



Children and young people

Hidden talents: young people and volunteering

A way forward

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Introduction

This is a joint paper between the Local Government Association (LGA) and Volunteering England.

In response to local authorities' responsibilities to support young people to succeed in life, the LGA and Centre for Social Justice worked with partners from the private, public and third sectors to develop a series of reports on getting the best out of young people.

This paper builds on the LGA's 'Hidden Talents' publications¹ and aims to start a conversation about the role volunteering can play in local authorities' support for young people who are not in employment, education or training.



¹ Hidden Talents publications:
www.lga.gov.uk/hiddentalents

Background

The number of young people aged 16 to 24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) is monitored by government.

The former Department for Children, Schools and Families was committed to reducing the proportion of 16 to 18 year olds who are NEET by 2 per cent, from 9.6 per cent in 2004 to 7.6 per cent by 2010. This target has not been met and currently, there are nearly one million 16 to 24 year olds who are not in education, employment or training.

From 1 April 2010, responsibility for commissioning learning services for young adults aged 16 to 19 moved from the Learning and Skills Council to local authorities. This gives local authorities full responsibility for the wellbeing of young people from 0 to 19 years old. From 2013, local authorities will also be responsible for ensuring young people and employers comply with the raised leaving age for learning.

The Hidden Talents reports

Baroness Eaton, Chairman of the LGA, asked the organisation to create new and imaginative local solutions to help young people not in education, employment and training, particularly through earlier action. The 'Hidden Talents' reports are the main outcome of this work.

The first report, 'Hidden Talents: re-engaging young people', looked at the scale of the issues faced by young people who were not earning, learning or working, and at the long-term impact on their futures.

The second report, 'Hidden Talents II: getting the best out of young people', focused on how young people could be supported locally and suggested how a new approach and policy solutions could engage young people more effectively in productive activities.

The third report, 'Hidden Talents III: celebrating achievements – local solutions for engaging young people', provided case studies celebrating what young people can do whilst highlighting the factors that can disengage them from education, employment or training.

Young people and volunteering

'Hidden Talents II' argued that the language used for policy making gave an unhelpfully negative impression of young people who are not earning, learning or working. The report highlighted that the number of young people classed as not engaged includes those who are volunteering or have caring responsibilities, thus potentially stigmatising individually and socially worthwhile activities.

The report proposed that the focus should be on what young people could do including caring, volunteering, community service and informal learning – all of which act as a stepping stone towards, or complement to, paid work and formal education and training. The wider benefits of volunteering and social action have moved further into the spotlight more recently, along with an increased appreciation of the local authority role in supporting and enabling individuals and communities to achieve positive change through their own actions.

'Hidden Talents II' suggested that new local solutions to help young people could be developed through an expansion of locally accredited programmes of informal learning and volunteering. It proposed that these should be included in the definition of meaningful activity²:

“...local partners should be able to adjust the system locally to ensure that opportunities become more

attractive by... placing more weight on volunteering and community service as a route into work and formal training, developing local initiatives for young people who give their time to the community”.³

Hidden Talents, informal learning and volunteering

The 'Hidden Talents' reports recognised that some young people who are disengaged are not ready for formal education, training or work and may face complex barriers. The reports concluded that informal learning, voluntary activity and community service can:

- start to break down some of the barriers to engagement
- provide a valuable way of improving skills, building confidence and gaining work experience
- act as a stepping stone into work and training, and in some cases might be an alternative to employment or training
- allow young people to contribute to the local economy
- help tackle social problems, build social cohesion and provide local culture and sport.

² Hidden Talents II (p.5):
www.lga.gov.uk/hiddentalents

³ Hidden Talents II (p.32):
www.lga.gov.uk/hiddentalents

How volunteering can provide flexible, accessible opportunities

Engage young people not earning or learning

For young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training, or who are not engaged as carers, volunteering offers a tool to help them re-engage and often has a positive impact. But it is important to understand and support the motivations to volunteer so that hard-to-reach young people can be targeted and engaged.

A recent OFSTED review recognised the value of youth services in engaging some young people:

“The most effective practitioners respond to young person’s needs and interests in an unobtrusive manner. Their non-stigmatising approach, together with the often voluntary nature of the relationship with young people, had the potential to engage some of the most resistant and hardest to help.”⁴

People are motivated to volunteer for a number of reasons: their personal feelings (eg satisfaction, feel-good); personal needs (eg pastime, relationships); altruism; experience (eg skills and work prospects); and personal inducements (eg qualifications)⁵.

Other studies reinforce these findings. ‘Helping Out’ (a national survey undertaken in 2006/07) asked respondents to choose from a list of reasons for starting to volunteer. The

top motivation given by 16 to 24 year olds (56 per cent) was, “I wanted to improve things, help people”. This was higher than across all age groups. The second most important reason among this age group was to develop skills and enhance work prospects, whilst ‘the cause’ was the third most commonly cited reason for volunteering⁶.

Provide a bridge to employment, education and training

One of the main benefits of volunteering is the increased confidence and self-esteem that many individuals gain from it. This can be particularly important for those who have been out of education employment or training⁷:

“Volunteering develops skills which young people can then use. This includes generic skills such as teamwork, communication and other social and interpersonal skills. It is often the supportive and people-centred ethos of the volunteering sector that facilitates the development of these skills.”

