



# Young People & Volunteering: Attitudes and Experiences in Areas of Multiple Deprivation

James Davies, PhD Summary

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## 1. Introduction

This document summarises key findings from my PhD research into young people's attitudes and experiences of formal volunteering in deprived areas.<sup>1</sup> Evidence indicates volunteering can give rise to a wide range of benefits for individuals, groups, organisations and society at large. However, participation in volunteering is unevenly distributed. Notably, persons in urban and deprived neighbourhoods are less likely to volunteer. Statistical data indicates these patterns are relatively consistent over time, suggesting that, despite efforts to remove barriers, engagement with volunteering is shaped by a range of structural and cultural factors. My PhD project utilised qualitative research methods, with young people and youth workers in deprived urban locations, to explore how young people started volunteering in areas characterised by non-participation, as well as the factors that constrained engagement. Additionally, it examined young people's attitudes towards volunteering and what it meant to those who participated in it.

### Policy environment

Volunteering has long been a focus of the Scottish Government. In 2004, the then Scottish Executive published its *Volunteering Strategy* which sought to remove barriers to participation, with a particular focus on youth volunteering through the establishment of Project Scotland. Project Scotland continues today, putting young people in contact with volunteering opportunities in order to help them 'get on in life through volunteering'. Alongside this, the Scottish Government encourages youth volunteering through the Saltire Awards, an initiative that rewards young people based on the number of hours they volunteer. More recently, and with cross-party support, the UK-wide #iwill campaign has risen to prominence. The campaign encourages organisations to pledge to make social action – defined as, 'practical action in the service of others to create positive change'<sup>2</sup> –

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<sup>1</sup> Formal volunteering is that which occurs in an organisational setting, unlike informal volunteering which takes place outside a group or formally organised context.

<sup>2</sup> Pye, J., & Michelmore, O. (2016). *National Youth Social Action Survey 2016*. London: Ipsos MORI.

more accessible and aims to increase by 50 percent the proportion of young people taking part in meaningful social action by 2020.

Although youth volunteering initiatives often highlight the enjoyment and sense of satisfaction volunteers can gain, as well as the impact they can have on others, emphasis is frequently placed on the role volunteering can play in enhancing employment and educational prospects.<sup>3</sup> In these ways, volunteering is positioned as enabling individuals to stand out from others. Such emphases resonate with the contention that volunteering is undergoing ‘radical change’, with an increased emphasis on individual gain at the expense of collective benefits.<sup>4</sup> Although there is evidence indicating young people engage with volunteering for a variety of individualistic and altruistic reasons, it is less clear how attitudes, motives and benefits are experienced among those in deprived locations. Accordingly, it is important to explore the relationship between the attitudes and experiences of this cohort and the manner in which volunteering is framed in policies and programmes. In light of the Scottish Government’s intention to ‘re-invigorat[e] volunteering’,<sup>5</sup> this is a timely endeavour that has the potential to develop an evidence base from which volunteering can be made more inclusive.

## **Understanding who volunteers**

Evidence suggests young people in Scotland exhibit a healthy volunteering profile. Based on data from 2016, the *Young People in Scotland* (YPiS) survey found 52 percent of young people, aged 11-18, volunteered, compared to 27 percent of adults, as reported in the *Scottish Household Survey* (SHS). Furthermore, during the same year, a higher proportion of young people in Scotland engaged in meaningful social action than in any other of the

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<sup>3</sup> Dean, J. (2014). How Structural Factors Promote Instrumental Motivations Within Youth Volunteering: A Qualitative Analysis of Volunteer Brokerage. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 5(2), 231-247; Holdsworth, C. (2015). The Cult of Experience: Standing Out From the Crowd in an Era of Austerity. *Area*, 49(3), 296-302.

<sup>4</sup> Hustinx, L., Shachar, I., Handy, F., & Horton Smith, D. (2016). Changing Nature of Formal Service Program Volunteering. In D. Horton Smith, R. Stebbins, & J. Grotz (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation, and Nonprofit Associations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government. (2017). *A Nation with Ambition: The Government’s Programme for Scotland 2017-18*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

nations across the UK (52 percent compared to a UK average of 42 percent).<sup>6</sup> Yet, while these statistics paint an overall positive picture, they mask inequalities in youth participation. As shown in Figure 1, males are less likely to volunteer than females, as are young people in urban areas when contrasted with their rural counterparts.

