

Involving younger volunteers

This guide is for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations that want to involve volunteers aged 16 and 17 years old. Volunteering Barnet offers a service for 16+ and we are keen to have more opportunities available to offer this age range.

Why involve younger volunteers?

- Young people can bring a fresh perspective, energy, enthusiasm and new ideas.
- To develop young people - their skills, understanding, aspirations and confidence. It can also be a great way for young people to make new friends and socialise in their local community.
- Volunteers for life - young volunteers can be very committed and develop a long-term connection with your organisation.
- Access to a wider pool of volunteers.
- Young volunteers may bring special skills with regards to social media, computer science and other areas.
- If the service supports young people, service users will appreciate young people volunteering.
- Increased social cohesion from intergenerational volunteering.
- Positive reputation - other volunteers, service users and supporters will be pleased you are giving opportunities to younger people.

Where younger volunteers aren't suitable

People under 18 are allowed to volunteer, however young volunteers may be more vulnerable than adult volunteers. There are therefore some tasks that may be inappropriate for young volunteers. Areas where younger volunteers may not be suitable include:

- Roles supporting people who display challenging behaviour or supporting very vulnerable people.
- Volunteering late at night.
- Roles which involve serving/selling alcohol.
- Roles with a significant amount of responsibility.
- Skilled roles, such as accountancy.
- Roles that involve volunteering alone or one-to-one with service users or members of the public.

Keeping young volunteers safe

- Regardless of the age of your volunteers, organisations have a legal duty of care towards everyone that comes into contact with them.
- The duty of care is a general legal duty to do everything reasonable in your power to protect people from harm. Your organisation should carry out a thorough risk assessment which covers the risk of involving young volunteers.
- Under 18s may be more vulnerable to risks due to a lack of experience, training and awareness. They need good training, inductions and support and supervision.
- A separate risk assessment should be completed for younger volunteers.
- Younger volunteers should never be left alone for long periods or allowed to volunteer with service users or members of the public alone.
- Clear safeguarding instructions and advice should be shared with everyone.
- Encourage a culture of openness and mutual respect.

Volunteering hours

There is no legal restriction on the number of hours a young volunteer can do, however, it is best practice to follow employment law limits for your volunteers. Volunteers still in education should not miss school or college to volunteer (although it can be a part of their school's curriculum). Volunteers shouldn't give their time very late at night. If volunteering for over four hours, an hour break should be given. Young volunteers should be allowed to have at least a two week break from volunteering a year.

Safeguarding and child protection

Before you start introducing young volunteers to your organisation it's important to assess your safeguarding culture. Make sure you have the following in place:

- An up to date safeguarding policy which is reviewed regularly.
- An opportunity for staff to undertake safeguarding training.
- A code of conduct for adults and young people.
- A named person who is trained and able to respond to child protection concerns.
- A separate risk assessment for volunteers under 18.
- A separate child and young person safeguarding policy that is reviewed regularly.
- All colleagues working with young volunteers are aware of and understand your safeguarding policies.

A DBS check is **not required** to manage volunteers under 18. Managing volunteers aged 16 and 17 is not 'regulated activity' so only a basic check is permitted, not an enhanced check. The [DBS outreach service](#) can provide advice on this.

Parent/guardian permission

Generally, for volunteers under 18 you should have parent or guardian permission. However, there are some cases where that may not be suitable:

- Informal group volunteering (e.g. a day of litter picking).
- Related to their LGBT identity.
- They are not in touch with their parents/currently homeless.

These situations should be considered on a case by case basis.

Recruiting young volunteers

There are lots of ways you can engage and recruit young volunteers. We have shared some ideas for how you could adjust your recruitment process to entice young people:

- Engage young people with political issues they are concerned about, for example: homelessness, racism, homophobia/transphobia, the environment. Be clear how the volunteering will make a difference.
- Hold drop in events and taster days so that young people can try before they commit.
- Make sure the roles are fun - younger people may get bored more quickly so make sure you keep volunteer activities short and interesting.
- Be flexible where possible – always offer holidays around exam periods
- Go to where they are – do an assembly, visit a youth club, make social media videos where they hang out.
- Think about the skills that young people have and the skills they want to develop. When designing roles for young people it's great to think about how you can bring those together. Thinking about your own organisation, what roles could you offer young people that would both build on their skills and give them skills? Any ideas?
- Word of mouth is still the most common way volunteers will find out about your roles. Encourage your adult volunteers to suggest it to young people/parents/carers they know. Once you have younger volunteers encourage them to suggest it to their friends.

