

Taking the Lead young people and volunteering

By Andrew Cummings

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THE NETWORK FOR QUALITY WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

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Foreword



I have often been asked why **accenture** chooses to support UK Youth, and indeed the charity sector in general. There are many reasons, but in my view they all boil down to one key element - our employees are young, they recognise that they are in a privileged position, and they have a strong desire to “give something back”. In my experience, the graduates who we seek to employ these days make a choice about their employer based on far more than just their salary. They look for an employer who is a good “corporate citizen”; one that will truly offer them opportunities to contribute back to society. Accenture offers such opportunities in many different ways. Supporting youth work and youth volunteering is one of these.

Accenture has had a relationship with UK Youth since around 2000. Since then, this relationship has taken many different forms. These include:

- Accenture consultants assisting with fund raising events, such as running the London Marathon in aid of UK Youth
- On-going initiatives such as sponsoring UK Youth’s Youth Achievement Awards,
- Providing practical assistance through the “How Can Accenture Help” scheme
- Sponsoring and assisting with one-off events, such as the recent “Film for Youth” competition.



I am pleased to say that at any one time, around 100 employees, and sometimes even more, are involved in assisting UK Youth in a whole range of ways. While only some of these involve fund raising, they all involve people giving their time and skills.

The Youth Achievement Awards is a fantastic scheme and one that caught my eye early on. Sponsoring the Awards was the first way in which Accenture made a substantial contribution to UK Youth. A three-year bursary was started in 2002, and this was renewed for a further three years in 2005. In addition to making a financial contribution, we established a joint steering group, which meets every three months, which has been an important way for Accenture to maximise their contribution to the scheme. We have taken an active interest in the groups of young people who benefit from the bursary. We have also worked with the charity to develop “success stories” which we have used to communicate within Accenture, the impact that the Youth Achievement Awards have on young peoples lives. And we have brainstormed new, related ideas concerning where we could contribute further. There is no question that the bursary has led to a lot of interest amongst our employees, and this has helped to create an environment where people seek ways to contribute further.

Accenture’s involvement with UK Youth is just one way in which we support volunteering. Each of our employees is entitled to three days a year to spend on charitable activities of their choice. Our employees use this to support a range of charities across the UK in a wide variety of activities. These include mentoring programmes, developing IT systems, even the occasional schoolyard painting! We are proud of the impact we can have through this policy and have many charitable partners, including UK Youth. In addition to our three-day policy, employees have the opportunity to apply their skills abroad through our partnership with Voluntary Service Overseas and through our not-for-profit consulting arm, Accenture Development Partnerships.

When I am asked why we do these things, it comes down to this: A desire to contribute in a way which uses ones talents, and which is fun and rewarding!

Bill Crothers
Senior Executive (1991 to 2006)
Accenture

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Youth Volunteering

Setting the Scene

The Russell Commission’s investigation into “youth action and engagement” has demonstrated a strong interest by the UK government in developing and promoting young people’s involvement in voluntary service. This follows a growing focus on young people’s volunteering in recent years. In 1997 the National Survey of Volunteering reported a “sharp reduction in levels of participation by young people aged 18 to 24”, and “negative views of volunteering among the younger generation” (1). Many of the initiatives undertaken since then have been aimed at reversing this decline, and changing the perceptions that young people have of volunteering.

Shortly after the 1997 survey findings were released, the Institute for Volunteering Research set out to further explore what young people actually thought of volunteering, and what factors would encourage young people to take part in volunteering. The research found that young people disliked the term “volunteering”, but still believed in the fundamental values behind volunteering. They felt that volunteering needed a “make-over”, which could be summarised by “FLEXIVOL”:

Flexibility	flexible work and working times to suit young people’s lives
Legitimacy	a more positive image for volunteering, seen as “normal” and “cool”
Ease of access	more information and encouragement, and easy access points
EXperience	relevant and interesting, with opportunities to learn new skills
Incentives	a reference or qualification to validate their experience
Variety	to accommodate the huge range of interests, goals and preferences
Organisation	efficient but informal in a relaxed and welcoming environment
Laughs	volunteering should be enjoyable, satisfying and fun (2)

Many of the youth volunteering initiatives that have been developed since then, such as the Millennium Volunteers (MV) programme, have been developed with these issues in mind. A UK Wide evaluation of MV, carried out from 2000 to 2002, recommended more flexibility around the time frames for completing MV, raising the profile of MV, increasing the use of external accreditation, and “genuine youth ownership” of projects (3).

The Home Office Citizenship Survey in 2001 found that 40% of 16 to 24 year olds had taken part in formal volunteering activities in the previous 12 months (4). This research also looked into barriers to volunteering. It found that young people who do not take part in volunteering “are often unaware of the potential benefits” of volunteering, and that young people were more likely to get involved in volunteering following “encouragement by friends, people they know, celebrities and the media”.



“It speaks for itself really – youth led youth work! It’s about young people taking action, being enthusiastic... throwing your all into a project and making it work. It’s important to be passionate so that others can see it and feel it... then they will support your ideas”

**Chelsea,
19 Liverpool**

Young people are most interested in “group and team activities, taster sessions and new types of voluntary activity.” Perhaps most importantly, the research suggested that the “reclamation” or overhaul of volunteering “should be peer led, using young volunteers to show other young people the diversity of volunteering” (5).

Other research projects in the UK have found similar issues and concerns. For example, a series of pilot projects on “youth team volunteering” were run by the Volunteer Centre Edinburgh, and found that several factors increased the likelihood that young people would undertake volunteering. These included doing volunteering “with their mates” (especially for disadvantaged groups), getting “buy-in” from the team members, giving young people a choice of activities or projects, giving information about the project and the likely results, and helping young people to feel connected to the project (6).

Interestingly, research into youth volunteering in other Western countries has resulted in similar findings. An Australian study into volunteering amongst young Australians aged 16 to 24 found very similar attitudes, barriers and recommendations to the UK research (7). Similarly, an American study in 2003/4 found that 40.2% of young Americans aged 15 to 25 had taken part in formal volunteering activity in the previous 12 months (8) – almost exactly the same rate as in the UK.

In the last few years, the most significant development regarding youth volunteering in the UK has been the Russell Commission, which investigated the “need for a new national framework for youth action and engagement”. The Commission’s report, launched in March 2005, outlined this new national framework, with the intention of bringing about “a step change in the diversity, quality and quantity of young people’s volunteering”. The intention is to bring about significant change with regard to the profile of young volunteers, the choice and quality available to young people when they volunteer, and the number of young people taking part in voluntary activities between the ages of 16 and 25 (9).

The Commission report states that the key theme for achieving these aims “is the importance of involving young people themselves in the design and implementation of volunteering activity”. The report went on to state that “**some of the most successful and inspirational volunteering experiences are those that are led by young people... Wherever possible... the national framework (should) embrace this youth led approach**” (10).

The report made 16 recommendations regarding how to bring about the desired step change in youth volunteering. One of these recommendations is “wider use of the Youth Achievement Award to recognise young people’s personal development through volunteering”, in order to “mark the contribution made by young volunteers, and to recognise the skills they learn in the course of their activity” (11).

The purpose of this publication is to stimulate the development of high quality, youth led voluntary activities. The case studies provided show a wide range of possible ways to engage young people, and provide them with opportunities to design and lead projects, with the support and assistance of committed adults. Some of the case studies focus on work with young people who have not traditionally taken part in volunteering, such as disabled young people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This publication also focuses on ways to incorporate the Youth Achievement Awards, in order to recognise and accredit young peoples’ learning and development whilst taking part in these activities.

For details about the reports quoted in this chapter, see Acknowledgements in Chapter 7.



The Youth Work Approach

There are many different approaches to working with young people. In this publication, we will focus our attention on what we call “Youth Work”. The reason for focusing on this approach is because youth work is ideal for overcoming the obstacles and barriers to youth volunteering, as discussed in the previous chapter.

At the centre of the youth work approach is a belief in young people and their potential. Youth work starts with young people’s needs, interests, aspirations and concerns. It is about recognising that the future of our society is dependent on the young people of today, and the skills, knowledge and personal qualities that they develop. Youth work recognises that being a young person has unique issues, concerns and experiences compared with other life stages and ages (12).

In the early 1990s, a Statement of Purpose was developed for the youth service, in an effort to identify the common factors that unite the vast range of youth work groups and organisations across the UK. This document described the purpose of youth work as “to ensure equality of opportunity for young people to fulfil their potential as empowered individuals and members of groups and communities ...during the process of transition from childhood to adulthood” (13).

Youth work focuses on helping young people to develop these skills and qualities, as well as developing their confidence to express themselves and their ability to contribute to the wider society. Youth work enables young people to learn about themselves, their society and the world through non-formal educational activities which combine enjoyment, challenges and learning.