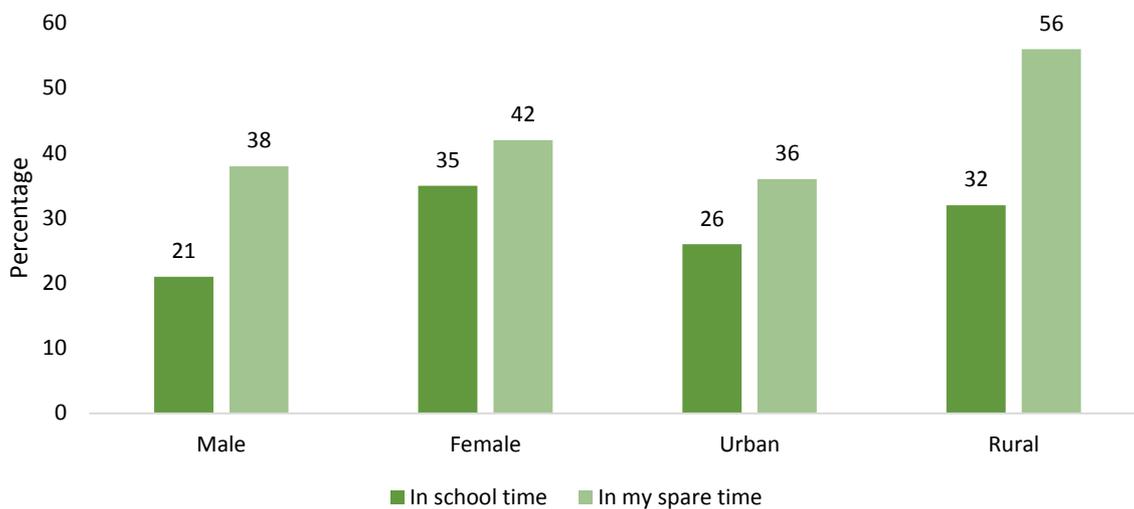


Figure 1 Young people's rates of volunteering by gender and geography (source: YPiS 2016)

The trends shown in Figure 1 are consistent with adult rates of engagement. Data from the SHS has shown that, since 2007, females were consistently more likely to volunteer than males and that, since 2012, rural areas exhibited higher levels of volunteering than urban locations. The patterning of volunteering in these ways – from youth to adulthood and across time – suggests participation is not solely an individual decision, but one that is shaped by wider social and cultural factors.

Consistent trends can also be seen when examining rates of volunteering by area-based deprivation. Since 2007, the SHS has found rates of volunteering in the 0-20 percent 'most deprived' areas, as designated by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), to be lower than the rest of the country. Researchers have suggested lower levels of engagement in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are related to community-level factors, such as limited

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<sup>6</sup> Pye, J., & Michelmore, O. (2016). *National Youth Social Action Survey 2016*. London: Ipsos MORI.

organisational infrastructure.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, when looking at rates of youth volunteering by deprivation, the institutional context of schools appears an important factor shaping engagement.

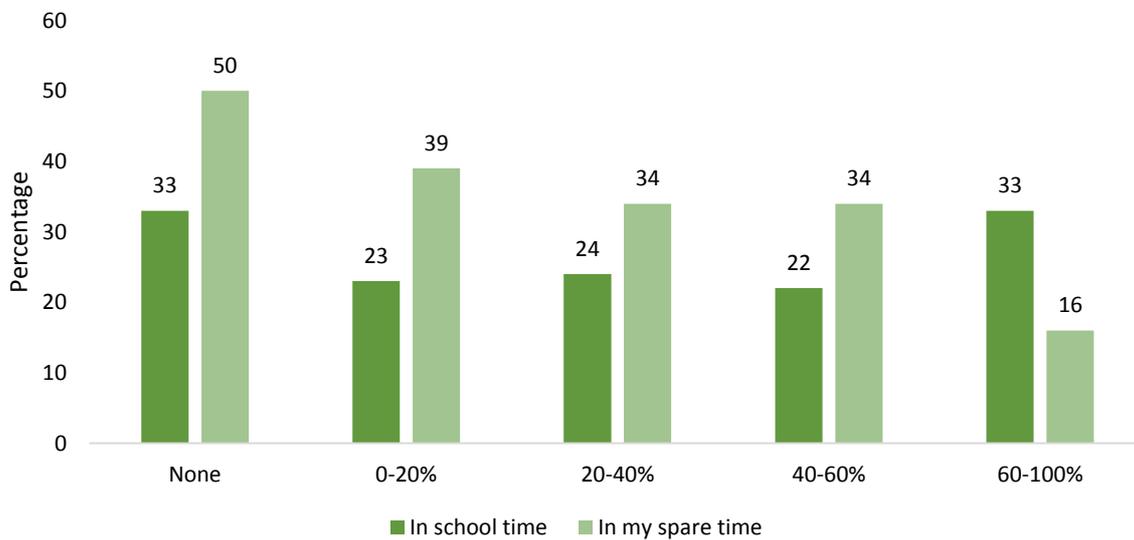


Figure 2 Young people's rates of volunteering by proportion of pupils residing in the 'most deprived' areas, as designated by the SIMD (source: YPiS 2016)

Figure 2 shows rates of in-school volunteering were equally high in schools where no pupils resided in the 'most deprived' areas and in schools where 60-100 percent of pupils lived in such locations. Beyond school settings, however, volunteering rates were notably lower for respondents who attended schools with high proportions of pupils from disadvantaged areas. This is consistent with the notion that organisational infrastructure has a central role in supporting volunteering. Furthermore, although volunteering is not confined to the voluntary sector, the finding that 'spare time' volunteering was lower in areas experiencing higher levels of deprivation resonates with evidence that the voluntary sector in deprived areas has disproportionately suffered under the austerity programme.<sup>8</sup> It suggests that, beyond the school gates, young people who attend schools with high proportions of pupils

<sup>7</sup> Lim, C., & Laurence, J. (2015). Doing Good When Times are Bad: Volunteering Behaviour in Economic Hard Times. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 66(2), 319-344.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, G., Meegan, R., Kennett, P., & Croft, J. (2016). The Uneven Impact of Austerity on the Voluntary and Community Sector: A Tale of Two Cities. *Urban Studies*, 53(10), 2064-2080.

residing in deprived areas lack access to, information about, or interest in volunteering opportunities in their communities.

