Young People and Volunteering in Scotland Survey

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Why did we carry out this research?

We want to grow volunteering participation in Scotland. We want to identify practice and policy interventions which will help us meet this goal. In order to find out how to grow volunteering participation we believe it is critical to understand participation – how, why and in what ways people participate.

We know about adult participation in Scotland, but there is a lack of information about young people and volunteering.

Young people are our next generation of volunteers. Understanding how, why and to what extent they participate is a really important step to encouraging long term, sustainable growth in volunteering.

Who took part?

We included our Young People and Volunteering in Scotland Survey in the Ipsos MORI Young People in Scotland Survey in October 2014. Over 2000 young people aged 11-18 took part from state sector schools. They completed a paper survey at their school during class time. What did we want to find out?

The survey was designed to find out:

- To what extent young people participated in volunteering;
- Who helped or encouraged them to volunteer;
- What young people thought about volunteering;
- What would encourage them to volunteer, and
- What kind of volunteering they would like to get involved in.

This survey focuses mainly on volunteering through a club, organisation or group (known as ‘formal’ volunteering).

What happened next?

We shared the results with practitioners to get their perspective and to test it against their own experiences, including: Youth Link Scotland, Young Scot, Education Scotland, Scottish
Government Third Sector Team, Skills Development Scotland, Volunteer Scotland Learning & Practice Team, Stirlingshire Voluntary Enterprise as well as academics.

As well as continuing these conversations and collecting more practitioner perspectives, we are continuing to analyse the data to find out more; this report will be updated as this process continues. If you have any comments, questions or are able to provide a different perspective we’d love to hear from you!

**Findings and practitioner reflections**

**To what extent do young people participate in volunteering?**

We asked young people about whether or not they volunteered\(^1\) and if so, whether it was in or out of school. If they didn’t volunteer, we asked them whether they would like to.

![Chart 1: Who volunteers?](image)

\(^1\) Young People were asked: “Thinking back over the last 12 months, have you given up any of your time to help out with things like clubs, campaigns or organisations without being paid?”

\(^2\) There are a relatively high number of ‘don’t know’ responses. The question we used mimicked that used in the [Scottish Household Survey](#) which measures adult participation. We did this to ensure the data could be meaningfully compared with the adult rate of participation. However, the high number of ‘don’t know’ responses suggests that this question may not work as well with young people, particularly for 11-13yr olds. 11-13yr olds are also nearly always the most likely to respond ‘don’t know’ for other questions. This suggests for future research we may need to consider new ways of exploring volunteering with this group.
Nearly half of all young people have volunteered. This is a much higher rate than the adult volunteering rate for Scotland, which in 2013, was 28%. There also appears to be a 10% increase in participation amongst young people compared to figures from similar research with 11-17yr olds completed in 2009\(^3\). A significant proportion of these volunteers are volunteering in their own spare time. Older young people (16-18yr olds) were more likely to say they volunteered in their spare time.

**Chart 2: Volunteering in spare time, age differences**

While a huge number of young people are already volunteering, incredibly another 19% of young people who aren’t volunteering would consider volunteering. This group represents untapped potential where the interest and willingness of young people to volunteer has not yet turned into active participation. Younger young people (11-15yr olds) are more likely to say they don’t currently but would like to volunteer. There’s also a gender aspect to this ‘willing’ group: more girls than boys were likely to say they didn’t currently, but would consider doing so. Boys were more likely to say they didn’t currently volunteer, and weren’t interested in starting volunteering.

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We reflected why young people are not volunteering. Practitioners talked about a lack of opportunity: as organisations and schools are risk averse and are put off involving young people because they perceive that there are regulations (e.g. health and safety, disclosures) which make it harder to involve young people. Negative perceptions of volunteering amongst young people were also considered a barrier to participation; discussed in more detail below. Practitioners also highlighted that schools and young people are not necessarily aware of what ‘counts’ as volunteering. For example taking part in school committees, litter picks and so on while related to the school, may be entirely voluntary and involve pupils giving up their free time. It was felt that volunteering could be better linked to the curriculum, particularly in primary years, to help increase awareness.