Let’s look briefly at some of the key points about the youth work approach, in order to understand how youth work differs from other forms of work with young people, and how this approach can be used when developing a youth led approach to volunteering.

“When you are involved in something from the beginning right through to the very end, you feel a real sense of achievement. In my town, young people wanted basketball courts and helped to raise the funds to get them. All the young people are really proud of the basketball courts now, and they’ve never been vandalised or anything because of that”

Nick,
18, Solihull)



Youth work has the following characteristics:

Voluntary Involvement

Youth work involves young people on a voluntary basis. Young people are able to attend youth work activities and projects - and to enter into a relationship with the youth workers involved - if and when they choose to do so. This fundamentally affects the way youth work activities take place, and the role they play in young people's lives. This voluntary involvement means that young people who do take part in youth work activities tend to have a high level of commitment to them, as it is totally up to them whether they take part or not.

Young People Focused

It is essential that youth work programmes and activities are young people focused. This means starting with the young people's interests, needs and wants as the basis for everything you do, and remembering that despite the other factors that may influence your work, it is the young people who must remain at the heart of your project. This can be challenging, as there are often competing issues and interests vying for your attention. Being young people focused means remembering that the process is more important than the outcome. For example, you may be working with a group of young people to renovate a building, which will then be used as a community centre. Having a young people focused approach will mean that the development and learning of the young people is more important to your project than the final outcome of the completed community centre. Keeping the young people's development as your main focus is at the very heart of the youth work approach.

“Good participation is about being involved in decision making in a real way. It shouldn’t be about an organisation just “ticking a box” to say that they consulted with young people”

**Sam,
20, Seaford**

Youth work programmes need to be creative and inspiring, and should be based on young people's interests and aspirations, in order to attract them and involve them in what is on offer. This means thinking about what you are offering from a young person's perspective, listening to what young people are interested in, and the type of activities they want to take part in. Without this focus on the young people and their interests, youth work programmes will not attract young people in the first place, and will ultimately fail to get off the ground.

Educational

Youth work is based on the notion of non-formal education, which means providing planned learning experiences for young people, but in informal settings. The emphasis is on having fun first, and then reflecting on the learning that took place afterwards. An example of this would be when a group of young people decide that they want to run a tuck shop at their local youth centre. From this experience they would learn a wide range of skills, such as ordering the food and drink, budgeting, pricing the items, stock-taking, and working as a team to make sure everything necessary was done. Whilst the learning experiences are very real, the emphasis at the time is on doing something that is both fun and rewarding, and focusing on the learning later.

Young people often learn very practical skills through their involvement in youth work, and may well enhance their understanding of topics they learn in “formal” learning settings like school or college. In youth work, the emphasis of the learning is on the development of personal and social skills. Youth work programmes are uniquely placed to offer learning opportunities that focus on young people growing and developing as people. Youth work also provides young people with opportunities to develop the confidence to use their skills and knowledge in the wider world (14).



Shared Learning Experiences

A vital part of the youth work approach is a belief in the importance of young people learning and developing through their interaction and companionship with each other. Young people learn important personal and social skills by working together, solving problems as a group, and communicating with people they may not normally mix with. Whilst other forms of provision for young people may also give these opportunities, youth work programmes will design activities specifically with this intention in mind. This might involve things like planning a residential that involves experiential learning through team building activities, or supporting a group of young people to organise a band night, and then agreeing the division of tasks and roles. Good youth work is about planning activities with these outcomes in mind, in order that young people learn by reflecting both on the planned activities, and on their everyday experiences and events.

“I’ve had some bad experiences... where the young people were asked our opinions, but if we disagreed with the adults they got angry. We’re seen as trouble makers if we stand up for ourselves or disagree”

Jenny,
17, Bristol

Partnership Between Adults and Young People:

Youth work is a partnership between youth workers and young people, which involves adults working with young people in a manner that prioritises the active participation of the young people. The role of youth workers and youth leaders is crucial to the quality and success of youth work. Youth workers seek out opportunities through which young people can have enriching and challenging experiences. They also provide acceptance to the young people, and encourage them to reflect and learn from their experiences. Youth work should be a mutually beneficial, enjoyable and rewarding experience, for both the young people who take part in projects and activities, and for the youth workers and youth leaders who support them.

Empowerment through Participation

There is an emphasis in youth work on empowering young people to take responsibility for themselves and their actions, by doing things with young people and supporting them to do things for themselves, rather than doing things for them. Youth work promotes opportunities for young people to have a voice, and to use their voice by taking part in decision making. Youth work is committed to this principle of participation, which has been described as “an approach to young people which respects them enough to want them to share responsibility and its consequences, and helps them to learn from such experiences” (15). In the youth work context, participation is “a dialogue between adults and young people as equal partners in a process where decision-making occurs, and changes happen” (16).

Youth work provides opportunities for young people to participate in decision making through planning, organising and evaluating projects, activities and services. As well as providing opportunities for young people to have a voice within youth clubs and projects, youth work should also prepare and promote young people to take part in decision making in the wider community.

Community

Youth work enables and encourages communities to contribute to developing and meeting the needs of their own young people. Youth work provides opportunities for young people to develop a sense of community amongst themselves, and this can often extend to them forming a connection to the wider community through links with other projects or groups. Youth workers should look for opportunities for young people to get involved in the wider community, and support them to develop and grow through these experiences.

“Any project that empowers young people is a good project”

Nick,
18, Solihull



Promotes Equality

Generally speaking, youth work programmes should be accessible to all young people regardless of their race, culture, religion, gender, sexuality, disability or any similar factors (17). However, certain youth work programmes and activities may target specific groups of young people – such as young mums or gay, lesbian and bisexual young people - in order to focus on the particular issues and needs of these groups.

Youth work should promote tolerance and respect for others, encouraging young people to think about issues from different perspectives, and challenging prejudice and discrimination. Ideally, youth work also provides young people with opportunities to meet other young people from a variety of backgrounds, allowing them to experience and value diversity and difference. Youth work should provide young people with positive experiences of being valued and accepted themselves, and challenge young people to extend this experience and understanding to others.

Fun and Engaging

Last but certainly not least, youth work should be fun for young people, in order to engage them into programmes and activities, and enable them to benefit from all of the factors mentioned above. This is particularly important because of the voluntary nature of youth work. Because young people can choose whether or not to take part, they must first be attracted to what is on offer, so that they can gain the benefits of those activities. Providing a variety of programmes and activities - developed with communication and the involvement of young people themselves - will maximise the likelihood that young people will be attracted to what you have on offer (18). Youth workers should be friendly and approachable, creating a positive atmosphere where young people feel welcomed and accepted. It's also important for us to remember that having fun is valuable in itself, and this is particularly so during adolescence.

The factors and characteristics outlined above - which define the youth work approach - mean that youth work provides an ideal basis for youth led volunteering, and for addressing the recommendations made by the Russell Commission, as well as the findings from recent research into youth volunteering. In terms of these recommendations and findings, the youth work approach provides the following:

“Volunteering has been brilliant. I have really enjoyed myself”

**Hannah,
15, Swansea**

- An understanding of the importance of involving young people in designing and implementing their own programmes and activities
- The experience of targeting specific groups of young people, especially those who may be under represented in volunteering
- Flexible options to suit young people’s lives
- Easily accessible programmes and activities
- Relevant and interesting programmes, with opportunities to learn new skills
- Incentives and recognition through programmes like the Youth Achievement Awards
- The ability to accommodate the huge range of interests, goals, preferences and aspirations of young people
- Informal, relaxed and welcoming environments
- Enjoyable and satisfying experiences

For details about the reports quoted in this chapter, see Acknowledgements in Chapter 7.



Youth Led Volunteering - Examples of Good Practice

Introduction

This chapter consists of a number of case studies, which highlight examples of youth led projects from across the UK. The projects described here differ in many ways, such as the types of young people they work with, the settings they work in, the ways in which they involve young people in planning and decision making and so on. But one thing they all have in common is a genuine commitment to providing young people with real and meaningful opportunities to get involved and have their say.

