



Promoting Youth
Volunteering in Ireland:

Current Practice and Ways Forward

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REPORT AUTHORS

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Summary

The National Volunteering Strategy (2021 - 2025) highlights the important contribution that young volunteers make to Irish society, whilst also acknowledging the potential barriers to participation and the need to do more to support and enable youth volunteering. In 2023 the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), through the Irish Research Council, commissioned a research team at University College Cork to undertake a study on how to promote youth volunteering. The study was carried out in partnership with Cork Volunteer Centre.

PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The youth volunteering project set out to:

- explore the barriers and enablers to youth volunteering, the pathways into volunteering, and the factors that influence retention;
- identify programmes/initiatives for engaging young people in volunteering and examples of good practice and innovation;
- synthesise the learning from each of the various stages to prepare a final report and toolkit for Volunteer Centres (VCs) and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) on how to promote and support volunteering amongst young people.

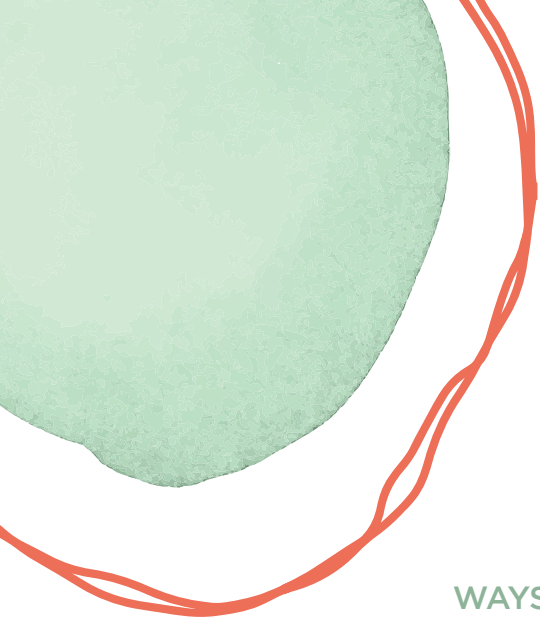
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There were three elements to the research: a survey of Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Involving Organisations; interviews with representatives from case study organisations; and participatory workshops with young people.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Volunteer Centres support youth volunteering through their engagement with secondary schools and third-level institutions. VCs have forged relationships with Transition Year coordinators, students' unions, clubs and societies, and course coordinators to reach out to young people. In addition, VCs have facilitated the development of volunteering opportunities and recognised the contribution of young volunteers through awards and certificates.
- The findings show that VIOs recruit young volunteers through different routes, principally word of mouth/asking people, third-level institutions, and online platforms and social media. Young volunteers are supported and encouraged through training opportunities (both in-house and external), mentoring and 'buddy' programmes, and opportunities for progression and leadership.

- When asked about the potential benefits that organisations derive from engaging young people as volunteers, the responses were overwhelmingly positive. VIOs and VCs noted, for example, that young volunteers help organisations to 'keep up to date with developing trends in society', 'allow organisations to expand and grow in serving the community', and 'bring a different dynamic to the group'. Young people bring valuable skills and knowledge, particularly in relation to IT and social media, and often attract other young people to the organisation, building capacity for the future.
- The findings confirm that young people derive a range of social, personal and career-related benefits from volunteering. Workshop participants reported that volunteering had enabled them to meet new people and make friends; pursue their interests; cultivate important life skills and attributes; access training opportunities; and enhance their CVs and secure references for job applications.
- The barriers and obstacles that may deter young people from volunteering include lack of time and the timing of volunteering activities (e.g. during school hours), lack of transport, and insufficient information on volunteering opportunities. Young people may also be deterred from volunteering with organisations that appear to assign them the most mundane and unengaging tasks, or that do not value their potential. From an organisational perspective, the additional requirements involved in taking on young people under the age of 18 are likely to be a significant deterrent. It may also mean that young people are more likely to be offered certain roles, such as one-off charitable collections and events. However, several VCs noted that organisations are sometimes unsure about the regulations and tend to err on the side of caution by targeting the 18+ age range. One of the messages emerging from the research was the need for greater clarity on the requirements and more support for VIOs in the recruitment of those under 18.



WAYS FORWARD: THE YOUTH VOLUNTEERING TOOLKIT

As well as identifying existing good practice and innovation (particularly through the case study organisations), the research project asked participants (VCs, VIOs and young people) for their views on what more could be done to promote and support youth volunteering. The issues raised formed the basis for the Youth Volunteering Toolkit.