These statistics indicate young people do not encounter volunteering on an even playing field. Those in urban and deprived areas appear less likely to volunteer – although engagement varies with organisational context – as do males. The finding that these patterns exist among the adult population suggests the youth phase is an important period in the development of a habit of volunteering. It also indicates opportunities to participate are embedded in social structures and norms. In addition to exploring attitudes towards and motives for volunteering, it is therefore important to understand the factors that facilitate and hinder access to volunteering opportunities in areas characterised by non-participation. To this end, the research sought to address the following questions:

1. What understandings and attitudes do young people in areas of multiple deprivation express in relation to the notion of volunteering?
2. What motivates and facilitates young people's involvement in volunteering opportunities in deprived areas?
3. What do those who volunteer in deprived areas value about doing so?
4. What factors hinder or obstruct young people's access to volunteering opportunities in deprived areas?

## **2. Research methods**

A qualitative methodology was employed to address the research questions. Young people, aged 12-18, were invited to take part in focus groups and individual interviews. In light of demographic variations in how young people engage with volunteering, focus groups were sought with different cohorts of young people, based on age (12-15 or 16-18), gender (male or female) and status (volunteer or non-volunteer). Table 1 outlines the focus groups that were conducted during the fieldwork.

Table 1 Focus groups conducted during the fieldwork

| <b>Organisation</b> | <b>Number of participants</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Status</b>                 |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Youth Charity 1     | 2                             | 14-15      | Male          | Volunteers                    |
| Youth Charity 1     | 2                             | 13-14      | Female        | Volunteers                    |
| Youth Charity 4     | 3                             | 13-18      | Female        | Volunteers                    |
| Youth Charity 5     | 4                             | 16-17      | Female        | Volunteers                    |
| Youth Charity 5     | 2                             | 15-18      | Mixed         | Volunteers                    |
| Sports Charity 2    | 5                             | 14-16      | Mixed         | Volunteers                    |
| Sports Charity 3    | 5                             | 12-16      | Female        | Volunteers and non-volunteers |
| Sports Charity 3    | 3                             | 12-16      | Male          | Non-volunteers                |
| Sports Charity 3    | 5                             | 15-16      | Male          | Non-volunteers                |
| School 1            | 6                             | 15         | Female        | Volunteers                    |
| School 1            | 2                             | 12         | Male          | Volunteers                    |
| School 2            | 5                             | 16-17      | Male          | Non-volunteers                |
| School 3            | 3                             | 17         | Male          | Volunteer and non-volunteers  |
| School 3            | 4                             | 17-18      | Female        | Volunteers                    |
| College             | 5                             | 15-16      | Female        | Non-volunteers                |
| College             | 4                             | 17-18      | Male          | Non-volunteers                |

Sixteen focus groups containing 58 participants were conducted.<sup>9</sup> These group interviews provided a way of exploring how different cohorts of young people thought about volunteering and their reasons for engaging with it, or not. Participants were asked about: what they thought volunteering was; their attitudes towards volunteering; their knowledge of volunteering opportunities; how they started volunteering; what volunteering meant to them; and what made it difficult to participate. Focus groups were supplemented with individual interviews. These covered similar themes but focused in more detail on individual pathways to volunteering and personal aspects that were less suited to group discussions. Twelve individual interviews were conducted, eight with volunteers, four with non-

<sup>9</sup> Two of the male participants who took part in the first non-volunteer focus group at Sports Charity 3 also took part in the second focus group at the charity after the first one was cut short. It is for this reason that the total number of focus group participants was 58 rather than 60, which is the figure one would get if calculating the number of participants shown in Table 1.

volunteers. In addition to this, six youth workers were interviewed to gain a broader perspective on the issues shaping youth volunteering in deprived areas. Focus groups and interviews were transcribed, before being analysed thematically in relation to the research questions.

Participants were recruited from 16 research sites in and around Glasgow.<sup>10</sup> Glasgow was selected as an area from which to identify organisations due to the high levels of deprivation found in the city. Research sites were located in the 0-20 percent 'most deprived' areas, as designated by the SIMD. The majority of research sites were located in areas with higher than average rates of: child poverty; young people classified as not in education, employment or training (NEET); and, unemployment. Furthermore, the areas contained lower than average levels of ethnic minority residents and residents had a higher than average chance of living near derelict land. Research sites were predominantly youth organisations, but also comprised sporting charities and educational institutions. By and large, the volunteers who took part in the study volunteered with other young people to support the activities of the organisations they attended. Although some non-volunteers were recruited from educational institutions, others were recruited from volunteer-involving organisations. This is important to note as it has implications for understanding the manner in which non-volunteers related to volunteering. Non-volunteers who attended volunteer-involving organisations, such as youth or sports groups, had contact with volunteers and benefitted from their actions. Accordingly, they may have been more likely to hold positive attitudes towards volunteering than those who lack such connections.