“It has meant that I have been able to make changes about something I feel strongly about”

Yasemin,
15, London

Before looking at these project examples, it is useful to spend some time thinking about the different ways that young people can be involved in planning and running their own projects and activities. Various factors will influence the ways in which young people get involved in decision making, such as:

- The amount of time and energy they have to commit to the project
- Their interest in the different aspects of the project – not all young people will necessarily want to be involved in the same ways
- The project itself and any constraints there may be regarding time-frames and so on
- Whether the young person has previous experience of similar projects
- What else is going on in their lives at the time

Each of these factors will influence an individual young person's involvement in planning and running a project. One of the things that all of the projects outlined below have in common is that the workers involved took the time to talk with and listen to the young people, in order to understand their interests and aspirations. This has been a key factor in the success of each of these projects. The projects highlighted here are:

- Chubby Bunnies – Young people planning and running activities for their peers
- Pennywell Youth Centre - Creating an environment where everyone is encouraged to have their say
- Swansea Council for Voluntary Service - Matching Young People's Interests to Volunteering Opportunities
- Stars in Their Ears - Developing projects that start from young people's own ideas and interests
- Youth Act - Training young people to develop their own campaigns and initiatives
- Nottinghamshire Pioneers - Ensuring disabled young people have their voices heard
- Peer Research Project, Northern Ireland - Involving young people in designing, carrying out and writing up peer research
- Article 12 in Scotland - Promoting children's and young people's rights through a youth led approach
- Connexions Leicestershire - Creating a culture of youth involvement at every level of an organisation



**Chubby Bunnies –
Youth Federation, Cheshire**

*Young people planning and running
activities for their peers*

Chubby Bunnies is a project of the Youth Federation in Cheshire, which brings together disabled and non-disabled young people in order to help break down barriers between the two groups. The project is one of the pilot groups for UK Youth’s Participation, Inclusion and Achievement (PIA) programme for 2005 to 2008, funded by the DfES.

Chubby Bunnies began in October 2005, when youth worker Anna Howarth from the Youth Federation began working with the senior members (i.e. older young people) at Belvedere Youth Club in Wallasey. Anna attended the senior members’ meetings, where they discuss and plan their ideas for projects. After discussing the project with them, the senior members offered to begin working with the younger aged young people on the Chubby Bunnies project.

The first stage of the project was to develop the senior members’ understanding of issues facing young disabled people.

“A series of outings were planned, where the young people from the senior members’ group visited places like a bowling alley, a leisure centre and a local swimming pool. As well as enjoying the facilities, they were asked to think about how accessible these places were for young disabled people, and what issues might need to be considered and addressed, in order for young disabled people to take part in those activities”.

Following these visits, the senior members began to plan a series of activities, which would be suitable for both disabled and non-disabled young people to attend together. The senior members thought about and planned all the aspects of the activities, including arranging transport, booking the facilities and so on. To ensure that all the young people had a say in what was being planned, Anna attended the senior members’ meetings to assist with their planning, and they also asked the younger members their ideas and opinions on what was being planned. They also regularly evaluated the activities to find out which ones were popular and which ones were not.

“Involving the senior members in planning and running the sessions with the younger members has had considerable benefits. They come up with great ideas that adults often wouldn’t think of, as they are much more in touch with what the younger members are interested in. Helping the disabled members has also made the senior members more thoughtful and considerate, and the senior members often remind the staff of issues and needs of the disabled young people”, Anna says.

All of the young people have grown in confidence as a result of being involved in the decisions, and seeing that their opinions and ideas are listened to. This was particularly important for the disabled young people, as they are often not asked for their opinions or involved in the decisions that affect them, to the same extent as non-disabled young people.

As well as the benefits gained, there have also been some difficulties. *“Because of the varying ages and abilities, the young people have widely differing attention spans and interests, and this can sometimes prove frustrating. It has been important to learn as they go, and to regularly evaluate and adapt the programme to address any difficulties or concerns”.*

Accreditation has been a significant part of the project. The senior members began working on their Bronze Youth Achievement Awards when they first became involved in the project, and now that they are involved in planning their activities for the younger members of the group, they are working towards their Silver Awards. The younger members are now also working towards their Bronze Awards. As well as this, the senior members are working towards Millennium Volunteer certificates, and have received training in Buddying, which is accredited by the Open College Network. These different forms of accreditation and recognition are important for several reasons. Firstly because they recognise the time, commitment and learning of the young people involved, and secondly because they are useful for the young people when applying for jobs, or for college or university.

Following the success of the Chubby Bunnies project, the Youth Federation is now planning a similar project in a different area of Cheshire. They plan to involve the senior members from Belvedere, so that these young people can further develop their skills. They are also planning a presentation at a UK Youth national conference being held in October 2007.



Pennywell Youth Centre

Creating an environment where everyone is encouraged to have their say

Pennywell Youth Centre is a purpose-built youth centre in Sunderland, which opened in 2003. The centre runs a wide range of projects and activities for young people, which include:

- the “Connect” programme, which works with young people who have left school or college with no qualification;
- a Millennium Volunteers project that involves young volunteers in assisting with running the youth centre by helping with activities, running the tuck shop etc;
- a Young Mums’ programme aimed at breaking down the isolation that many young mums experience; and
- a school inclusion project working two days a week with young people who are at risk of being excluded from school.

Throughout these various projects and activities, the staff members at the centre encourage young people to be actively involved in planning and running the centre. Kirsty Hutchinson of Pennywell Youth Centre said “we have recently re-established a young people’s council, called the ‘Us Group’.

“I first got involved in volunteering because it was a requirement of my college course. I got involved in Millennium Volunteers, and through that got offered a whole range of new opportunities. I liked the feeling of influencing other people’s lives. Like when I was coaching younger kids at football – I thought they would be really lippy but it turned out to be really enjoyable. And it’s opened lots of doors for me...”

**Dan,
18, Birmingham**

The Us Group meets every week to discuss various aspects of the centre, as well as wider community issues. The group then develop a work plan, and passes on their ideas to the youth workers to consider and to help implement”.

As well as the Us Group, the centre tries to include young people in a variety of ways, such as having a suggestion box, which allows the less vocal or less confident young people to put forward their ideas. They also hold regular discussions in the youth club to encourage young people to have their say, and the staff members are encouraged to create an environment where the young people feel comfortable to approach them with ideas and suggestions.

“Creating such an environment allows the young people to develop a sense of ownership of the centre, and to see it as their own community. It also means that the power is shared with the young people, and they learn to relate to adults and authority figures with confidence”, says Kirsty.

Efforts are also made to celebrate the success of the centre and the achievements of its young people. A ceremony is held every year, where young people receive certificates and awards such as Millennium Volunteers and Youth Achievement Awards. Representatives of a wide range of organisations and community groups are invited to the celebration, to make sure that these achievements are recognised and celebrated as widely as possible.

Swansea Council for Voluntary Service

Matching Young People’s Interests to Volunteering Opportunities

Swansea Council for Voluntary Service (SCVS) is currently running a pilot project with 25 young people in Year 10, who are all volunteering in the community as a demonstration project of the Community Participation element within the 14-19 Learning Pathways Agenda for Education in Wales.

The young people are introduced to the concept of community participation and are helped to identify their skills, as well as their goals for their own personal development. The young people then match their skills and interests to appropriate volunteering opportunities. They are supported on their volunteer placement by volunteer supervisors. The young people’s involvement means they are contributing to their community, whilst determining their own learning experiences and roles. One such volunteer placement is a local drop in café for young people called the Red Café. The young volunteers have been able to negotiate their roles, and have gained a high degree of diversity and flexibility in terms of their learning experiences.



“Volunteering as a drama assistant has been a really worthwhile experience.”

**Michaela,
16, Swansea**

At the same time they have created a positive environment for their own personal development.

There have been many benefits to involving young people in the planning and delivery of projects. SCVS have found that this project really illustrates the untapped potential of young people in volunteering capacities, and demonstrates how involving young people adds value to an organisation. This added value includes things like improvements in service delivery, enhancing the development of staff and other volunteers, and contributing to a more cohesive community.

Mark Jones from SCVS says *“I find the young people have so much energy and enthusiasm for what they choose to do. The emphasis on ‘choice’ is important. The young people are much more likely to fully participate when they have more control, more input and more choice in their future. The feedback from young people, schools, parents and the voluntary sector has been amazing so far!”*

“I don’t really see any down-sides to the youth led approach, but I feel it is very important that all partners are fully supported so that projects of this type can succeed. Young people need appropriate support and encouragement, and schools and voluntary sector organisations need support too. The emphasis is on partnership. This can be challenging, but when everyone is fully committed, we all reap the benefits.”

SCVS are currently introducing UK Youth’s Youth Challenges as a way of accrediting the young peoples learning and participation. They have chosen the Youth Challenges because of its flexibility, and have found that the Youth Challenges encourage the young people to work through their learning experiences that have resulted from their volunteering.

Mark said *“sometimes the hardest thing to do is to get started. My advice is to start as soon as you can, as from then on everything gets easier!”*

Stars in Their Ears – St Helens Youth Service

*Developing projects that start
from young people’s own ideas
and interests*

The Multi Activity Points Project (MAPP) is a detached youth work project run by St Helens Youth Service and funded by Neighbourhood Renewal. The aim of MAPP is to work in deprived areas, with detached teams working in different estates in St Helens. They offer young people the chance to get involved in youth work projects, based on their own ideas and interests.

