

Background

VSB is a local development agency with 40 years of experience providing the infrastructure to support, encourage and promote citizenship and participation through voluntary activity. As the Volunteer Centre for Belfast, Castlereagh, North Down and Ards, VSB provides the support mechanisms to enable individuals to access voluntary opportunities, matching volunteers with voluntary placements, and maximising mutual benefits. VSB provides support each year for 3000 volunteers and 600 organisations whose work involves volunteers. Support includes advice, information and training relating to good practice standards. Young Citizens in Action (YCIA) is the youth department of VSB. Young Citizens in Action is youth-led and exists to encourage young people to become more active in their community through volunteering and to support young volunteers. 'One Foot in the Door'¹ was published by Young Citizens in Action in 1998. It was a research report into youth volunteering and community relations in Northern Ireland. Young Citizens in Action has commissioned this research report in part as a follow up to One Foot in the Door.

The objectives of this study were:

- To carry out a research project into volunteering amongst young people (aged 16-30) in the Greater Belfast area
- To offer comparisons into "A Foot in the Door" before peace time in Northern Ireland was established – examining the situation of volunteering amongst young people in the current climate of a more peaceful and stable society
- By way of a community audit to offer an insight into both young people who volunteer and those who do not volunteer
- To identify the extent of volunteering being carried out by young people across Greater Belfast
- To identify what types of volunteering young people get involved in
- Based on the findings of the Research recommendations will be identified and an Action Plan developed which will be implemented to encourage young people to become involved in volunteering and community activities
- The information above will be distributed amongst community/voluntary organisations in order to facilitate them to effectively target young people to become involved in community activities
- An Action Plan will be devised based on the findings which will enable Young Citizens in Action to implement a targeted promotional and recruitment strategy over the course of one year
- This research will be adaptable so to enable it's use by VSB to promote volunteering among 16-30 year olds
- To identify comparative statistical information on individual volunteers

Methodology

Questionnaires were used to collect the range of statistical information required. The questionnaire was developed using the objectives of the study, contact with key individuals and desk research relating to youth volunteering. The total number of questionnaires circulated was 1508. The sample was not random; all of the young people registered with VSB in order were surveyed to get views from existing volunteers. In addition in order to get views from young people not engaged in volunteering, questionnaires were circulated via youth centres and schools that were prepared to facilitate the process. Of the 242 young people who completed the survey, 142 were not currently volunteering and 100 were volunteering. There was a 16% response rate to the questionnaire. Focus groups were organised in all parts of Belfast and with young people engaged and not engaged in volunteering. A total of 38 young people attended the groups for young people engaged in volunteering and 19 attended the groups for young people not engaged in volunteering.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the people that took part in the survey and the focus groups. In addition we would like to thank all the youth and voluntary organisations and schools that assisted us in the research.

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¹ One Foot in the Door, Young Citizens in Action, VSB, 1998



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Key Findings

Key Comparisons with One Foot in the Door

Young People are giving fewer hours per month but making a longer term commitment

- In the past month the 72 young volunteers who gave details of their hours had committed **2,635 hours** of voluntary time with the average commitment being **36.5 hours**. In A Foot in the Door the time commitment from 145 volunteer respondents was 6,429 hours and the average time given by each volunteer was 38.96. This new survey therefore shows a decrease on the average in the One Foot in the Door survey.
- In One Foot in the Door over 80% of the respondents gave more than 35 hours per month and this has changed with 23% of respondents now giving over 30 hours per month but the majority giving less than 10 hours per month.
- In terms of the time commitment 49% of volunteers had been volunteering for more than a year and this is an increase on the 38% shown in One Foot in the Door.
- There has been a change in the time of day preferred for volunteering from the earlier survey with **more young people volunteering in the evenings and afternoons and fewer at weekends and mornings**. The most significant change is the number volunteering all day, which has dropped from 23% to 11%.

Volunteering and You

Young volunteers are gaining a wide range of skills of benefit to themselves and their communities

- There is a wide range of voluntary activity taking place with volunteering in a youth club as a leader or helper the most common. Cross community activity, summer schemes, fundraising and music/art/drama were also popular. In all 38 different types of roles were identified including the 'other' section.
- The most important reasons for starting to volunteer were to **gain skills and experience, for self-satisfaction and to contribute to career development**.
- In terms of the benefits gained from volunteering the most important were **gaining experience, learning new skills, doing something worthwhile, having fun and doing something which looks good on your CV**. Young people in focus groups were able to clearly articulate the benefits to them of volunteering, these included: personal development, fun, learning knowledge and skills, making new friends, sense of satisfaction at helping other people and getting good experience for their CVs. They were also able to articulate a set of wider benefits to the community such as prevention of antisocial behaviour, to assist other young people to widen their life chances and change their role models.
- The majority of volunteers (55%) would be interested in accreditation for their volunteering with 11% already undertaking accreditation.
- 66% of volunteers would be interested in training** related to their volunteering with 12% already undertaking it.
- Young people felt that a key way to enable young volunteers to have a positive volunteering experience was to ensure that they were involved in the decisions that affected them.

Why not get involved?

Most young people don't volunteer because they have never been asked.