The Toolkit includes a set of practical recommendations for VIOs and VCs to guide their effort to promote and support volunteering amongst young people. In particular, the Toolkit highlights the importance of:

- Developing volunteering roles that are flexible, meaningful and engaging.
- Raising awareness of volunteering and connecting with young people through multiple sites and effective recruitment materials.
- Developing application and selection processes that are straightforward and user-friendly.
- Providing progression routes and leadership opportunities for young people at different levels of the organisation.
- Creating supportive environments for young people, for example through mentoring, training and consultation.
- Providing opportunities for reflection and recording what has been learned through volunteering.
- Recognising young volunteers' contributions, for example through awards programs and events, or through informal feedback.

1 Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND

Volunteering is defined in the *National Volunteering Strategy (2021 - 2025)* as 'any time willingly given, either formally or informally, for the common good and without financial gain' (DRCD, 2020: 18). The contribution that young volunteers make to Irish society is highlighted in the strategy report, whilst the need to do more to support youth volunteering is also acknowledged.

In 2023 the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), through the Irish Research Council, commissioned a research team at University College Cork to undertake a study on how to promote youth volunteering. The research reported here informed the production of a toolkit for Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) and Volunteer Centres (VCs).

1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

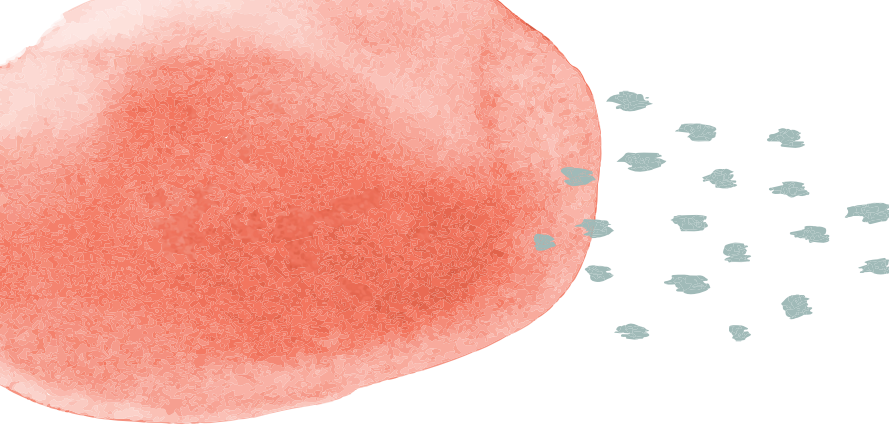
The Youth Volunteering project set out to:

- explore the barriers and enablers to youth volunteering, the pathways into volunteering, and the factors that influence retention;
- identify the different programmes/initiatives for engaging young people in volunteering and identify examples of good practice and innovation;
- synthesise the learning from each of the various stages to prepare a final report and toolkit for VCs and VIOs on how to promote and support volunteering amongst young people.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in partnership with Cork Volunteer Centre (CVC) which is part of a national network of Volunteer Centres that provide a placement service, matching individuals who want to volunteer with non-profit organisations.

The research design used a mixed methods approach, comprising three elements: a survey of Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Involving Organisations; interviews with representatives from case study organisations; and six participatory workshops with young people.



SURVEYS WITH VCS AND VIOS

Small-scale qualitative surveys were carried out with 14 Volunteer Centres and 67 Volunteer Involving Organisations from different sectors to share insights and good practice on how to recruit and support young volunteers, which informed the development of the toolkit. The questionnaire design for both surveys was informed by the work of Braun et al. (2021) on online surveys as a qualitative research tool.

Both surveys were administered online using Qualtrics software. The online questionnaire to VIOs was distributed by Cork and Monaghan Volunteer Centres and through the StudentVolunteer.ie VIOs mailing list. The online questionnaire to Volunteer Centres was distributed by Cork Volunteer Centre and Volunteer Ireland.

Different sectors were represented in the VIO survey, including youth work and other youth organisations; sports and exercise; conservation/environmental; credit unions; mental health; disability; community development; arts/music (including festivals).

CASE STUDY ORGANISATIONS

The research included eight case studies of organisations/initiatives that were identified as examples of good practice and innovation. The selection of the case studies was based on an online search for organisations that engage with young volunteers, consultation with Cork Volunteer Centre and other VCs (via the survey) and recommendations from Dr Lorraine Tansey, from the National Volunteering Strategy Implementation Group, who was an advisor to the project.