One such project initiated through MAPP is “Stars in Their Ears”, a music project which began when a group of young men spoke to the detached youth workers about their interest in MCing. Ged Phoenix from St Helen’s Youth Service said *“The youth workers found time and space for the young people, and the young men started coming together to write lyrics and perform their material. Over time, more young people became interested, and the project grew. It now regularly attracts 50-60 young people, all keen on developing their MCing skills. The young men who initiated the project are now helping to lead these sessions. As well as teaching other young people about MCing, they are also taking responsibility for*

things like letting the new young people know the rules of the youth centre, like where they are allowed to smoke and so on.”

The MAPP youth workers also assisted the young men to develop a funding proposal, based on their own ideas, to further develop the MCing and to have the resources for more young people to take part. This proposal was then submitted to the Camelot Foundation’s “Forefront Awards”, and the proposal was successful in receiving a £3000 grant. The money will be used to run a peer education project aimed at helping other young people to set up and run their own MCing projects, as they get many requests to bring MCing into other youth projects in the area. They are also planning to MC at an under 18s event which will bring together over 500 young people in the St Helens area.

As well as successfully applying for funding and leading sessions with other young people, the young men have developed in other ways. Several of them had been involved in crime and drug use; becoming involved in the music project has given them a new, more positive focus, and even helped one of them to return to school.

A while after becoming involved in “Stars in Their Ears”, the young men found out that they could gain a Bronze Youth Achievement Award, based on the time and energy they were putting into



their MCing. They are now working towards Silver Awards, based on their work running sessions for other young people.

Despite the obvious success of the project, there have been a few negative aspects too. *“Some other young people in the area have been a bit jealous of the achievements of the young men involved in “Stars in their Ears”. It has also been important to make sure that the youth workers and young people don’t burn themselves out, which could easily happen if they responded to all the requests they receive from other youth clubs and projects”,* Ged said.

Following the success of this project, the youth workers at St Helens are keen to further develop their work in other arts and performance areas, in order to be able to engage more young people, and to offer a wide variety of options to meet their interests.

Youth Act

Training young people to develop their own campaigns and initiatives

Youth Act is a project of the Citizenship Foundation, which works with young people aged 11 to 18, providing them with training and support to enable them to develop campaigning skills. Young people then use these skills to address the political and social issues that interest them most - in their school, community or youth group. Young people learn skills such as lobbying, writing press releases, advocacy and fund raising, and they use these skills to tackle local issues and concerns. One of the aims of Youth Act is for the “young people involved to move beyond community service to making a real impact on public policy”.

Young people are involved in Youth Act in a wide variety of ways. According to Carrie Supple of the Citizenship Foundation, *“As well as taking part in the training, young people have been part of the advisory group for the project since its beginning, and they are also involved in regularly evaluating the content of the courses. Young people also help to facilitate parts of the training, and Youth Act includes young people on their job interview panels. This is part of the Youth Act approach, which states that ‘young people should be involved in every step of the way’.*

As a result of this involvement, young people develop many skills and use these to tackle a variety of issues. One such example is a march through the streets of Tottenham in north London, aimed at raising awareness and reducing the incidence of gun crimes. The Youth Act training aims to help local groups to become self sufficient by focusing on capacity building. The training takes place in a variety of settings including schools, sporting groups, housing estates and youth clubs.

Part of the project’s philosophy is to identify supportive adults – youth workers, parents, teachers or community members – who attend the training with the young people, and then go on to assist the young people to realise their projects. This helps to ensure a true “community” approach by joining young people and adults to work together to address the problems and issues in their communities.

Until recently, Youth Act has been a London-based project. However, they have now begun running Training the Trainer programmes, training others to use the Youth Act model, with the aim of establishing a national network of young people who have participated in Youth Act. They have also begun to send Youth Act “graduates” to outside training and then to utilise their new skills within the Youth Act network, and also in the wider community.

“It helped me gain the self-confidence and communication skills that helped me do what I thought could only be done by professionals”

Jeffrey,
14, London

Another important aspect of Youth Act is celebrating and promoting the young people’s achievements. *“Youth Act holds presentation events for the young people to publicly celebrate their projects and the difference these have made. Several Youth Act projects have gone on to win various awards. We have also recently begun to use the Youth Achievement Awards as a way of recognising the skills and experience that the young people gain through their involvement”.*



Nottinghamshire Pioneers

Ensuring disabled young people have their voices heard

Nottinghamshire Pioneers is a countywide youth council for young disabled people in Nottinghamshire. The aim of the group is to give young people with disabilities a voice in decisions that affect them. Young people from Pioneers represent the group on bodies such as the county youth assembly, the Connexions Youth Board, and local “Best Value” Reviews. They have been involved in investigating respite care provision, and looking at the independence of young disabled people in Nottinghamshire. They are just beginning to work with the local Holocaust Centre, looking at disabled access issues for the centre, and learning about how disabled people were treated during the Holocaust.

The young people take on the various roles necessary for running the youth council, including chair, treasurer and secretary. The group members agree the agenda for their meetings and decide on the projects they wish to focus on.

Those young people who wish to represent the group on other bodies and forums must first lobby the group to explain their interest in that topic or group, and are expected to provide feedback to the Pioneers’ meetings about the bodies they are represented on.

Being involved in the Pioneers has a huge effect on the young people’s confidence and self esteem. According to Margaret Clement of Nottinghamshire County Council’s Disability Support Team, *“Many of the young people take the skills they learn and the qualities they develop at Pioneers, and apply them to other aspects of their lives. One young woman, for example, has established a disabled sub-group of her college student union. Being involved in a group like Pioneers also allows the young people to see themselves and their potential in a new light”*.

Celebrating the young people’s achievements also plays an important part in the Pioneers youth council. They have been using the Youth Achievement Awards for about two years, and this has proven to be a very positive way of highlighting the work of the young people, and the skills they have developed through their involvement in the youth council. Holding awards ceremonies also helps to highlight these achievements.

“Many parents are surprised to find out just how much their children have taken on and achieved. The young people are able to use their YAA certificates on programmes like Entry to Employment (E2E) and at school or college. For many of the young people, their YAA certificate is the first accreditation they have ever received”, Margaret says.

One of the next steps for the Pioneers group is for the youth workers to train the young people to become peer educators. As a result of this, the young people will move on to other things, taking the skills they have learned at Pioneers with them. This will enable the young people from Pioneers to help other disabled young people to set up similar groups for other organisations and projects.

“I first went along to a youth consultation when I was 13, because it gave us a day off school and there was chocolate cake! I hated school, and I thought getting involved in things like that might give me a chance to help change things for the better. Since then, I’ve been involved in youth work and I now want to become a youth worker. I like the feeling of doing something worthwhile and helping to put a smile on someone’s face”

Beki,
18, Grimsby



Peer Research Project – Northern Ireland

Involving young people in designing, carrying out and writing up peer research

In April 2006, YouthAction Northern Ireland (YANI) were commissioned to carry out a piece of action research, involving 15 young people carrying out research in three geographical areas of Northern Ireland. The aim of the research was to explore “how young people could connect to the Northern Ireland Youth Work Strategy (2005 to 2008) and oversee the planning, facilitation and evaluation of youth work practice in Northern Ireland.”

The young people first met as a group at a residential in May, where they agreed on a number of research methods and approaches that they would use to gather the information they required. The group members carried out six focus group meetings with young people, 20 interviews with staff from various organisations, and received 45 written questionnaires from young people. The young researchers received training in research skills from the University of Ulster, and were supported throughout the process by youth workers from YANI.

As well as carrying out the research, the young people also analysed the data and were involved in writing up their findings. During this process, the youth workers realised that the young people needed some basic youth work training, in addition to the research skills they had learnt, to assist them with things like facilitating focus groups with other young people. They are currently planning to run workshops, where they will present their findings back to young people from the communities they were researching.

Project co-ordinator Martin McMullan said “*the initial aim was to produce a model whereby young people would be involved in managing the Youth Work Strategy for Northern Ireland, sitting in partnership alongside the adults. However, we soon realised that such an approach was overly ambitious at this stage, and the young people involved were not keen on this approach. Instead, they wanted the research they carried out to focus on more immediate realities in the lives of young people*”.

Following the research the young people wanted to ensure that their findings were not simply captured in a “boring” report. So the young people produced a DVD and postcards in order to promote the findings to young people in a fun and accessible way.