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<sup>10</sup> Throughout this report and the PhD thesis, pseudonyms for participants and research sites are used to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

### **3. Research findings**

The following sections present key findings in relation to the four research questions the study addressed.

#### **Understandings of and attitudes towards volunteering**

Definitions of volunteering commonly focus on three central characteristics: i) volunteering is an unpaid act; ii) volunteering is a freely performed activity; iii) volunteering creates benefits for others.<sup>11</sup> In addition to these characteristics, organisational structure is sometimes added as a fourth dimension. Volunteering in organisational settings is referred to as formal volunteering, while volunteering that occurs outside such environments is known as informal volunteering.

Participants generally identified the three central characteristics when asked what they thought volunteering was. Greatest emphasis was placed on the notion that volunteering is an act that benefits others, while the least emphasis was placed on the notion that volunteers act without coercion. On the question on payment, although there was a general consensus that volunteers were unpaid, some participants expressed uncertainty and appeared to confuse volunteering with employment in the voluntary sector. Non-volunteers were generally less certain about this aspect, although there was evidence of volunteers also expressing doubt. By and large, participants did not discuss the organisational aspect of volunteering unless prompted. When raised, participants indicated that, while volunteering could occur beyond a group setting, volunteering through an organisation was a more valuable mode of participation due to its capacity to generate collective goods.

In terms of attitudes, participants generally expressed favourable views towards volunteering. Yet, there was a widespread feeling that, among their peer groups, volunteering was a stigmatised activity. One participant felt volunteering was often described as 'boring' or 'unenjoyable', while another felt it was the type of activity an

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<sup>11</sup> Ellis Paine, A., Hill, M., & Rochester, C. (2010). *"A rose by any other name..." Revisiting the Question: "What Exactly is Volunteering?"*. London: Institute for Volunteering Research.

individual would 'get slagged' for doing. This was partly related to the impression participants had that volunteering was not commonly practiced among their peer groups. Indeed, one youth worker reported some of the young people she worked with viewed volunteering as 'something other people do'. The stigma was perceived to be related to stereotypical notions about what volunteering entails and its status as a non-remunerated activity.

It is important to stress, none of the participants themselves expressed negative views towards volunteering. This may have been related to the fact that, by virtue of attending youth organisations, volunteers and non-volunteers often had contact with and benefitted from the actions of other volunteers. Such experiences were important in shaping their attitudes. Volunteers, for instance, regularly described how their encounters with volunteering had altered their opinions:

I used to just think it was like basically a bit goody-goody and it's a bit cheesy ... but not any more ... now 'cos I know ... it helps build skills and all that, but before that, I just thought it was like, go out and help people and then that's it.

Volunteers frequently conflated their attitudes towards volunteering with the benefits they received while engaging with it. This suggests that, without exposure to volunteer-involving environments or experience of volunteering, young people in deprived areas are left with limited resources to draw on when formulating opinions about volunteering. Accordingly, they may be more likely to consider it in negative or stereotypical terms and thus less likely to see it as something that is relevant to their lives. Providing opportunities to volunteer and/or learn about volunteering, may, therefore, be an effective way of countering the stigma associated with it.

### **Motivations and routes into opportunities**

Existing research indicates that, in order to understand engagement with volunteering, it is not only important to consider motivations, but also the social context in which pathways to participation are forged. Thus, as well as asking participants why they volunteered, the

research also explored the social factors that led to their engagement with youth organisations and volunteering opportunities.

Teachers and schools have been found to be among the most significant actors facilitating young people's access to volunteering opportunities.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to this, participants in my study generally felt their teachers had a minimal to non-existent role. Instead, family, friends and youth workers provided information about volunteer-involving organisations and opportunities to volunteer. When exploring participants' pathways to volunteering, a common process emerged. Volunteers frequently described lengthy histories at specific organisations as attendees prior to volunteering. To capture this trajectory, the notion of the 'participant-to-volunteer' transition was proposed. Key steps in this process included:

1. Discovering youth organisations

Organisations were often located in participants' local neighbourhoods. Friends had a significant role in informing participants about them. Parents, frequently mothers, were also important in this respect. Indeed, mothers sometimes volunteered in the organisations themselves. In light of the low levels of adult volunteering in deprived areas, this suggests volunteers had somewhat atypical family experiences and opportunities for finding out about volunteer-involving organisations.

2. '[Growing] up in clubs'

Participants often reported they had been involved with the organisations where they volunteered for lengthy periods of time. As one respondent stated, 'I always grew up in clubs'. These experiences provided important foundations – i.e. familiarity with the practices and people within organisations – from which calls to volunteer could be responded to positively.