The case studies are as follows:

- The YMCA, which is a voluntary organisation that aims to provide life-enriching opportunities to children, young people, their families, and communities. Of particular interest to the current project are the YMCA's Youth Spaces and Leaders in Training programmes, and global youth work activities.
- Localise, which is a national youth and community organisation that aims to provide easily accessible volunteering opportunities to young people.
- The Irish Red Cross, which provides humanitarian support locally and nationally. The Irish Red Cross supports youth membership and volunteering through various initiatives, notably Red Cross Youth and a leadership programme.
- Spunout, which is an information website for young people. Volunteers in the 16-25 age range play a central role in identifying topics and creating and reviewing site content.
- StudentVolunteer.ie, which is an online platform for higher education students, HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) and community organisations. It enables Volunteer Involving Organisations and initiatives to promote their volunteer opportunities to students in participating HEIs.

- Carlow Volunteer Centre (CVC), which is one of a network of Volunteer Centres across the country. CVC runs a 4-week volunteering programme for secondary schools, targeted principally at Transition Year students.
- Foróige, which is one of Ireland's largest youth work organisations reaching some 40,000 young people each year aged 10 to 21.
- The Voluntary Inspired Participation (VIP) Programme, which was initiated by the Limerick Sports Partnership, and aims to empower local teenagers to become leaders and volunteers in the realm of sports and physical activities within the community.

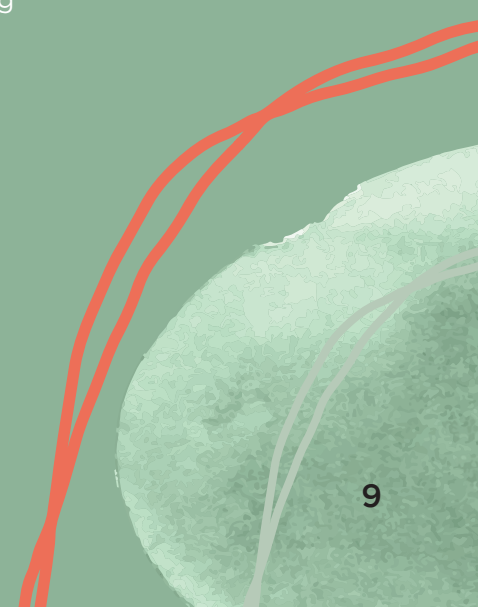
The eight case studies are included in the toolkit as examples of innovation and good practice.

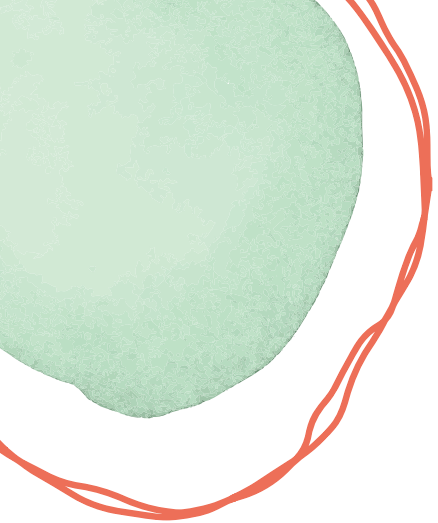
PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Six participatory workshops were held with young people (aged 16-26). Four of the workshops were held in-person, while two were held on-line to make it easier for participants to attend. A total of 41 young people were involved in the six workshops.

The workshops explored several themes, including: perceptions of volunteering; the factors which might encourage or deter young people from volunteering; what constitutes a positive or negative experience of volunteering; and what more can Volunteer Involving Organisations do to attract and retain young volunteers. The workshops included young people with varying levels of experience of volunteering: some had volunteered from a young age, whilst others had little or no experience of volunteering. During the in-person workshops, participatory and arts-based qualitative research methods were incorporated into the design as a method of gaining an insight into young people's perspectives in an engaging and creative way (Barone and Eisner, 2011). Each workshop lasted approximately ninety minutes.

Workshop activities included introductions and icebreakers as a method of creating a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Participants were asked to draw an image of a volunteer in groups, while the facilitators observed the activities, engaged in some strategic eavesdropping, and asked some probing questions. This activity was then used as a starting point for discussion. Participants were invited to draw on a Graffiti Wall (Europlanet, 2023) their initial ideas on youth volunteering. In collaboration with the facilitator, the participants identified the main themes emerging from the groups and these were then discussed in more depth during a World Café-style discussion. To conclude the consultation, participants were encouraged to indicate which recommendations they would prioritise.