There were many difficulties and practicalities to overcome. “*There was a large geographical spread for the project, which made it difficult when bringing the young researchers together. We had also brought together young people from various youth work organisations, and this proved time consuming in terms of building new relationships with young people who had no link to YANI. It also took time for the young people to understand the context of the research, in addition to learning the skills they required to carry it out. Added to this, the time frame kept changing which proved frustrating.*”

Despite these difficulties, both the young people involved, and YouthAction Northern Ireland as an organisation, learned and gained a lot from the project. For the young people there was a strong sense of ownership – they very much saw it as their research. They also had a strong sense of the importance of the work they were doing, and the fact that their findings would be used to shape services for other young people throughout Northern Ireland. They were able to put aside their preconceptions about things like the Catholic / Protestant divide, and issues like sexuality and ethnicity, and by doing so they developed new insights into these issues and their effects on themselves, their society, and on young people generally.

As well as the skills they gained, many of the young people received formal recognition for their involvement on the project. Some of the training elements were accredited by the Open College Network (OCN), and many of the young researchers also achieved Bronze or Silver Youth Achievement Awards (YAA). The youth workers found that YAA fitted well with the project, as the peer assessment and mutual support elements of the scheme mirrored the processes the young people were using in their research.

Martin also said that YANI “*learned a lot about how to prepare young people for such a project. It was important to remain focused on the wants and needs of the young people, and not to allow the project to become more important than the young people themselves. The youth workers completed a Volunteer Plan with each young person, in order to understand why the young people wanted to be involved in the peer research, and what they hoped to get out of it. And we have since developed a Code of Ethics around peer research, to ensure that young people’s interests are fully protected in similar projects in the future*”.

Since completing the research project YANI have been funded to carry out similar projects in some counties of Northern Ireland, and have also applied for funding to carry out a research project on sectarianism and its effects on young people, in partnership with the University of Ulster.



Article 12 in Scotland

Promoting children’s and young people’s rights through a youth led approach

Article 12 in Scotland is a network of individuals and organisations who work together to promote youth rights based on the rights laid out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international human rights charters. They promote these rights through the medium of peer education. The network is entirely young person led, with young people completely making up the Management Group which sets the agenda for the organisation. Whilst adults are employed by Article 12, their role is to co-ordinate the day to day activities as determined by the Management Group. For legal reasons young people must be at least 16 to be on the Management Group. Young people under 16 are still active within Article 12 in Scotland and they help to inform the decisions and directions of the organisation at the grassroots level.

“I have become much more confident and have learned many important skills such as workshop facilitation, public speaking and report writing through my time spent volunteering... I am now studying at university and I know that if I had not had the on going support of Article 12 in Scotland I would not be lucky enough to be in the situation I am in today.”

Regan
23 Scotland

Co-ordinator Lynne Tammi says “Young people involved with Article 12 in Scotland gain many new skills and qualities, such as communication skills, confidence, and a much greater understanding of democratic processes. Involvement in Article 12 in Scotland demonstrates to young people that democracy is not just about voting – it is about taking action in order to bring about change. One of our main aims is to promote the participation of children and young people at all levels of Scottish society, and to campaign for their inclusion whenever and wherever possible”.

The organisation has been very successful at engaging young people who would not necessarily consider becoming “members” of mainstream youth organisations. This is due in part to Article 12 in Scotland having a less structured approach than membership-based projects and organisations.

In recent years, Article 12 in Scotland has carried out numerous projects. These have included conducting a Scotland-wide survey concerning young people’s views on the current voting age, running youth rights workshops and giving presentations at conferences in the UK, Europe, the Middle East and Canada.

Lynne Tammi also mentioned that the organisation “has recently received funding for a new project called P.E.S.T., which stands for Peer Education Skills Training. The project aims to use Peer Education to skill young people up to tackle whatever they want to know more about, or whatever they want to change. The P.E.S.T. project is also about providing support and training to young people and the organisations that they are involved with, to enable them to make change happen”.

In the coming years, Article 12 in Scotland hope to continue their work, promoting young people’s involvement in democracy and decision making. They will do this by focusing on things like:

- promoting youth governance
- increasing the number of young people involved in their network
- producing new resources developed by and for young people
- working in partnership with youth projects in other parts of the world – such as Eastern Europe and Africa - where youth participation and youth democracy are at a much earlier stage.



Connexions Leicestershire

Creating a culture of youth involvement at every level of an organisation

Like many Connexions services in England, Connexions Leicestershire has taken seriously the need to involve young people in decision making within the organisation. Over the last few years, they have developed a wide range of opportunities for young people to become involved. One example is the Youth Executive, which is a “shadow” board made up of 20-25 young people from across the county, who carry out numerous projects, and act as young ambassadors on behalf of Connexions.

According to Kate O’Farrell from Connexions Leicestershire, *“The Youth Executive writes its own Business Plan each year, and from this a number of projects are run. In recent years these have included running support groups for young people, and acting as “mystery shoppers”. The Youth Executive has its own budget, and they have some say over the use of this budget. A couple of members of the Youth Executive also sit on the Partnership Board, the main decision making board for Connexions Leicestershire”*.

There is also a Communications Youth Group, which puts together all aspects of the Connexions Leicestershire magazine. The young people involved in this plan and write the articles, carry out interviews and so on. The articles in the magazine can be on anything that the young people on the communications group think will interest other young people.

Across Connexions Leicestershire, young people are involved whenever a new project is being planned. *“Young people have steering groups to plan events, carry out peer research on a range of topics such as youth volunteering and housing needs, and so on. Every team in the organisation has a budget for including young people, and there is a genuine commitment to involve young people at every level. Every team has a “champion” responsible for the involvement of young people, and these champions meet regularly to review their progress, share ideas and support and motivate each other to continue to develop their approaches”*, Kate says. They are also provided with regular training and there is a commitment to continuous improvement.

Involving young people in these ways has considerable benefits, both for the organisation and for the young people themselves. For the organisation, there is a confidence that the

services they provide are geared up for what young people actually want, and not just what adults think the young people want. For the young people, there is the chance to develop a great many skills, and to mix with other young people from a wide variety of backgrounds. There are also considerable benefits as a result of young people feeling a sense of ownership for the projects in which they are involved. They tend to take much more responsibility and have much greater enthusiasm for the things they are involved in. In future, they hope to continue to build on these experiences, by moving from youth led projects to ones which are both initiated and led by young people.

Connexions Leicestershire are also committed to recognising and accrediting young people’s involvement. They use the Youth Achievement Awards as the primary way of achieving this. *“The staff have learned to build in this element from the planning stage of any new project, and we spend time considering what evidence will be needed for each challenge and target. Award groups then meet every few weeks to work on their portfolios together”*.

“Since I got involved I’ve really enjoyed meeting other young people. I got involved in an anti-bullying project so I can help to change things for other young people who get bullied, especially through a peer-led approach”

**Helen,
17, Leicestershire**



Next steps

The previous chapter provided the chance to look at different ways that young people have been involved in planning and running a wide variety of projects and activities. It is important now to take time to consider some of the key themes and issues that each of these projects have in common, and to learn from their experience in developing a youth led approach to volunteering.

The workers involved with each of the projects outlined in the previous chapter were asked to explain the key to the success of their project. They were also asked what advice they would give to other workers who are just starting out using a youth led approach. Based on their feedback, this chapter aims to give advice and ideas on developing youth led volunteering. This chapter is divided into three sections:

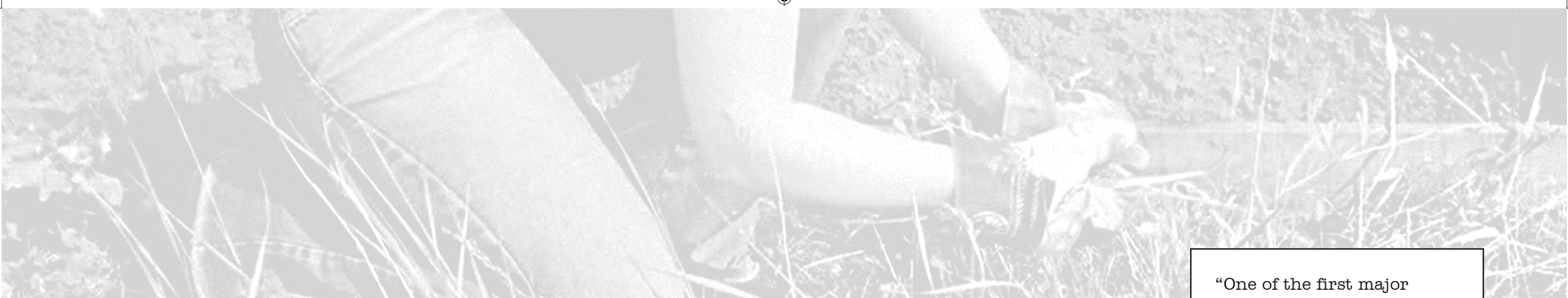
- 1. **Do's and Don'ts** outlines some of the things to keep in mind when developing a youth led approach to your work with young volunteers.
- 2. **Getting Started** is aimed at people and organisations for whom this approach is brand new, and gives some suggestions on getting things off the ground.
- 3. **Taking Things Further** is for those who have already begun to use a youth led approach, and are keen to look at ways to further develop their work.