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<sup>12</sup> Harper, H., & Jackson, G. (2015). *Young People and Volunteering in Scotland Survey*. Stirling: Volunteer Scotland; Pye, J., & Michelmore, O. (2016). *National Youth Social Action Survey 2016*. London: Ipsos MORI.

### 3. Transitioning into volunteering roles

Having developed relationships with youth workers and other young people at their respective organisations, participants reported being asked or encouraged to start volunteering. Due to participants' self-reported social anxieties and lack of confidence, there was evidence to suggest that, without their foundations in particular organisations, they would not have moved into volunteering roles.

The participant-to-volunteer transition highlights the importance of social attachments and sense of belonging to the process of starting volunteering. This contrasts with the experiences and confidence of young people from middle-class backgrounds, whose prior experiences enable them to enter volunteering opportunities with comparative ease.<sup>13</sup> The participant-to-volunteer transition also highlights the importance of having time and space to develop relationships from which volunteering can be encouraged. Factors which, as discussed below, may be particularly challenging in under-resourced organisations.

In keeping with the notion that youth volunteering is often promoted on individualistic grounds, employability motivations were widely cited by volunteers and non-volunteers as something that did, or would, encourage them to volunteer. Despite this, only a minority of volunteers stated they were solely driven by such motives. Rather, social attachments and the desire to engage in leisure-orientated activities appeared stronger motivators. For those who had followed the participant-to-volunteer transition, there was often a desire to give back to the organisations from which they had benefitted. Table 2 outlines the nature of these motives.

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<sup>13</sup> Dean, J. (2016). Class Diversity and Youth Volunteering in the United Kingdom: Applying Bourdieu's Habitus and Cultural Capital. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45(1), 96-113.

Table 2 Motivations for volunteering

| <b>Motivation</b>        | <b>Description</b>  |
|--------------------------|---|
| CV and future-orientated | In all but a minority of cases, these motives were not orientated towards a particular goal. Rather, volunteering was seen as something that might be helpful in the future and was desired for its perceived capacity to enable participants to stand out from others. Youth workers often promoted volunteering on such grounds. However, some avoided discussing it for fear of putting young people off, due to the formality of such incentives.   |
| Leisure-orientated       | Participants frequently reported a deficit of things to do in their neighbourhoods. In this context, volunteering was often motivated by a desire to engage in pleasurable activities and 'have a carry-on'. The types of activities participants sought generally reflected gender norms; for instance, males almost exclusively desired sporting based activities.  |
| Social attachments       | Perhaps the most powerful motive for volunteering was the desire to maintain attachments participants had developed over the course of their experiences at youth organisations. Although CV-enhancing benefits, such as certificates, were considered important, there was a sense that volunteering was motivated by the immediate benefits it provided, such as friendship and support. One participant stated she wanted to continue volunteering after her Duke of Edinburgh placement because: 'I love helpin' and ... everything that I've gained, I cannae just throw that away'. Rather than wanting to 'give back' to the community in an abstract sense, volunteers wanted to support the specific organisations from which they had benefitted. |

Social attachments and a sense of belonging were thus important factors in why participants started and continued volunteering. The immediacy of the benefits derived through volunteering – such as, friendship, support and leisure – meant future-orientated motives carried less weight than those based on the here and now. Indeed, one youth worker, whose organisation was supported by university students and younger persons from the

local area, felt the instrumental and future-orientated motives of the former were not evident among the latter, who were more concerned with what they would gain from volunteering 'right now'. This suggests a divergence from the employability emphasis in youth volunteering policies and programmes. Accordingly, when promoting volunteering to young people in deprived areas, emphasising the social and leisure aspects may prove more fruitful for encouraging participation, particularly for those for whom explicit reference to employability factors may be off-putting.

### **The benefits of volunteering**

Broadly speaking, participants valued volunteering for the social connectivity it provided and the opportunity to act with agency. Participants developed strong emotional attachments to others from which they received support, friendship and a sense of belonging. In order to fully appreciate the significance of these benefits, it is necessary to situate them alongside participants' otherwise constrained leisure lives. When describing their neighbourhoods, participants commonly reported:

- 'Boring in't it, there's nothing to do': neighbourhoods were felt to lack amenities and things to do.
- 'Ruined' parks: in instances where amenities were available, they were often vandalised and could not be used.
- 'You wouldnae be doing anything but sitting in the house': there was a sense that, without access to youth organisations, time was spent indoors, in bed and on digital devices. This reflects a broader trend in youth leisure concerning a 'retreat to the private sphere' due, in part, to the commercialisation of urban amenities.<sup>14</sup>
- 'A guy was shouting ... threatening people': anti-social behaviour was a common presence in participants' local areas.

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<sup>14</sup> Batchelor, S., Whittaker, L., Fraser, A., & Ling, L. (2017). Leisure Lives on the Margins: (Re)imagining Youth in Glasgow East End. In S. Blackman & R. Rogers (Eds.), *Youth Marginality in Britain: Contemporary Studies of Austerity*. Bristol: Policy Press.