The participatory methodology was adapted for the online workshops which were hosted on MS Teams and facilitated by two researchers. The online workshops included icebreakers, introductions and interactive activities such as participants creating word clouds on volunteering related concepts. Participants took part in an activity where they had to ‘find an image of a volunteer’ online and these images then became the basis of a guided group discussion on perceptions and representations of volunteers and volunteering. Participants also reviewed online volunteer advertisements and gave their feedback on their effectiveness for the promotion of youth volunteering. The focus group discussion then followed similar guided questions to the in-person workshops.

Workshop participants were recruited through a secondary school, youth clubs, the Cork Volunteer Centre, a higher education institution and a voluntary organisation that works with young people. The workshops included young people from different parts of the country, and from rural and urban locations. One workshop – held in Cork city – included young people who had moved to Ireland from different parts of the world (Spain, Ghana, China, Japan, Rwanda). The majority of participants in the workshops were aged 18 or over. They were asked to reflect on their earlier experiences of volunteering, so that information was gathered on volunteering across age ranges.

Table 1: Participatory Workshops

LOCATION	ORGANISER	AGE RANGE
Co. Wicklow	Secondary School	16-17
Galway (online)	University of Galway	19-23
Cork	Cork Volunteer Centre	22-26
Cork	Youth work organisation	16-18
Co. Cork	Youth work organisation	18-19
National (online)	National VIO	16-19

1.4 ETHICAL PROCEDURES

The project received ethical approval from the UCC Social Research Ethics Committee. All relevant ethical procedures were followed in the recruitment of participants for the workshops, including the procurement of parental consent for those aged under 18.

1.5 YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP

A Youth Advisory Group was established to inform the work of the project. The group was composed of five young people who had experience as young volunteers and these young people had a role as experts and informants in the research (Horgan and Martin, 2021). Members of the group reviewed the research methodology, focusing principally on the design of the participatory workshops with young people. Those who were not able to attend the meeting were sent copies of the draft research instruments for comment. The feedback from members of the group informed the design of the workshops, for example participants suggested the use of visual and image-based activities to help us define volunteering. The ‘draw a volunteer’ activity was added to the participatory workshops based on the suggestions from the youth advisors. This was adapted by the researchers for the online group to find volunteering images online. Other issues that the Youth Advisory Group were interested in exploring were media representations of volunteering and the group suggested that the media tends to focus on older people and adults as volunteers and young volunteers are rarely represented. They also noted that the language around volunteering needs attention. One suggestion was to talk about ‘helping or assisting’ as more tangible terms for young people. Members of the Youth Advisory Group were invited to review the initial findings and toolkit. In November 2023 they also participated in an online meeting with a panel of stakeholders to review the draft toolkit and report.

1.6 REPORT STRUCTURE

Chapter 2 presents a brief review of the literature on youth volunteering in Ireland and internationally. The research findings are presented in chapter 3, including an overview of how VCs and VIOs currently recruit, support and recognise young volunteers; the benefits of volunteering for both young people and VIOs; young people’s perceptions of volunteering; and the barriers to volunteering. Chapter 4 looks at what more can be done to promote youth volunteering – at an organisational and policy level – based on recommendations made by VIOs, VCs and young people participating in the research.

Previous Research

In order to provide a context for the current study, this chapter will briefly review the Irish and international literature on youth volunteering.

2.1 PATHWAYS INTO VOLUNTEERING

Understanding the routes into volunteering is of considerable interest to both researchers and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) and has been explored in a number of studies. The international literature suggests that word of mouth and asking people directly are often the principal means by which volunteers are recruited both from the general population (Davis Smith, 1998; Low et al. 2007; Volunteering Australia, 2016) and from younger age-groups. A cross-national study of episodic and events-based volunteering, for example, found that those aged under 25 were most likely to learn of volunteer opportunities from friends or neighbors (Almog-Bar et al. 2022). Research carried out in Ireland also points to the importance of word of mouth and pre-existing links with VIOs for recruiting young volunteers. In a study with young people carried out by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) (2011), participants frequently indicated that they became involved in volunteering because they had been asked to do so. Those that had yet to get involved suggested that they would be interested if they were asked. The authors conclude that, 'This will have implications for Volunteer Involving Organisations – the most effective place for these organisations to look for young volunteers could therefore be “close to home”' (NYCI, 2011: 37). Similarly, research with student volunteers at one Irish university reported that the most common means by which students find out about volunteering opportunities is through their friends (Powell et al. 2018).