“Many volunteers also gain a range of ‘hard’ skills such as practical IT, media and organisational skills. Volunteering often presents individuals with opportunities they would not otherwise experience, such as managerial roles. This practical learning is often supported through complementary training and education.”⁸

4 Engaging young people: Local authority youth work 2005-08: www.ofsted.gov.uk/content/download/9223/101762/file/Engaging%20young%20people.doc

5 Young people, volunteering and youth projects: A rapid review of recent evidence: http://vinspired.com/uploads/admin_assets/datas/282/original/v_formative_evaluation_rapid_evidence_review_Dec_2009_x_2.pdf

6 Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving: http://www.volunteering.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/BFC9C41E-7636-48FB-843C-A89D2E93F277/0/OTS_Helping_Out.pdf

7 IVR, A gateway to work: www.ivr.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/CD44F747-A05F-4EBE-BD81-F41281121C3C/0/A_Gateway_to_Work.pdf

8 IVR, The benefits of volunteering for employability: currently unpublished

Demonstrate the social return on investment

The return on investment in volunteering benefits both the individual and the wider community. Individual benefits include improved career options, better health and wellbeing, as well as social networking.

The social capital developed through volunteering is important for building strong and active communities and offers important benefits for local authorities. A society rich in social capital tends to have lower rates of crime, lower levels of school absenteeism and inter-racial conflict, and higher levels of economic growth⁹.

The social return on investment in volunteering has not been sufficiently studied to date but the available evidence is persuasive. For example, in the case of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), the social return for every £1 invested in BTCV overall was £4 and estimated to increase to £15 in five years¹⁰. These savings were shown in reduced crime and benefit claims, increased employment, and improvements in health and leisure.

Draw on existing experience

Volunteering is not cost free. To develop volunteering as a means of engaging young people in productive activities requires some local investment in the creation, promotion and management of volunteering opportunities. The existing local support systems for volunteering, particularly local Volunteer Centres (many working with involved teams), would offer a cost-effective vehicle.

A range of organisations are experienced in working with disaffected young people and a number of existing volunteering schemes

could be used by local authorities working in partnership to meet the needs of such groups. Large numbers of opportunities can be found through the local volunteer centres¹¹ and on the volunteering opportunities website www.do-it.org.uk, or supported by the vTalentYear programme.

A list of UK-based organisations that offer volunteering opportunities for young people in the UK can be found at <http://labs.vinspired.com/uk-volunteering>

The challenges to volunteering

Volunteering can play an important role in local authorities' support for young people who are not working, learning or caring. However, there are some challenges which may need to be addressed if local authorities are to engage young people effectively.

Job substitution

Volunteering is a matter of choice and people should have the right to volunteer, or not. It should complement and supplement the work of employees and not be used to displace paid staff or undercut their pay and conditions of service. Volunteering England and the TUC have signed a national charter¹² to strengthen the ties between volunteers and paid staff. This sets out a series of principles to encourage a good working relationship between volunteers, employers and paid staff.

The 'NEET' label

The 'NEET' label does not recognise the positive impact of volunteering as a source of personal growth, work experience and skill development. Volunteers, even those volunteering full time, are officially classed as inactive and considered to be disengaged by being labelled 'NEET'.

⁹ Volunteering, capital of the future?: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001227/122747e.pdf>

¹⁰ Inspiring people, improving places: www2.btcv.org.uk/BehaviourChange.pdf

¹¹ Volunteer centres can be found by locality: www.volunteering.org.uk/finder

¹² A Charter for Strengthening Relations Between Paid Staff and Volunteers: www.tuc.org.uk/publicsector/tuc-17329-f0.cfm

Access to benefits

The benefit rules enable people to volunteer providing they can make themselves available for interview within 48 hours and take up employment within a week. The regulations are not well understood by young people and sometimes not by Jobcentre Plus staff. Misinterpretations of the rules can hinder young people's volunteering.

A guide to volunteering while on benefits has been published by Jobcentre Plus¹³. Volunteering England and the national management of Jobcentre Plus have also signed an agreement to work together to clarify the rules and encourage collaboration between volunteer centres and Jobcentre Plus locally¹⁴.

Problems are also reported where young people on long-term volunteering programmes, such as through New Deal schemes, have been called back to attend training classes they have found less helpful than the experience gained through volunteering.

Local authorities and partners may want to build strong relationships with the local Jobcentre Plus to work through these problems and help support young people who are not currently in employment, education and training.

Available funding

Significant amounts of local, national and European funding are ring fenced for programmes that support young people who are officially defined as 'NEET'. The current system means that this funding often cannot be used to support volunteering opportunities, even those that have been created specifically to support young people's progression into employment, education or training.

The proposals set out in 'Total Place' and more recently 'Place-based budget approaches'¹⁵ (or future schemes applying a similar methodology), may reduce the amount of funding that is ring fenced.