1. Do's and Don'ts

- Look at what other groups and projects in your area are doing, and learn from other models and approaches. If you hear of a successful youth led project, make an appointment to meet with the workers and, if possible, the young people, to find out more about their approach
- Provide all staff and adult volunteers who will be involved with the young people with training and support around the issue of involving young people in decision making
- Make sure someone in your organisations has clear responsibility for involving young people in decision making at an organisational level. Larger organisations should look at having "champions" with clear and direct responsibility for this area of work, and for ensuring the issue is incorporated into the organisation's work, planned and discussed at meetings and so on
- Ensure that your organisation is clear about the legal responsibilities involved in working with young people, and have the necessary checks in place
- Be clear and realistic about what you are trying to achieve and what is involved in achieving it
- Remember that this is a new approach – it may feel strange and uncomfortable to start with
- It's ok to start small – in terms of ideas, numbers of young people etc. This might mean involving young people in "simple" things like setting up activities, running the tuck shop at the youth club etc
- Be open to new ideas, especially ones you may not have thought of. One of the most rewarding things about youth led projects, and involving young people in decisions, is that young people often have a very different way of looking at things, and this can create all sorts of new ideas and possibilities
- Involve the young people as early as possible in the project – from day one if possible. This will promote a greater sense of ownership
- Start by developing a relationship with the young people
- Offer young people options and choices whenever possible
- Don't make assumptions about what young people want or are capable of – ask them!



- Have regular communication with the young people. Keep them informed about what is happening, and take time to listen to the young people in order to find out about their interests, ideas and aspirations
- Remember that young people are different from each other. Just because one young person or group of young people does or doesn't want to do something, doesn't always mean that all other young people will feel the same
- Remember that the process is as important as the outcome, so don't take unnecessary short-cuts to get to the end result
- Things don't happen overnight. Often, letting young people take the lead will mean that things take longer than if older people were doing it for them
- Be clear and honest about the things that young people have control over or a say in, and those areas where they don't. Wherever possible, involve young people at every step / stage in the decision making process
- Set clear boundaries with the young people and take time to discuss expectations – both theirs and yours
- Allow young people to make mistakes and create an environment where they know that this is ok
- Try new things – it's ok if things don't always go as planned or expected
- Remember that young people's lives change much faster and more often than older people's do. This might lead to a change in their availability or commitment to a project or group
- Don't take it personally if young people change their minds or decide they can't or don't want to be involved in something
- Make an action plan with the group which includes a timeline for reviewing your progress. Revisit your plan regularly to see how things are going, what needs changing or adapting etc
- Do a Volunteer Development Plan with each young person, to find out why they are getting involved, what skills they bring to the project and what they want to get from the experience
- Take things at the young people's pace. It is important that you take the young people with you (or better still, that they take you with them)
- Don't allow the young people or your workers to "burn out". Encourage the group not to take on more than they can realistically do
- Take time to evaluate your project and activities. Regularly discuss and revisit the young people's roles – what are they doing? What do they want to be doing? Does anything need changing?
- As well as evaluating things with the young people, do your own evaluation of how things are going. Keep a journal or record of your thoughts and feelings so that you can reflect on how things change and develop from your own perspective, as well as from the young people's perspectives
- Encourage young people to have a sense of ownership in the project and the work they are doing. This will come easily if they have considerable say in what happens, how things happen etc
- Steer clear of professional jargon whenever possible. If you must use jargon, take time to explain it clearly. Also, take time to explain different words and phrases related to the young people – like "represent", "having a voice", "consultation" etc
- If your young people are involved in consultations with outside agencies, make sure the agency responsible make a commitment to feed back the findings to the young people
- Think of ways to recognise and celebrate the young people's commitment and achievements. As well as accreditation and certificates, have things like parties and celebrations to mark milestones. When you are handing out awards and certificates, hold an awards night and invite parents, other services, local dignitaries and celebrities
- Aim for continuous improvement in the ways you involve young people in planning and decision making. Don't get complacent or stuck working in one particular way
- With all of these things, remember to communicate with the young people – ask them what they want and be clear about what you want and expect from them
- Involving young people in planning and decision making will only work if you believe in young people, and in their potential to contribute in meaningful ways
- Keep it fun!!



2. Getting Started...

If involving young people in planning and designing projects and volunteering opportunities is a new approach for you and your organisation, it is a good idea to start small.

If your organisation is not yet at the stage where you are working with young people in any way, you could:

- Contact a youth project or organisation in your area and discuss the possibility of doing a joint project together
- Place the issue of young people's participation and involvement on the agenda of your staff meeting or board meeting, and work together to list as many different ways as you can think of that young people could be involved in planning and running projects and activities and decision making within your organisation

- Find ways to gain a young person's perspective of your organisation. For example, you could invite a local youth group or project to carry out an audit of your organisation in order to identify what is needed in order to attract young people into your organisation. This might include things like looking at the office or venue that you plan to use for your work with young people. Ask the young people to assess how youth-friendly the venue is, and what could be done to make it more attractive to young people
- Spend time clarifying your reasons for wanting to involve young people, and becoming clear about what you have to offer that could be attractive and interesting to young people
- Make sure you are clear about the legal issues and responsibilities involved in working with young people, such as the need for Criminal Records (CRB) checks etc. For more information on this, contact Volunteering England (see details in Chapter 7)

If you already have young people involved in your organisation, you could:

- Ask the young people individually whether they would like to become involved in having a say about the projects and activities they take part in
- Organise a group meeting at a mutually convenient time to discuss ideas for involving young people in planning and running activities
- Offer young people a chance to help with some of the "behind the scenes" aspects, like setting up activities, or helping to plan an outing or activity
- Put up a suggestion box where young people can put their ideas about changes, and encourage people to use it
- Place the issue of young people's participation and involvement on the agenda of your staff meeting or board meeting, and work together to list as many different ways as you can that young people could be involved in planning and running projects and activities, decision making etc

"One of the first major campaigns I was involved in was lowering the voting age to 16, something I feel is very important. I have become much more confident and have learned many important skills such as workshop facilitation, public speaking and report writing through my time spent volunteering. I am now studying at university and I know that if I had not had the on going support of Article 12 in Scotland I would not be lucky enough to be in the situation I am in today."

**Regan,
Scotland**



3. Taking Things Further

Once you have begun to involve young people in the planning and design of their own projects it is important to continue to develop and explore new ways to involve them. There are many ways that young people can be involved in planning and decision making and several issues to consider when further developing a youth led approach. Possibilities include:

- Moving from involving young people in planning and decisions to supporting young people to initiate and run their own project ideas
- Involving young people on management boards and committees
- Involving young people in the recruitment and selection of staff
- Providing young people with a budget for which they are completely responsible
- Training and supporting young people to carry out audits and inspections of services and organisations
- Involving young people in the planning and design of services and organisations

When further developing the involvement of young people in planning and designing projects and services, it is useful to have a clear and objective process for reviewing current practice, as well as future possibilities. Various theories and models have been developed to help consider issues around youth participation. One such model is the Clarity Model of Participation (19), which looks at the following issues and factors:

- Initiation of the method – whose idea was it?
- The agenda – who decides what is discussed?
- Decision making – who makes decisions about how to proceed?
- Information – who holds the information necessary for decision making?
- Implementation – who takes actions on decisions?
- Structure of participation – how formal or informal is it? Does it merely replicate adult ways of doing things?

Furthermore, the National Youth Agency has developed a standards framework called “Hear By Right” (20), which uses seven indicators in order to assess how well an organisation is developing with respect to the involvement of young people in decision making. For each indicator, the framework provides guidance for organisations at three different levels in terms of their level of experience in involving young people – whether they are “emerging, established or advanced”.

Tools and resources such as these can be very beneficial in assisting organisations to reflect on their practices of involving young people. There are details about resources such as these in Chapter 8.

“It was the respect and responsibility that I was given as a senior member and voluntary youth leader that helped me to develop personally and socially, and to become an active member of society”

**Carl,
25, Lancashire**



Accrediting Young Volunteers through the Youth Achievement Awards

One of the key recommendations of the Russell Commission report was the “wider use of the Youth Achievement Award to recognise young people’s personal development through volunteering”, in order to “mark the contribution made by young volunteers, and to recognise the skills they learn in the course of their activity” (21).

The Youth Achievement Awards were developed by UK Youth to provide a framework for accrediting young people’s achievements in their informal and non-formal learning, through their involvement in youth work programmes, volunteering and active citizenship.