Notwithstanding the primacy of word of mouth and being asked, new recruitment methods have emerged in recent years, most notably the internet and social media (Nurse-Bray et al. 2022). Powell et al. (2018), for example, found that over one quarter of students used the internet and social media to source information on volunteering, compared with only 7% who found information through traditional media, such as newspaper and TV advertisements. This may be because students increasingly rely on new media for information and could also reflect the different ways in which organisations publicise volunteering opportunities to young people. International research also indicates that there are generational differences in the use of online sources. For example, one UK-based study of volunteering found that the use of organisational websites varied significantly with age, with the highest use being among 25–34-year-olds and the lowest among those aged 65 and over (Low et al. 2007). More recent research from Almog-Bar et al. (2022) found that volunteers aged 18–24 were more likely than any other age group to learn of episodic volunteering opportunities through social media.

Schools, colleges and other educational institutions provide important routes into volunteering for young people (Gaskin, 2004; Shaw and Dolan, 2022; Walsh and Black, 2015). The NYCI (2011) study found that the secondary school Transition Year programme had acted as a key lever for many of the young research participants to engage in volunteering activity. During Transition Year (TY) students had received information, support and encouragement to get involved in volunteering. More importantly, they felt that they had the 'time and space' to volunteer during this year. Participants reported that they had developed a greater social awareness through their schools and through the encouragement, information and direction provided by guest speakers facilitated within the school environment. Similarly, over 40% of university students in research by Powell et al. (2018) had found out about volunteering opportunities through their schools. They too noted that Transition Year provides young people with opportunities for voluntary activity, but these opportunities are more limited in subsequent years (5th and 6th) as schools focus on preparation for the Leaving Certificate examination. Participants also identified other pathways into volunteering, including youth clubs and sports. In some instances, young people had progressed from being members of an organisation (e.g. Scouting Ireland, the Irish Red Cross) to a volunteering role (Powell et al. 2018).

Within third-level education, some institutions run programmes or initiatives to promote civic engagement (MacNeela and Gannon, 2014), often through the national network StudentVolunteer.ie, an online platform that enables VIOs to promote their volunteer opportunities to students in participating HEIs (Higher Education National Student Volunteering Working Group, 2021). A study at one Irish university identified two main types of volunteering: leadership of student-led societies and off-campus volunteering in non-profit organisations, in areas such as youth work, education, or social services (MacNeela and Gannon, 2014). Similarly, research by Smith et al. (2010: 76) in five Western countries found that the most popular beneficiaries of volunteer activities were youth-based, university clubs and organisations, and sports and cultural organisations. A UK-based study by Brewis et al. (2010) found that over one-third of students' first experience of volunteering was mediated by their university or students' union. Students reported receiving different forms of support for their volunteering, including assistance in finding opportunities, training, payment of expenses, processing of criminal records checks, and opportunities for students to reflect on their experience.

Age is an important factor affecting access to volunteering opportunities amongst young people. In her review of the international literature, Gaskin (2004) notes that younger teenagers tend to get involved in volunteering through school, family, church and youth clubs; older teenagers through college and university, friends and schemes like Millennium Volunteers; and people in their twenties have a possible work-related route through employer-supported volunteering.



2.2 MOTIVATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING

Previous research suggests that young people volunteer for altruistic, social and instrumental reasons (Buckley and Caffyn, 2022; Gaskin, 2004; NYCI, 2011; Shaw and Dolan, 2022; Walsh and Black, 2015). The NYCI (2011) study found that the principal motivations for volunteering were a connection to and belief in the underlying cause, being asked to get involved, a peer or family connection to volunteering, and a desire to help and make a difference. Concern for others and solidarity with a particular cause, individual or group of people had acted as a strong prompt for many young people to engage in volunteering.

Multiple studies have explored the motivations and benefits of volunteering amongst students in third-level education (Brewis et al. 2010; Garvey et al. 2015; Holdsworth, 2010; MacNeela and Gannon, 2014; Powell et al. 2018) – a cohort with generally high rates of participation (Smith et al., 2010). A major survey of student volunteering in the UK, for example, found that the most important reason for volunteering was to help others/the community, followed by a desire to learn new skills, meet personal needs/interests and gain work experience (Holdsworth, 2010). Similarly, research conducted by Dublin City University found that the two main reasons for volunteering were altruism (to help others and give something back to the community) followed by a desire to gain work experience and develop new skills (Garvey et al. 2015). Meeting people and making friends is another important reason for volunteering, though in the studies reviewed here it was ranked after altruistic and instrumental motivations. Altruistic motives – the desire ‘to give something back’ and ‘to help others’ – were ranked as important or very important by the vast majority (over 85%) of respondents in a study conducted at another Irish university (University College Cork), while the ‘opportunity to gain work experience and enhance my CV’ was important or very important to 63% of respondents (Powell et al. 2018). A slightly smaller proportion (59%) identified social reasons (meeting people and making friends) as important or very important.