Young people who do volunteer do so in different ways. The majority volunteer regularly; a large number of those young regular volunteers are doing so around once a week or more.
Comparing girls and boys, girls were more likely to volunteer regularly (66%) than boys (52%). The opposite is also true: boys are more likely to volunteer occasionally (46%) than girls (31%). As well as differences between girls and boys, age is also a factor in how frequently people volunteer: the older they are the more often they volunteer.

Chart 5: The older the young person, the more frequently they volunteer

These findings create a very promising picture of young people’s volunteering in Scotland. It also highlights that there is still a lot of untapped potential for growth in participation. Together with practitioner reflections these findings have helped inspire some concrete ideas for growing participation amongst young people, discussed below.
Who helped or encouraged young people to volunteer?

Given we want to grow young people’s contribution, it’s really important we understand their pathways into volunteering. We were particularly interested in whether there were specific people who encouraged or helped them get involved. The survey clearly identified the key people who play an important part in enabling young people’s volunteering.

Parents and guardians play a significant role, followed by teachers and then friends (see below). Research shows that if your parents volunteer then you are more likely to volunteer; our survey highlights that from the young volunteer’s perspective parents play an important role as gatekeepers into volunteering.

Chart 6: Who encourages young people to volunteer?

Younger groups are more likely to be influenced by their family and friends; teachers are more likely to influence 16-18yr olds (45%) than younger groups (25%).

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4 We asked young people: “Did any of these people help you to begin volunteering? They might have done this by telling you about things you could do to help, showing you how to get started, or just by encouraging you.”

Practitioners we spoke to said it was helpful to see clearly who could be ‘targeted’ to help grow young people’s involvement in volunteering. As gatekeepers, parents and teachers awareness of what counts as volunteering in and out of school (e.g. ‘litter picks, helping out on school committees) and of non-traditional types of opportunities (micro-volunteering, online volunteering) was really important to help increase numbers of young people volunteering.

Girls were more likely to say friends encouraged or helped them to volunteer. Of all the young people who said friends encouraged or helped them to volunteer, around 60% were girls and 40% were boys.
A far greater number of girls than boys choose responses involving friends (i.e. friends encouraging young people to start volunteering, wanting to volunteer with friends, and associating it as a way to spend time with friends). This and other differences between boys and girls are illustrated in the gender infographic in Appendix A.

**Practitioners reflected that young people were generally risk averse, and that the peer influence could not be underestimated.**

**What do young people think about volunteering?**

In order to see the potential for growing volunteering, we were keen to understand whether negative perceptions of volunteering were a barrier to young people taking part.

**Practitioners that work directly with young people said that they sometimes struggled to persuade young people of the positive benefits of volunteering. They commented that young people were not interested in something that ‘didn’t pay. They struggled to see the ultimate economic benefit in enhancing their skills through volunteering. Practitioners felt that sometimes friends and family reinforced this view. This is why we consider those who encourage young people to volunteer as ‘gatekeepers’: the findings above and practitioner reflections illustrate parents and teachers can be enablers or barriers to young people volunteering.**

**In practitioners experience young people had quite a traditional view of volunteering – that it meant giving up a lot of time, regularly, over a long period. We discussed whether this view of volunteering might be perpetuated by the awards (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh, Saltire Award).***
Our survey findings paint a more positive picture of young people's views of volunteering; however, we did not ask young people whether they were put off volunteering because it 'didn’t pay'.

Young people have a very positive perception of volunteering. A high proportion of young people identify with the traditional ‘altruistic’ concept of volunteering (e.g. helping other people and being a good citizen). Far smaller proportions of young people associated it with negative words or phrases.

In 2009 we carried out a similar survey with young people aged 11-16. Far higher percentage of those young people associated the words “boring” (19% compared with 10% in 2014) and “goody-goody” (18%).

Older young people were more likely to associate the altruistic words with volunteering. The older group were also more likely to think of it as a way to develop skills and gain experience (71%) than younger groups (46%).

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http://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/330835/research_2010_being_young_in_scotland_summary.pdf
While it’s great that young people think of volunteering positively, the responses also show that young people perhaps more likely to think that volunteering benefits other people (‘helping people’, ‘a way to make a difference’) and has an instrumental, functional benefit (‘away to develop skills and experience’) than thinking of it as a way to enhance their own wellbeing (‘a chance to do something interesting’, ‘a way to make friends’, ‘a way to have fun’ than ‘a way to develop skills and experience’).