- The biggest reason young people gave for not volunteering was that **they had never been asked** (68%). This was closely followed by a lack of information (66%). A lack of awareness of the benefits (53%) and being too busy (52%) were also important factors. Lack of flexibility and variety showed as an issue with 43% of young people while lack of out of pocket expenses was indicated by (36%) of young people.
- The majority (91%) of young people who were not currently volunteering would volunteer if they were asked.**
- Most of the young volunteers got involved because of a friend or family member, with being a member of an organisation and schools/colleges also being important. There was also an indication that non-volunteers were less likely to have a family member who volunteered.
- The majority of respondents (73%) could not recall seeing any publicity relating to volunteering in the last few months.



Volunteering contributes to an improvement in Community relations.

Volunteering and community relations

- 41% of respondents believed that divisions in our society do not restrict young people from volunteering.
- In answer to the question "Does your community background prevent you from working in other areas?" 71% of respondents said no.
- In response to the question "Would you be interested in working on voluntary projects that are directly aimed at cross community contact and co-operation?" 78% of people said yes and 21% no.
- In response to the question do you believe that volunteering can contribute to an improvement in cross community relations 91% of respondents felt that it could, with only 9% saying that it could not.
- In the focus groups young people engaged in volunteering expressed their view of citizenship in terms of **having their own place in the community and making a contribution**. They also emphasised acceptance and respect of others.
- Sectarianism and community division was the problem most often identified by young people as the biggest social problem affecting their communities.
- The majority of people (86%) had not written to an elected representative.
- The majority of respondents (63%) had not signed a petition.
- Most people in the survey were not eligible to vote. However of the people who were eligible volunteers were slightly (3%) more likely to have voted.
- The majority of respondents to the survey indicated that they would be interested in taking part in a volunteer youth forum.

About You

- The respondents to the survey were predominantly female (64%).
- The majority of respondents (77%) were in the age group 16 – 20.
- The majority (95.4%) of young people responding to the survey gave their ethnicity as white.
- The respondents were split between members of the Protestant Community (42%) and members of the Roman Catholic Community (46%) with 12% from neither community.
- The majority (98%) of young people responding to the survey did not have a disability.

Recommendations

This report makes recommendations, which VSB in partnership with volunteer involving organisations in Belfast will generate into a strategy for action. The recommendations are rooted in the evidence provided in the report.

Volunteering – What it Means

- There is a need to **celebrate** the positive and beneficial impact volunteering is making to the lives of young people and their communities.
- There is a need to ensure that young people are clear about the **benefits of volunteering** both to themselves as well as the wider community in order to engage them in volunteering in greater numbers.

Volunteering and the Wider Community

- There needs to be a **more deliberate approach to engaging young volunteers in cross community activity**. If volunteer involving organisations are committed to cross community activity then they need to plan for it within their programmes and the focus group evidence points to the fact that it is most successful where there is a high level of ownership by young people.
- Consideration should be given to testing a **volunteer forum** as it may be appropriate for some young people but it would need to be focussed and well planned to get the maximum benefit. It should also be evaluated frequently to ensure that its membership reflects the wider community across Belfast.

Getting Involved

- The **range of volunteering roles** available to young people needs to be widely promoted. Volunteer roles for young people need to be **flexible** to fit in with their lifestyles. In creating flexibility in terms of how often people need to volunteer, how many hours they give and whether it can be done from home or online, organisations can attract a wider range of young people.
- There may be value in offering an opportunity for **taster days**, which will allow young people to experience the range of opportunities available in a short time frame and which could be used as a catalyst to generate increased involvement.
- There is a need to ensure that **group activities** are available to young people. This may be particularly valuable in areas where there is no culture of volunteering among peers or families. In these areas it may be beneficial to pilot **youth led group volunteering** as a means to raise awareness and to generate activity.
- It may be useful to look at how to encourage more **family volunteering** across Belfast.
- There is also a need to consider the importance of young people spreading the word about volunteering to their friends. Trying to harness the momentum of **young people inviting their friends** to volunteer could prove beneficial to recruiting young volunteers. There is a need to pilot some focussed approaches of this kind.
- There is a need for **clear, credible, accessible information about volunteering**. There is a need to review the type of information available about volunteering and to ensure that it is appropriate to young people and that it is placed in areas where young people are likely to see it. Information should be available via the Internet regarding volunteering and it is vital that the new Volunteer Centres website www.volunteernow.co.uk is made relevant for young people and promoted to them.
- There is a need to ensure that young people are presented with **volunteering information through school** on a regular basis. Volunteering opportunities also should be offered through school in order to reach the maximum number of young people.
- Ninety one percent of young people who do not volunteer **would volunteer if asked**. It would be useful to consider how volunteering organisations should go about asking these young people to get involved.
- Volunteer involving organisations should ensure that publicity materials would appeal to both genders. In designing volunteer roles **gender issues** should be considered in order to ensure that volunteer roles appeal to young men as well as young women.

Staying Involved

- There is a need to look at the **time placements are offered** in order to ensure that they appeal to the maximum number of young people, it would appear from this research that afternoons and evenings suit young people best.
- When planning for involvement of young volunteers it seems to be important that young people are **engaged and consulted** at every stage. This should lead to a more productive satisfying experience for all involved.
- Young people **should not be out of pocket for volunteering**.
- Organisations considering involving young volunteers should look for opportunities to **externally recognise** the volunteering the young people are engaged in and the skills that they are learning through it.
- Training** is of interest to young people and again organisations need to ensure that their volunteer programmes are sufficiently well resourced to ensure that young people can avail of the training they needed.