They are targeted at all young people aged between 14 and 25, and are accredited by an external Awarding Body - ASDAN. Unlike most other Awards of this type, there are no fixed activities that the young person must complete in order to achieve an Award. Instead young people are encouraged to consider what is a challenge for them personally, and to explore the learning objectives or targets that they wish to gain from completing the activity. In this way the Awards work very well in terms of being used by youth led project and activities.

The Awards operate at 4 levels – Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum. The levels represent young people taking progressively more responsibility for planning and organising activities, for themselves and their peers:

- **Bronze level** - young people take part in activities, and provide evidence of social skills they have gained by doing so.
- **Silver level** - they help to plan and organise the activities they wish to take part in.
- **Gold level** - they take full responsibility for planning, organising and leading the activities.
- **Platinum level** - aimed at youth leaders and peer educators. At this level, the candidates are involved in training and delivering youth work programmes and activities for other young people.

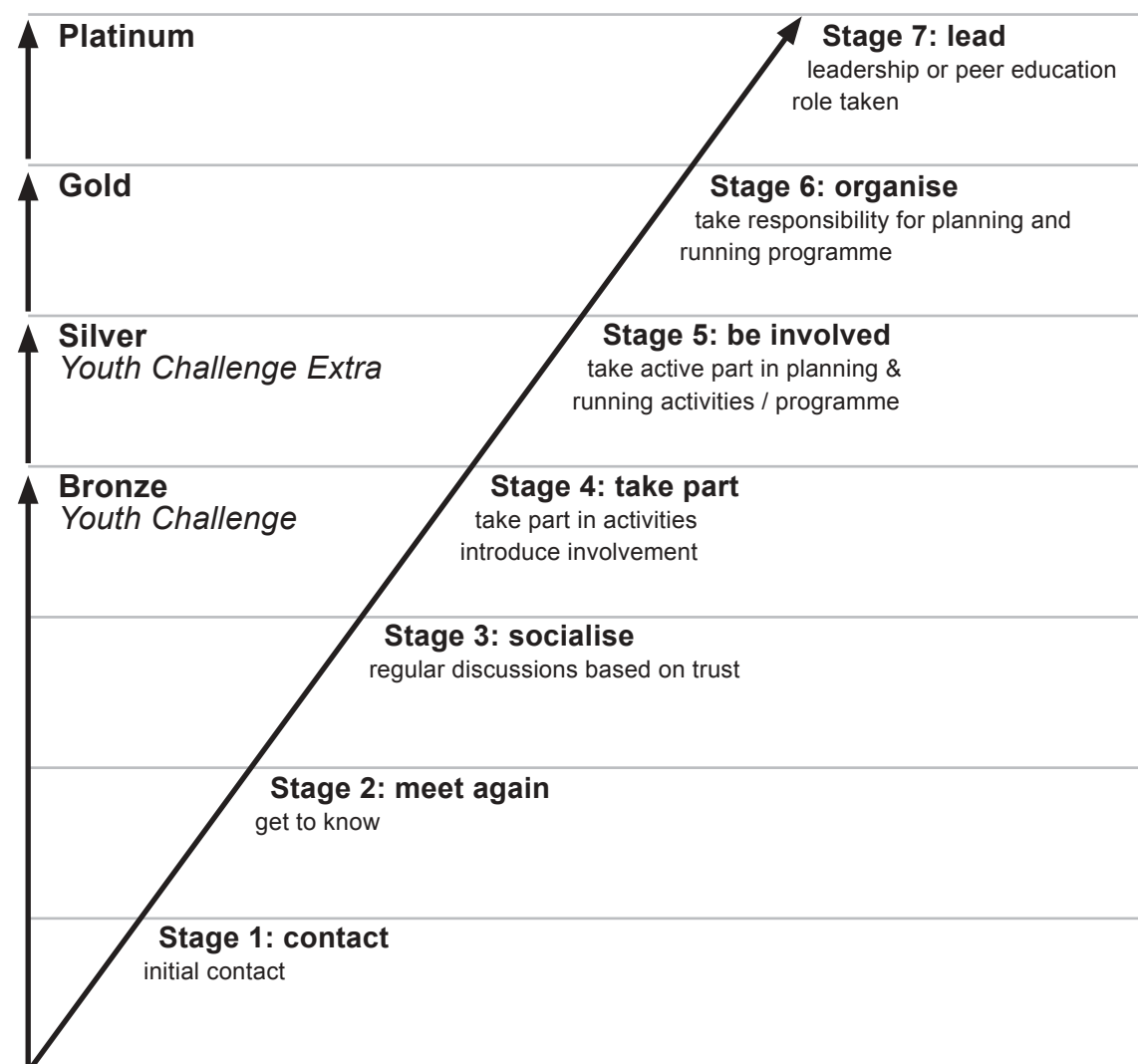
Each of the levels is linked to the development of social and personal skills, as shown in the “Curriculum Development Model”, developed by youth work consultant John Huskins

(See diagram overleaf).

According to this model, young people involved in youth led volunteering projects would be participating at least at level 5, or Silver level of the Awards, as they would be involved in planning and running activities and programmes. Some young people may be participating at level 6 or 7 – Gold or Platinum level. Young people can choose to start the Awards at any level, provided this is appropriate to their role, or their involvement in the project.

As well as the Youth Achievement Awards, there is also the Youth Challenge, which is similar to YAA but is aimed at a younger group - young people aged 11 to 14. It is intended as an introduction to the principles of participative, self-directed learning in informal and non-formal environments.

Central to the Youth Achievement Awards is the concept of peer support and peer assessment. Young people form what is called an “Award Group”. The purpose of the group is to provide each other with support to plan, do and review the ‘challenges’ and ‘targets’ that they set themselves. Young people collect evidence to demonstrate their achievements and present this in a portfolio of evidence.



© John Huskins (after Gloucestershire Youth and Community Service)

Through participation in the Awards, young people are encouraged to build their social skills, such as negotiation, problem solving, planning and reviewing. They are also encouraged to develop their study skills, including literacy and IT skills. However, the Awards are flexible enough to enable young people with literacy problems or with learning disabilities to take part, because young people are able to provide “evidence” for their portfolios in a wide variety of ways. This can include photos, videos, drawings, testimonials from others and so on. This has made the Awards particularly popular with young people who have not achieved qualifications in formal education settings.

Although there are other awards in UK that recognise non-formal and informal learning, the Youth Achievement Awards are unique. They are the only UK-based Awards that are both externally accredited to national standards, and which do not have set activities or learning outcomes, which are required in order for young people to achieve an award. The programme is also unique in that young people are being assessed on their levels of participation and involvement, rather than on the knowledge or skills they acquire.

Many local and regional organisations that now use the Youth Achievement Awards have developed their own methods for ensuring that young people are involved in the planning and running of the Awards. Often, young people who are working towards their Silver, Gold and Platinum level Awards provide support to young people who are working towards their Youth Challenges or Bronze Awards.

By recognising and celebrating achievements, the Youth Achievement Awards are a significant motivating factor in engaging young people in their own learning processes. The Awards challenge young people to further their non-formal and informal learning, and to broaden their experiences of learning. They also provide a useful tool for actively engaging young people into a programme of activities, and encouraging young people to take progressively more responsibility for planning and organising these.

There are details about how to find out more about the Youth Achievement Awards and Youth Challenges in Chapter 7. You can also find more details on the UK Youth website at www.ukyouth.org.



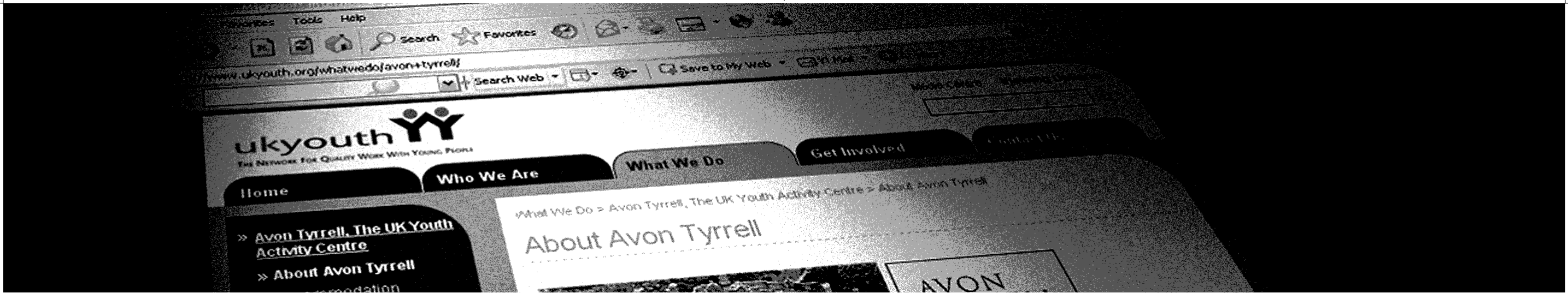
Examples of activities that would count towards each level of the Youth Achievement Awards:

Focus and Objectives	Examples	Ideas – 15 hours challenges
Bronze: Young people take part in activities, organised by other people	Sarah attends a youth group in St Helens. She and her friends have taken part in several sessions, learning about MCing skills like using a microphone, writing lyrics and how to set up PA and sound equipment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attend a session on how to use a microphone• Have a go at writing some lyrics• Learn to set up PA and sound equipment• Attend a performance of MCing with her youth group
Silver: Young people help each other to organise and carry out activities	Liam is one of the senior members at the Belvedere Youth Centre. He is involved in the Chubby Bunnies project, where he and his friends have helped to plan and run outings and activities for disabled and non-disabled young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit the local bowling alley to see whether it is suitable for disabled young people• Help to plan an outing to the bowling alley by ringing up to find out the cost, helping to plan the travel arrangements• Helping to write a flyer about the outing• Attending the bowling outing and helping to make sure the young people were having a good time
Gold: Young people take full individual responsibility for organising and leading activities. They also give a presentation about what they have done to achieve the Award.	Khalid is a member of the Management Group at Article 12 in Scotland. He has personally planned and run several information sessions for young people in various youth groups, explaining the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, and discussing ways that young people can become more involved in decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liaise with various youth workers in order to set dates and venues for information sessions• Plan the programme for the sessions• Write a PowerPoint presentation, a quiz about children's rights, plan ice breakers etc• Deliver an information session and write a brief report of the outcomes• Give a presentation at the next Management Group meeting on the information sessions

Focus and Objectives	Examples	Ideas – 15 hours challenges
Platinum: Young people work independently and take full responsibility and control of their own actions in a leadership role. This award varies from the others in that the challenges are pre-set and include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Producing a personal development plan• Undertaking appropriate training• Undertaking placements working with other young people• Producing an evaluation• Giving a presentation	Annabel is concerned about bullying at schools, and wants to raise awareness of the problem. She and some friends decide to join together to tackle the issue. They attend training at Youth Act to learn about campaigning and lobbying skills. She then sets about promoting the issue by lobbying local and national bureaucrats and politicians responsible for youth and schools, and working with groups of young people to learn ways of challenging bullies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write a personal development plan outlining her plans for tackling bullying, and the intended outcomes• Undertake training, including training on campaigning and lobbying skills• Work with groups of young people and lead sessions on dealing with bullying• Lobby local and national politicians on issues relating to tackling bullying• Evaluate the outcomes of the project• Give a presentation on the project to a meeting of parents and citizens at the local high school

“I was really nervous about doing the peer education workshop but it all went well and the most positive thing was that they were really interested and they all wanted to find out more”

Clare,
Aberdeen



Further Information and Resources

Resources for Developing a Youth Led Approach

“**Everyday Participation**” was developed by UK Youth as a “practical and essential guide to making participation an integral and intrinsic part of everyday practice”. To order this publication, go to the UK Youth website at www.ukyouth.org and click on “publications”

Training - UK Youth also runs training courses on “Everyday Participation” and “Involving Young People in Decision Making”. For a copy of the training calendar, visit the website and click on “What We Do”. It is also possible to arrange in-house training. For further details email bookings@avontyrrell.org.uk

“**Hear By Rights**” is a standards framework developed by the National Youth Agency. More information can be found at their website – www.nya.org.uk

UK Youth has also developed a number of publications and resources to assist people and organisations to understand and develop a youth work approach. These include:

- **Quality Work with Young People**
- **Foundations**
- **UK Youth** – a quarterly magazine for youth workers
- A large number of resources focusing on particular areas of work, such as work with young men, young mothers, young homeless people and so on.

Details on all of these resources can be found at UK Youth’s website – www.ukyouth.org

UK Youth also run a wide range of training days on various youth work skills and issues. (See opposite for details).

Information about the Youth Achievement Awards

To read more about the Youth Achievement Awards and Youth Challenges, or to download an information pack, go to www.ukyouth.org and click on “Youth Achievement Awards”, or email yaa.help@ukyouth.org

There are also a number of publications and resources focusing on YAA and other accredited learning programmes available from UK Youth. These include:

- **Accreditation Toolkit One**
- **Portfolio Building**
- **Youth Matters**

Visit the UK Youth website and click on “publications” for details on these.



Youth Volunteering Organisations

In England:

V is the organisation responsible for implementing the recommendations of the Russell Commission report, and for promoting youth volunteering. Find out more at www.wearev.co.uk

Youth Active is a UK wide multi-agency partnership committed to developing sport and physical activity throughout the Youth Sector. They provide information about engaging young people in volunteering in sport. Visit their website at www.youthactive.org

CSV, or Community Service Volunteers, is the largest volunteering organisation in the UK. Their website contains information on volunteering generally, and specific information for and about young volunteers. Read more at www.csv.org.uk

MV, or Millennium Volunteers, has a wide range of programmes for young people, and their website contains details about young volunteers such as why young people volunteer.

Visit www.millenniumvolunteers.gov.uk

Volunteering England is the volunteer development agency for England. Their website includes links to various youth volunteering opportunities. Go to www.volunteering.org.uk

In Scotland:

Visit the website of Volunteer Development Scotland at www.vds.org.uk.

For MV visit www.mvscotland.org.uk

In Wales:

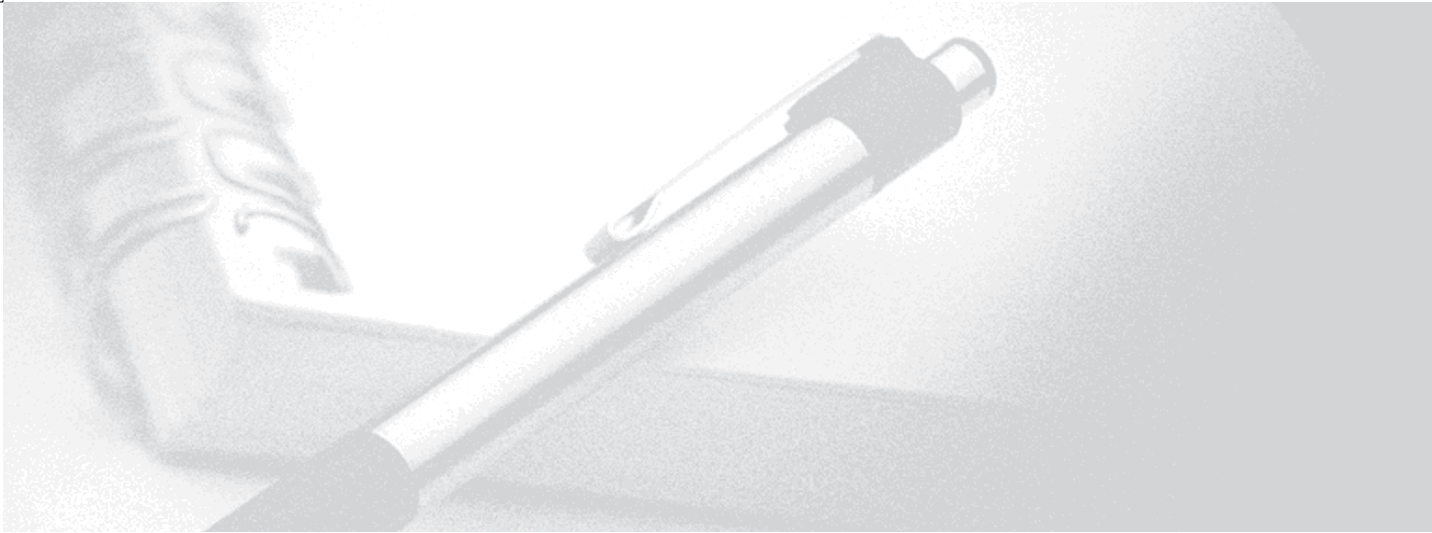
Visit the Wales Council for Voluntary Action's website for details about MV and youth volunteering. See www.volunteering-wales.net

In Northern Ireland:

The Volunteer Development Agency is responsible for MV and gives information on youth volunteering generally. Visit www.volunteering-ni.org/youth

“I have become much more confident and have learned many important skills such as workshop facilitation, public speaking and report writing through my time spent volunteering... I am now studying at university and I know that if I had not had the on going support of Article 12 in Scotland I would not be lucky enough to be in the situation I am in today.”

Regan,
23 Scotland



A series of 20 horizontal lines for writing, arranged in a single column.



taking the lead

young people
and volunteering

Andrew Cummings