Reflecting on these findings practitioners suggested promoting the ‘impact’ of volunteering on them and others, rather than promoting the opportunity itself. Raising awareness amongst gatekeepers of the positive benefits of volunteering ‘beyond CV building’ (such as increased confidence and wellbeing) and within the different awards (through reflecting on their experience and changes in the way they felt about themselves through volunteering) were seen as important steps to broaden participation, both in terms of getting more young people involved, and potentially ensuring young people participate in the future.

It’s obviously very encouraging that young people who responded to the survey think of volunteering positively – but how does it rank against other activities they can do in their spare time? The chart below shows the top six activities young people would most like to do in their spare time.

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7 We asked young people: “Which of these activities would you most like to do in your spare time?” (Tick all that apply?)
While sports clubs and dance groups are overwhelmingly the first choice for young people (52%), significant proportions ‘helping out friends and neighbours’ (24%) and ‘volunteering with a local group or charity’ (16%) suggest giving time to others – now or in the future – is potentially considered an important part of their experience outside school. ‘Helping out friends and neighbours’ is a less formal type of volunteering than that mediated by an organisation, club or group. 11-14yr olds were more likely to choose this option than ‘volunteering with a local group or charity’, perhaps indicating that they were not yet engaged with or relating to a more formal context.

Interest in volunteering increases with age. Older young people were more likely to want to spend time volunteering with a local group or charity (24%) than younger groups (14%).

Girls and boys want to spend their spare time in very different ways. The chart below shows these striking differences. While similar proportions of girls and boys want to take part in sports clubs, youth groups (including scouts and guides) and church and other religious groups, we could speculate that within these it’s likely they’re taking part in different sports and dance groups, guides or scouts. Girls are most interested in creative activities and volunteering (both ‘helping out your friends/neighbours’ and ‘volunteering with a local group or charity’). While this chart shows boys are more interested in computer clubs (13%) this is largely an interest of younger boys, with very small numbers of 15-18 yr old boys selecting this option. The large number of boys stating ‘none of these’ also indicates that the survey categories could be improved to identify how boys want to spend their spare time.
Practitioners discussed the findings showing young people conforming to gender stereotypes. We talked about whether volunteering could be considered a way to challenge stereotypes, potentially encouraging girls and boys to consider less gender stereotypical opportunities and interests. Strategies to use volunteering as a way to widen young people’s experience is further discussed below.

**What would encourage young people to volunteer?**

Young people clearly think volunteering is a good thing many are motivated to volunteer - so what would encourage them either start or continue volunteering? We asked young people about what things would encourage them to get involved in volunteering; the top six are presented below.

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8 We asked young people: “Which of these things would encourage you to do any/more volunteering in the future?”
Over half of young people (55%) said that the opportunity to volunteer with friends would encourage them to volunteer. Girls were more likely to state this (62%) than boys (49%). Alongside the importance of a social experience, high proportions of young people would be encouraged to volunteer if it gave them the opportunity to improve career prospects (37%) and skills (29%). Combining those together (career prospects and skills) suggests the opportunity to develop is likely to attract young volunteers.

Like adults, young people want to volunteer close to home$^9$; 16-18yr olds ranked this higher than younger age groups. We could speculate that younger age groups are more likely to be driven to where they are volunteering rather than using public transport, and therefore less particular about volunteering close to home.

Almost a fifth would be encouraged to participate if they’re asked (19%) and if they knew they could try it first before committing (20%). This ‘try it and see’ finding perhaps also confirms practitioner experiences that young people perceive volunteering as a significant commitment.

Practitioners we spoke to commented that young people were ‘risk averse’ and will tend to do what their friends are doing. We identified a need to increase the number of social, group based opportunities, and the chance to ‘bring a friend’ along to try out volunteering.

What areas do young people want to get involved in?
Young people are also interested in volunteering in a wide range of areas$^{10}$. Below shows the top five areas young people are interested in; within these there are clear differences between boys and girls:

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$^9$ http://www.volunteerscotland.net/policy-and-research/research/volunteering-in-scotland/

$^{10}$ We asked young people: “In which of the following areas would you say you would be most interested in volunteering with?”