- Publicise your volunteer roles in places that young people go to such as youth clubs, local parks and community spaces.
- Develop good links with their networks e.g. schools, colleges, youth clubs, scout and guide units and promote your opportunities via presentations and visits, and through attendance at events related to volunteering or freshers and careers fairs.
- Use your in-house social media to recruit using engaging graphics and messages. If you have the budget, consider paid promotions on social media platforms that young people use.

Application process

When considering your application process for volunteers there are adaptations you can make to be more appealing to young people. You might like to explore:

- Making the process of applying for the role short and simple if possible. Avoid asking volunteers to complete complex application forms or to send in CVs. When a volunteer applies get back to them as soon as possible as many young people will move on if they haven't heard back from you within 48 hours.
- Offering them the opportunity to send you a short video of themselves explaining why they want to volunteer for you. You can then follow this up with any clarifying questions by phone or text before inviting them in.
- When interviewing young volunteers, consider having at least one young person on the interview panel if possible.
- Consider sending a plan for the interview and the questions in advance.

Working with schemes, schools and colleges

It's worth exploring how you can engage young people through spaces and projects they are already involved in. For example:

- Young people are often interested in volunteering because they are undertaking their Duke of Edinburgh (DofE), NCS challenge or it's a part of their school's requirements.
- Connect with local schools, colleges and youth clubs to offer them your volunteering opportunities.
- Create group opportunities for the NCS scheme as well as DofE opportunities.

- This sort of thing is great for projects – for example, if you have an area of your building/garden you want revamped, a holiday clubs activity plan to be devised and supported with, or something else.
- These kind of projects can take time and effort and it is important to think about capacity – sometimes they can feel like more trouble than they are worth. But when you get them right you can get longer term more regular volunteers who stay with you for a long time.

Retaining your volunteers

Retention is a big challenge of volunteer management, and this is doubly true with younger people. Of course, there are reasons why a young person will have to end their volunteering e.g. leaving home for work or university, or the demands of exams.

- It is important for young volunteers to have a named contact that they can go to with any questions or concerns. This could be a more experienced volunteer as well as a member of staff. Young people may also lack the confidence to raise issues with the role or explain that they cannot volunteer at the moment –and so may simply 'ghost' the organisation.
- Get to know your volunteers, if you understand what motivates them you will be able to keep them engaged for longer.
- Discuss with them when they may be busy and offer to hold the role open, for example, giving them a break during revision and exam periods.
- Make it clear that you are open to hearing their feedback on the role and emphasise that it has to work for them.
- Hold regular reviews of the volunteering, and if suitable, offer them more responsibility or a different role.
- Hold socials and parties for the younger volunteers, for example at festive occasions (Christmas, Eid, Diwali etc.) or at the beginning of summer or after a big project.
- Set a volunteering reward scheme, collecting badges/levels/ certificates for a certain number of volunteer hours.
- When advertising the role, while being positive, be clear about any challenges that there are.
- Explain why reliability is important in a non-judgemental way.

Management

Try not to assume too much about younger volunteers, they are varied as people of any age. However, below are some hints to bear in mind:

- Be clear on expectations. You may have to make some matters of etiquette clear that would be obvious to an older volunteer.
- Create a manual with guidance and encourage them to check it first if they have questions.
- Offer an older 'buddy' volunteer to provide advice/mentoring.
- Since we live in a much more digital world, younger people tend to have much less experience in making telephone calls, especially 'formal' ones. If you are asking them to use the phone, let them know that this will be required at the beginning of the process and consider providing 'scripts' to use on the phone.
- If you need to let them go then try to have a mature conversation with them about it. E.g. invite them to a meeting at an agreed date and time to explain why you have come to the decision and to hear any feedback from the volunteer.