

Research Findings Scotland No 6
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Young People Volunteering

This Research Findings Scotland is the sixth in a series of bulletins on research into volunteering in Scotland published by Volunteer Development Scotland. The findings are taken from a variety of quantitative and qualitative research into volunteering and young people in Scotland and the UK. Please refer to the bibliography for further details.

Background to the Research

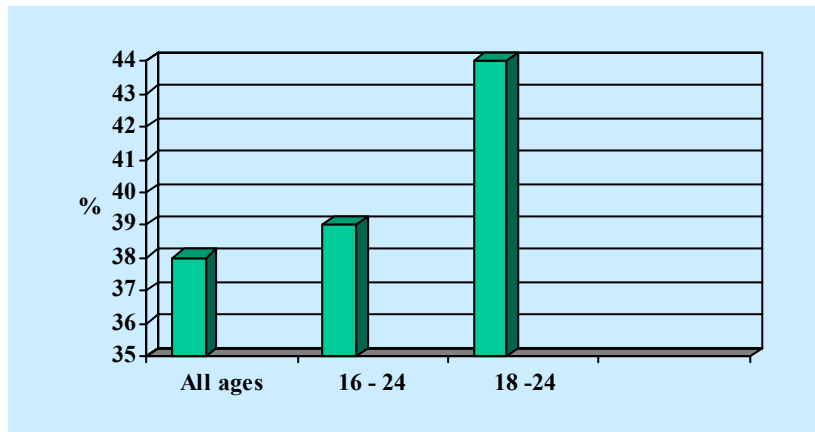
These Research Findings come at a time when young people volunteering is high on the policy agenda. With government initiatives such as Project Scotland and the Russell Commission aiming to involve more young people (and keep them involved), as well as trying to break the barriers to volunteering; it is important that we understand the motivations and needs of young volunteers and utilise this knowledge to create a Scotland where anyone who wishes to volunteer has the information they need, and the opportunity to do so.

N.B Young volunteers are defined as volunteers who fall within the age category 16-25

16-25 year olds make up 12% of the total population of Scotland. This equates to around 600,000 young people.

(Scotland's Census 2001)

Volunteering by Age (Scotland)



As you can see from the graph above, those in the 16-24-age category are more likely to volunteer than the Scottish average of all age groups. However, when we look further into volunteering in this age group, we can see that the 16-18 year olds are less likely to volunteer than their 18-24 counterparts. This may be because 16 and 17 year olds are likely to still be at school and that these can be critical years for their education.

Many volunteers, particularly young people, start volunteering at school age. This indicates the importance of encouraging young people to start volunteering at an early age, thus encouraging them to remain volunteers throughout their lives. It must be noted however, that school may not be the only influence in this and that parents, peers and youth groups may have been a factor.

Stage of life at which started volunteering (Scotland)

	Total pop %	16 – 24 %	25 – 34 %	35 – 44 %	45 – 54 %	55 – 64 %	65+ %
School	30	67	26	36	36	18	17
Uni/College	7	11	20	11	1	5	2
Started work	22	13	33	30	17	25	17
Children still at school	18	-					
Children left school	4	-					
Became unemployed /gave up work	5	6	5	2	5	8	5
Once retired	7	-					
Other	4	-	5	3	4	4	5
Nothing specific	4	3	-	1	5	12	2
Don't know	1						

Young People's Views of Volunteering

Previous research carried out across the UK (Gaskin 2004), indicates that young people see volunteering as a worthy activity; a way of helping out, gaining skills and experience while being a good citizen. A minority of young people see volunteering as being 'uncool' with suggestions that 'the brand' needs an overhaul.

In Scotland those who take part in volunteering have a positive outlook with many stating that volunteering makes them happy, gives them a sense of achievement and has increased their levels of confidence. In addition, young people volunteer to help others, to gain skills and give something back. In particular, social motivators such as meeting new people and getting out of the house encourage young people to volunteer (Wotherspoon 2004).