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Young people are most interested in volunteering in the field of sport and exercise; boys were more likely to choose this area (46%) than girls (26%). This was followed by helping children or young people in school which was of more interest to girls.

Other areas young people were less interested in were volunteering with local community groups or older people. While overall interest in these areas increases with age, along with interest in health or disabilities (15%) and First Aid (12%) along with political groups, environmental protection and Justice and Human Rights. We could speculate that interest in volunteering in those areas reflects an awareness and knowledge which increases with age.
Practitioners discussed that young people’s areas of interest reflected their current experience – young people’s choices might be driven by the context of an award rather than their own passions. Young people may need more exposure to ‘what’s out there’ before they can make decisions about what areas they want to be involved in.

We considered the potential for local authorities, encompassing a large range of services (including schools) many of which already involve large numbers of adult volunteers, to consider linking volunteer involving services to schools to showcase potential areas of interest for young people.

The main messages so far....

There are important messages we should take from this survey. Nearly half of young people aged 11-18 are volunteering. No other age group in Scotland has such a high rate of volunteering.

Not only are high proportions of young people volunteering, but even more have expressed an interest in starting.

It’s easy to talk about ‘young people’ as one group, but this research shows that we shouldn’t. Young people aren’t all the same. If we’re looking to tap into the huge potential young people can bring then we need to consider that older and younger groups, boys and girls get involved in different ways, for different reasons and are interested in different areas.

This research, bringing to the fore young people’s perspectives on volunteering, has provided a ‘jumping off point’ for discussions amongst researchers and practitioners. Through this process we have identified practical next steps to help grown young people’s participation in Scotland.

1. **Raising awareness with ‘gatekeepers’: schools, parents and young people** regarding:
   - the traditional view of ‘high commitment’ volunteering isn’t always true, that it is as much about their own wellbeing as improving that of other people, or a means to an end to improve CVs and job prospects.
   - the need to broaden experience: tackling gender stereotypes and exposure to new areas of interest they’re not experiencing in their normal spare time activities.

2. **Exploring the potential for youth awards** which include volunteering to focus on the benefits of volunteering for young people in terms of their own confidence and wellbeing.

3. **Raising awareness amongst volunteer involving groups, clubs and organisations** of the need to:
   - Create more group based opportunities
   - Create more family opportunities
   - Let young people ‘try it and see’
   - Tailor opportunities to the needs and interests of different young people
   - Create opportunities that are flexible, rather than requiring long term, high level of commitment.
   - Ask young people to volunteer
What’s next?

This research is being shared with more and more people; their reactions will continue to bring more perspectives and knowledge to this area. We’re exploring the potential for further analysis and practical actions.

Most importantly we need young people’s reactions to the research, and gathering their reactions will be an important part of this ongoing project.

If you have anything you’d like to share then please get in contact with Helen.harper@volunteerscotland.org.uk or gemma.jackson@volunteerscotland.org.uk
Appendix A

We’re less likely to volunteer now, but we’re interested in doing it in the future.

Our families and friends are more likely to get us into volunteering.
We’d like to volunteer with our families.

We think volunteering is a good thing.
We’re more likely to volunteer than adults.
We’d be up for volunteering if we could volunteer with our friends.
Think about letting us try it out first, before we commit.

We want to volunteer in our local area.
Our teachers are more likely to get us into volunteering.

Source: Young People and Volunteering in Scotland 2014, Volunteer Scotland
Appendix B

Let’s compare....what boys and girls at school say about volunteering

I’d like to volunteer with my friends and think volunteering is a way to make new friends.

We think volunteering is a good thing.

I’m more likely to volunteer than adults.

We’d be up for volunteering if it improved our skills and job prospects, and if we could volunteer with our friends.

I’m interested in volunteering in sports related activities.

We want to volunteer in our local area.

I’m more likely to say I don’t want to volunteer.

I’d rather spend my spare time doing sport & exercise or helping out my neighbours, than volunteering for a group or charity.

Think about letting us try it out first, before we commit.

Source: Young People and Volunteering in Scotland Survey 2014, Volunteer Scotland