- ‘People are gonnae jump to conclusions and think you’re up to no good’: as well as experiencing anti-social behaviour, participants felt their behaviour was often misconstrued by others in such terms.

These factors had the effect of limiting participants’ geographical movements. The policing and surveillance of their presence in public space was considered ‘demeaning’. One participant summarised the sense of alienation she experienced in her neighbourhood: ‘you’re getting stopped [by police] and it’s like too much hassle, so that’s why naebody really goes out, everybody just stays in’. In this context, attendance at youth organisations and volunteering provided a way of escaping such constraints. Participants particularly valued the opportunities they encountered to connect with others, develop reciprocal relationships and emotional attachments. From these relationships, participants felt their self-confidence was enhanced. Table 3 outlines the benefits participants described.

Table 3 Benefits participants gained through volunteering

| <b>Benefit</b>            | <b>Dimension</b>                     | <b>Description</b>  |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Social interaction</b> | Connecting with others               | Participants spoke affectionately of the friendships they made with other young people and youth workers, the latter of whom were considered to treat participants with more respect than other adults – namely, teachers and police officers. By and large, the relationships were characteristic of ‘bonding social capital’ – inward facing networks tying individuals with shared characteristics together. Less prominent was evidence of ‘bridging social capital’ – relationships forged across social cleavages. Where it was present, relationships were not valued for their capacity to enable participants to ‘get ahead’, but for their intrinsic dimensions, such as friendship.  |
|                           | Reciprocal and emotional attachments | By helping others, participants derived a powerful sense of personal satisfaction. As one volunteer stated, ‘I get a kick outtae it, helping people ... you feel good about yourself and you just feel proud’. In contrast to their limited leisure opportunities, volunteering enabled participants to act with purpose and agency. By developing trust with the young people they helped, participants saw they had something of value to offer others. Additionally, participants became ‘emotionally attached’ to those with whom they volunteered. These attachments contributed to their wellbeing and made participants ‘feel worthy’ and part of a ‘big family’. Volunteering environments were experienced as ‘safe spaces’ in which friendships were formed and |

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sustained and individuals could forget about the stresses they encountered elsewhere in their lives.

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|                   |                            |   |
|-------------------|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Confidence</b> | Through social interaction | Throughout the fieldwork, volunteers indicated that, prior to volunteering, they felt anxious about entering new social situations and lacked confidence. This was partly related to their restricted geographical movements, which meant their social interactions were limited to a finite number of people. By volunteering, participants were encouraged to interact with new people. Youth-to-youth rather than youth-to-adult engagement was considered a more effective way of developing confidence, due to the comparative ease of interactions. Time was a further factor, with confidence growing alongside length of engagement. Furthermore, in contrast to the formality of educational settings, the informality of volunteer-involving organisations was reported to make participants feel relaxed and secure. |
|-------------------|----------------------------|---|

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|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Through support from youth workers | One youth worker felt her role was to help young people with the 'simple things', such as using a telephone. She felt that, although the emphasis in youth volunteering frequently rests on its employability benefits, there were often important steps young people needed support with before they could think about employment. Indeed, she stated that, for some young people, discussing such aspects would lead to disengagement, due to the formality of such topics. |
|------------------------------------|---|

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|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Through leadership roles | Due to the trust that was placed in them, leadership roles made participants feel 'grown up', provided important opportunities for personal development and pushed participants out of their comfort zones. One youth worker recounted how the young people she worked with challenged councillors at a hustings event, while a volunteer described shifting from a position of alienation in his leisure time to one of agency through his volunteering role. Some participants felt the skills they developed placed them in a stronger position to transition into adulthood and employment. |
|--------------------------|---|

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These findings suggest volunteering was valued for its relational aspects, the opportunities it provided to engage in pleasurable activities, as well as the sense of purpose and agency derived through it. In a similar vein to participants' motivations, the benefits they described were largely valued for their immediacy, rather than their capacity to unlock future gains. Although the confidence and skills they developed would likely assist transitions into employment or further education or training, they were not generally described in such

terms. Instead, they were considered significant in the context of their otherwise limited leisure opportunities and the policing of their presence in public space.

This has important implications for the promotion of volunteering to young people in deprived areas and the management of their voluntary activities. It suggests an explicit emphasis on employability gains may not accurately reflect the meanings and significance volunteering acquires for this cohort. Volunteering provided an important social function in the absence of alternative leisure opportunities. The informality of the spaces where participants volunteered and the sense of safety they felt within them stood in contrast to the formality of their schools and the threat of 'dangerous others'<sup>15</sup> in their neighbourhoods. This indicates that providing opportunities for young people to socialise with other young people and engage in activities they enjoy are important factors in encouraging and sustaining participation.

### **Barriers to volunteering opportunities**

When exploring the factors that impeded participants' access to volunteering opportunities, two broad types of barriers emerged. Firstly, there were a series of objective factors that constrained access to information about volunteering and participants' capacity to physically access opportunities. Secondly, in light of these objective constraints, subjective dispositions developed that penalised engagement with volunteering. These factors are shown in Figure 3.