Also, young people place importance on the impact that volunteering might have on their employability. Volunteering gives young people useful work experience and something to put on a CV, it shows their willingness to work as well as giving them experience of their chosen field.

Young people in Scotland recognised that volunteering was something that they had not given a lot of thought. They appreciate that volunteering is a good thing, and that it is necessary, but they don't always see themselves as taking part in it. Also, those not involved did not have much of an idea of what volunteering entailed, only assumptions. One suggestion was that volunteering was introduced at school level when people were starting to think about their future so that the concept was understood and its relevance was noted.

Volunteering Activities

Young people are involved in the same types of voluntary activity as older people. However, young people are twice as likely as the population in general to be involved as a volunteer helping with sports and recreational activities, and least likely to be involved in committee work.

Young people are also more interested in helping children and young people than any other age group in Scotland.

Overall, like most other volunteers, young people want to volunteer in a field that they are interested in, and for many, this involves working with their peer group.

Barriers to Young People Volunteering

- Unaware of potential benefits
- Negative peer pressure
- Lack of confidence, fear of rejection
- Time – can be due to pressures of study
- Cost
- Access to information
- Welfare benefits
- Images of grannies in charity shops
- 'Can't be bothered'

- 'Not cool'
- Fear of expectations/failure
- 'It's just not for me'

What would make it easier for Young People to Volunteer?

Young people would be more interested in volunteering if it could improve their skills, get them qualifications and if it fitted in with existing interests and skills. This is particularly true of students as a means of increased employability for graduates entering a competitive labour market (Reilly C & Odds J 2003). Finances are also an issue with young people showing a concern about not being out-of-pocket for any volunteering that they do. Furthermore, in a time when many young people have part time jobs, it is understandable that they might choose to spend their time earning money rather than volunteering, particularly when some see volunteering as unpaid work.

In addition peer group involvement is important with more people showing a will to be involved if a friend was involved too. There is also the issue of peer pressure – some people may be worried about not being 'cool' if they volunteered. In line with findings from the population in general, it would be easier for people to get involved if more information were available on volunteering, although word of mouth is a common route into volunteering for young people.

The most commonly given reason for people not volunteering, however, is a lack of time. This issue could be addressed if volunteering was promoted as a more flexible activity: that people could volunteer when they had time and they did not have to make a regular commitment if they were unable to.

Both Scottish and UK research (Gaskin 2004 and Scotscorps 2003), noted that some actions could be taken to attract more young people. These included a greater variety of opportunities, a strong emphasis on youth-initiated and youth-led volunteering and more review and reflection of participant's experiences. This move towards quality volunteering experiences could increase numbers of young volunteers, as well as encouraging them to continue volunteering.

There is a responsibility on volunteer involving organisations to recognise the value of young people as volunteers and to create meaningful opportunities that meet their needs. Recruitment methods should be targeted at young people, using methods such as Internet and radio.

What are Young People looking for from Volunteering?

Research from a UK perspective indicates that young people want legitimacy from their volunteering, respect from their peers, parents and community, recognition from employers and a chance to contribute and learn.

Research in Scotland indicates that young people want the opportunity to work with people, to see the positive impact of their actions, to work on projects and in teams and to socialise with other volunteers.

In terms of the organisation of their volunteering, young people want peer led group and team activities, taster sessions and flexibility. The volunteering that would attract

young people would be able to fit around their lives and would not be restrictive. It is also important to them to have a say and to receive practical support from adults.

Young people also do not want any cash reward for their volunteering but would appreciate a simple thank you or perhaps an outing or party (with the people they are helping). There is also a recurring theme that although certificates with proper meaning and recognition are a good thing, that 'Mickey Mouse certificates' can put people off. Research carried out by the IVR in 1998 indicated that young people appreciated getting a reference for future work from a volunteering opportunity.

Summary of the Research Findings

- Young people view volunteering as a worthy activity – a way of helping out and being a good citizen
- Young people are more likely to get involved in volunteering if a friend is involved
- Young people want legitimacy from their volunteering – an experience that means something
- Young people want meaningful recognition for their volunteering efforts

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