Local authorities and volunteering organisations may want to work together, nationally and locally, to identify funding for volunteering programmes which contribute to personal development and progression for disengaged young people – and to make the case to develop such funding programmes.

¹³ A guide to volunteering while on benefits: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp1023.pdf>

¹⁴ Agreement between Jobcentre Plus and Volunteering England: www.volunteering.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Policy
Tackling+the+Benefits+Barrier

¹⁵ Total Place: A whole area approach to public services: www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/psr_total_place.htm
Place-based budgets: the future governance of local public services: www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/12294113

Oxfordshire – Engaging young people through volunteering

Linval (pictured) is a full-time volunteer through the vTalentYear at a youth centre in Oxfordshire¹⁶.

Linval experienced various difficulties in his life and had been in prison three times. He gained seven GCSEs, including two Cs in science in school. Afterwards, Linval worked as a labourer and decided he wanted to become a bricklayer. He completed an E2E course and then did an apprenticeship in bricklaying. But things were going wrong in other ways. He was mixing with the wrong crowd, drinking and taking drugs, and ended up in prison. When he went to prison for the third time he had not completed his apprenticeship.

On release from prison, Linval was homeless but managed to gain a place at Abingdon Foyer where he was helped to break away from his old friends and to take part in a range of activities based on the action plan he developed with his support worker. This system helped him to work out what he wanted to do and how to achieve it. He was given support and training to manage his anger and drinking and was encouraged to attend an open day for the vTalentYear programme. Linval now works as a full-time volunteer at Abingdon Youth Centre doing different activities with young people and using his experiences to help them.

Linval achieved various qualifications through the Foyer and E2E programmes and will gain a Level 2 qualification in community volunteering through vTalent. When he completes the programme, he aims to get a job as a youth support worker:

“I’m well known in Abingdon, but now I’m known for the right things. If I can help someone not go down the same path, then my experiences haven’t been wasted.”



¹⁶ Hidden Talents III, Case studies:
www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=5202270

The way forward

There are opportunities for all interested groups to work in partnership to re-engage young people through volunteering. The LGA and Volunteering England could develop their work with local authorities to help support and assist young people into volunteering.

To take this forward we propose:

- the definition of 'NEET' should be reviewed to take account of those who are volunteering
- young people should be able to access opportunities that are most suitable for them - volunteering should no longer be excluded from the choices available
- volunteering should be recognised as a potential route towards employment, education and training
- the provision of high-quality volunteering opportunities should be developed at a local level to support young people not engaged in education, employment or training.

This will mean that:

- NEET figures represent the levels of inactivity among young people more accurately
- local authorities and their partners will be able to focus their resources on young people who are genuinely disengaged and who need dedicated support
- local authorities will gain the freedom to use high-quality volunteering opportunities as a progression route for disengaged young people.

We recommend the following actions:

- closer working between local authorities and the voluntary and community sector to explore more effective links in supporting disengaged young people
- closer working between local authorities, volunteer centres and other local support systems to demonstrate how local volunteering opportunities can meet the needs of disengaged young people
- the development of 'place-based budgets' or similar approaches, should include volunteering by young people as a means of reaching agreed outcomes and targets
- a wider evidence base is compiled to explain the link between volunteering and re-engaging young people
- the LGA and local authorities should consider creating employer-supported volunteering schemes¹⁷ for all their employees so that volunteering becomes valued and embedded in the culture of local authorities themselves, following the example of many central government departments
- the outcome of the evaluations of the vTalent Year and existing local authority schemes should be widely disseminated.

¹⁷ Employer Volunteering Scheme:
<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/goodpracticebank/Specialist+Themes/Employer+Supported+Volunteering/index>

Further information

Department for Children, Schools and Families. 'Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)': <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00322-2008&>

Department for Children, Schools and Families. '16- to 18-year-olds NEET': www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?go=site.home&sid=42&pid=343&ctype=none&ptype=contents

Department for Communities and Local Government. 'National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Handbook of Definitions': www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/finalnationalindicators

Department for Communities and Local Government. 'Citizenship survey': www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1416740.pdf

Institute for Volunteering Research. 'Young people, volunteering and youth projects: A rapid review of recent evidence': http://vinspired.com/uploads/admin_assets/datas/282/original/v_formative_evaluation_rapid_evidence_review_Dec_2009_x_2.pdf

Institute for Volunteering Research. 'Gateway to work': www.ivr.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/CD44F747-A05F-4EBE-BD81-F41281121C3C/0/A_Gateway_to_Work.pdf

Local Government Association. 'Hidden Talents I, II, III. Re-engaging young people': www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelD=2109543

Local Government Association. 'Older teenagers not in education, employment or training': www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/5366207

Local Government Association. 'Place-based budgets: the future governance of local public services': www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/12294113

National Centre for Social Research and the Institute for Volunteering Research, for the Cabinet Office. 'Helping out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving': http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/third_sector/assets/helping_out_national_survey_2007.pdf

New Philanthropy Capital. 'Getting back on track': www.philanthropycapital.org/publications/education/neets.aspx

OFSTED. 'Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why': <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Documents-by-type/Thematic-reports/Reducing-the-numbers-of-young-people-not-in-education-employment-or-training-what-works-and-why>

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