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<sup>15</sup> France, A., Bottrell, D., & Armstrong, D. (2012). *A Political Ecology of Youth and Crime*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

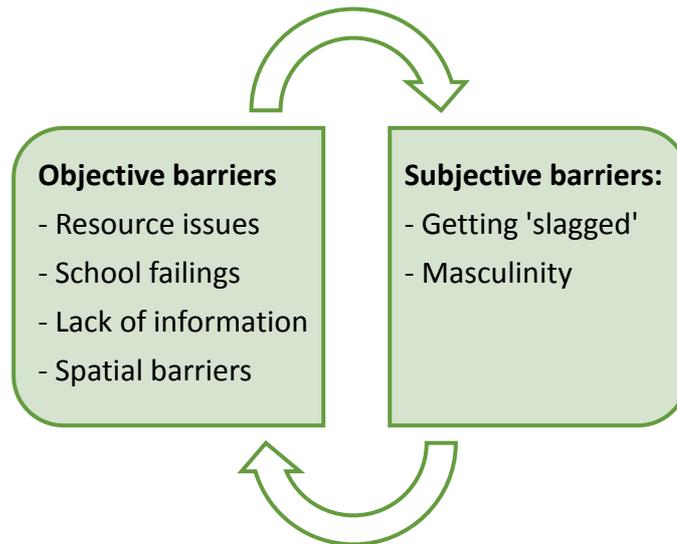


Figure 3 Objective and subjective barriers to volunteering opportunities

The arrows in Figure 3 highlight how the objective and subjective barriers were mutually reinforcing. By limiting opportunities to engage in volunteering, the objective barriers generated a set of conditions through which volunteering become a non-normative activity among participants' peer groups. Accordingly, by virtue of its perceived incompatibility with peer behaviour, volunteering was considered the type of activity an individual would get 'slagged' for doing. These subjective dispositions then normalised the objective factors, such that non-participation appeared natural. Despite this, there was a sense that the significance of informal penalties may have been overstated – i.e. fear of getting 'slagged' was a potentially greater barrier than actual experiences of it. Tables 4 and 5 outline the objective and subjective barriers respectively.

Table 4 Objective barriers to volunteering

| <b>Objective barrier</b>                      | <b>Description</b>   |
|---|--|
| <b>Resource issues</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some instances, youth workers' full-time positions had been reduced to part-time roles. Elsewhere, youth workers stated their roles were not guaranteed beyond particular time frames.</li> <li>• In light of the emotional attachments participants developed, youth workers expressed concern about the potentially negative emotional fallout in the event that their organisations close or provide reduced services.</li> <li>• Youth workers expressed concern about their inability to support young people with complex needs, due, in part, to their lack of training in such areas.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Problematic relationships with schools</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants widely reported their schools were more of a hindrance than facilitator of volunteering.</li> <li>• Both volunteers and non-volunteers felt there was a deficit of information about volunteering available at their schools.</li> <li>• Participants felt only certain groups of pupils, often older students, were able to access information or advice about volunteering.</li> <li>• Youth workers reported inconsistent engagement with schools. While some were reported to 'buy into it big time', others were 'never heard from'.</li> <li>• One youth worker expressed frustration at her feeling that the schools she worked with only put forward their academically strong fifth and sixth year pupils.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Lack of information</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Throughout the fieldwork, there was a strong sense that participants encountered a dearth of information about volunteering.</li> <li>• Volunteers often reported they were only aware of the volunteering opportunities they were involved in, highlighting the significance of the 'participant-to-volunteer' transition. Without early exposure to volunteer-involving environments, young people in deprived areas were disadvantaged in terms of learning about volunteering.</li> <li>• Lack of information was particularly apparent during discussions with non-volunteers, who often reported that the fieldwork was the first time they had spoken about volunteering.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Spatial barriers</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despite encountering anti-social behaviour in their neighbourhoods, participants' local areas were also viewed as places of familiarity and safety. Many had grown up in their neighbourhoods, rarely left them and had strong attachments to their areas. This had the effect of reducing their willingness to travel to other parts of the city.</li> <li>• Constrained spatial movements were compounded by threats of conflict between different 'schemes' and the presence of gangs.</li> </ul>  |

Table 5 Subjective barriers to volunteering

| Subjective barrier              | Description  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Getting 'slagged'</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In keeping with statistics indicating low levels of volunteering in deprived areas, participants reported volunteering was not widely practiced among their peers. Accordingly, non-volunteers expressed concern that they would 'get slagged and bullied' if they volunteered.</li> <li>• Peer norms were reported as significant in shaping behaviour. In order to fit in with one's social group, it was considered important not to deviate from accepted behaviours.</li> <li>• This impacted opportunities for starting and sustaining volunteering. One participant reported he stopped volunteering when he realised he was 'missing out' on socialising with his friends.</li> <li>• One youth worker felt that the impact of informal penalties was most significant around the time young people transitioned into secondary school and their teenage years.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Masculinity as a barrier</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The weight of informal penalties was considered to be particularly acute for males, due to the perception that females were more likely to volunteer. Volunteering was thus thought of as 'more feminine'.</li> <li>• One male respondent stated: 'none of the boys are really interested [in volunteering], so you're an idiot because you're the guy with the lassies by yersel' ... so it doesnae appeal'.</li> <li>• Due to the stigma associated with volunteering and its perceived femininity, there was evidence of self-exclusion among some of the males, in order to protect their social positions.</li> <li>• One youth worker described how peer approval for males impacted their willingness not only to volunteer, but to continue attending youth organisations once they reached their teenage years.</li> <li>• There was evidence to suggest informal penalties were activity dependent. For instance, volunteering in a sporting capacity conformed to peer norms and was thus considered a more acceptable pursuit.</li> </ul> |

Despite the development of subjective dispositions that were perceived to penalise engagement with volunteering, there was a sense that the impact of negative peer sanctions may have been overstated. For example, while some volunteers reported their friends made fun of them for volunteering, it was not considered enough to dissuade them.

This may have been related to the nature of participants' attachments to particular organisations. The participant-to-volunteer transition often meant young people were emotionally invested in their organisations and received a range of benefits from them – benefits which outweighed informal penalties. There was also a sense that having a strong social position could reduce the impact of getting 'slagged'. For instance, one ex-volunteer described how he felt immune to name calling when he volunteered, due to his popular status while at school.

The finding that the weight of informal penalties may have been overstated, in addition to the finding that participants expressed positive attitudes towards volunteering, suggests there is a foundation which can be used to encourage participation. Doing so, however, requires making changes to the objective conditions shaping young people's access to information about volunteering and opportunities to engage in it. Unlike middle-class young people, who are socialised in environments where volunteering is normal and expected,<sup>16</sup> my participants encountered a dearth of information about volunteering and did not feel their schools promoted it. This suggests more can be done to enhance this cohort's knowledge and awareness of volunteering, particularly in schools. However, for those who have difficult relationships with formal education, promotion through schools may be ineffective. In such circumstances, youth organisations may be well placed to provide information. It is, therefore, important to ensure they are properly resourced and staffed in order to offer the necessary support and space to encourage participation, particularly for young people with complex needs. Altering these objective conditions and widening participation may, then, reduce the extent to which volunteering is viewed as antithetical to peer norms, thus limiting the extent to which it is subjected to informal penalties.

#### **4. Recommendations**

Based on the fieldwork, the following seven recommendations were developed to widen access to volunteering opportunities:

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<sup>16</sup> Dean, J. (2016). Class Diversity and Youth Volunteering in the United Kingdom: Applying Bourdieu's Habitus and Cultural Capital. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45(1), 96-113.

1. *Improve access to information:* both volunteers and non-volunteers lacked information about volunteering. This meant they were unaware of opportunities and were liable to developing stereotypical ideas about it. Enhancing awareness about the broad scope of activities entailed by volunteering may reduce the stigma associated with it and enhance opportunities for engaging in it.
2. *Early engagement:* as confidence was an issue for participants, facilitating early involvement in youth organisations may provide an important foundation from which the participant-to-volunteer transition can occur. Early exposure to volunteer-involving organisations may also help reduce the informal penalties associated with volunteering.
3. *Offering meaningful and accessible activities:* in order to engage young people as participants or volunteers, it is necessary to offer meaningful activities reflective of their interests that they are able to access. Part of the reason volunteers sustained their involvement in organisations was due to the enjoyment and sense of agency they derived through it. The evidence suggested youth-to-youth engagement was more fruitful in this respect than youth-to-adult activities. Enhancing the suitability and availability of opportunities may prove fruitful for encouraging engagement.
4. *Being sensitive to age and gender:* the fieldwork suggested young people were liable to fall away from organisations as they entered their teenage years and that males were particularly susceptible to informal penalties. Supporting these particular groups and providing opportunities reflective of their interests may help maintain their engagement.
5. *Greater coordination with schools:* both the young people and youth workers reported difficulties regarding schools as facilitators of volunteering. In light of the second and fourth recommendations, it would be pertinent for volunteer-involving organisations to work with primary schools to inform pupils about volunteering and enhance their awareness of opportunities, as well as maintaining relationships as young people transition into secondary education. Furthermore, the creation of stronger links between volunteering and policy interventions, such as the Curriculum for Excellence, and government bodies, such as Education Scotland, may ameliorate some of the school-based barriers reported in the study.

6. *Investing in youth organisations*: participants in this study described the support they received from youth workers, as well as the emotional bonds they developed with them. Yet, youth workers reported the services they offered were threatened by funding cuts. It is therefore essential to ensure youth organisations are well funded, staffed and accessible in order to provide the level of support necessary to engage young people in deprived areas in volunteering.
7. *Local engagement*: the thesis highlighted constraints on participants' spatial movements. Accordingly, it is important that organisations are geographically accessible. Moreover, by being embedded in their communities, youth workers were able to develop relationships with young people over time. Ensuring organisations are properly resourced, therefore, can help facilitate opportunities for such relationships to develop from which participation and volunteering in youth organisations can be encouraged.