The need to be mindful that young people’s motivations change over time and at critical transition points is noted by Shaw and Dolan (2022). In her review of the international literature on youth volunteering Gaskin (2004) also notes that the priority given to different motivations can vary according to age: younger teenagers may have more social motives and find it interesting to learn about different sorts of jobs (through volunteering), while those in their late teens or young adults are particularly motivated by a career or vocational focus as the prospects of employment or further education loom large.

2.3 BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES

The benefits from volunteering generally align with motivations, including the acquisition of new skills, greater confidence and improved employability, as well as increased levels of altruistic and social satisfaction (Gaskin, 2004; NYCI, 2011; Walsh and Black, 2015). A recent report from Volunteer Scotland (2023) categorises the benefits of formal youth volunteering into two main categories: wellbeing benefits and career benefits. The most frequently cited wellbeing benefit was ‘having fun’ (58%), followed by increasing confidence, feeling part of a team, making new friends, and feeling they had made a difference. In terms of career benefits from volunteering, almost half of young formal volunteers benefitted from learning new skills, and over a quarter benefitted from being a leader (Volunteer Scotland, 2023).

Research with third-level students on the potential outcomes of volunteering indicates that it can enhance academic development, life skill development and sense of civic responsibility (Astin and Sax, 1998; Brewis et al. 2010; Powell et al. 2018). Volunteering can also play an important role in developing students’ community awareness and integration into communities outside the university. In one study, students identified the opportunity ‘to burst out of the student “bubble” as one of the most valued aspects of volunteering’ (Brewis et al. 2010: 9). Importantly, volunteering at university has also been found to enhance a student’s likelihood of volunteering in the future (Brewis et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2010).

2.4 BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

Research has identified a number of potential barriers to volunteering, including lack of time and the timing of volunteering activities (e.g. during school hours); lack of transport; insufficient information on volunteering opportunities; lack of confidence in making the first step; or young people's concerns that they have nothing to contribute (Brewis et al., 2010; Davies, 2018; McKnight et al., 2022; NYCI, 2011; Walsh and Black, 2015). In the case of third level students, the rising cost of education and the need to undertake more paid work, or commute long distances to and from college, further limits their opportunities to volunteer (Powell et al. 2018; Smith et al., 2010)

Young people may also be deterred from volunteering by the attitudes and policies of organisations, which include lower age limits, a belief that young people require extra supervision, and offering them limited 'menial' work (Gaskin, 2004). In a cross-national comparative study of episodic volunteering Almog-Bar et al. (2022) identified two 'outlier' groups —the younger volunteers (24 and younger) and older volunteers (64+) who are often assigned unspecialized assignments with little guidance. Their research suggests that this approach leads to under-trained volunteers, who are uncomfortable with their assignments, and often leave their roles early due to feelings of underutilization. The authors suggest that there is a need to rethink how to better incorporate both young and older people as episodic volunteers.

Increased bureaucracy and regulation may also deter potential recruits (Gaskin 2004; Nursey-Bray et al., 2022; Shaw and Dolan 2022). Students in research by Brewis et al. (2010) said they were put off by the perceived bureaucracy that surrounds the application stage, including Criminal Records Bureau checks, application forms and interviews. They reported that starting to volunteer can often appear to be too much like applying for a job, and this can lead to fears about the levels of time and commitment needed. Applicants may also lose interest if there is a lengthy period between applying and starting voluntary work (Gaskin, 2004). Over-formal recruitment and selection procedures can be particularly off-putting to people whose first language is not English, for people with visual impairments, and those with low levels of literacy (Gaskin, 2004).

The image of volunteering amongst young people is thought to be a longstanding barrier to participation (Davies, 2018; NYCI, 2011). Studies have highlighted the fluidity that characterises young people's understandings and definitions of volunteering (Walsh and Black, 2015). Some young people dislike and do not identify with the term 'volunteer'. Research in Ireland found that even some of those who are active volunteers do not connect with the terms 'volunteer' or 'volunteering' and appeared to have very narrow interpretations of the concept and the range of activities that volunteering

can encompass (NYCI, 2011). Furthermore, there was a view amongst some research participants in the NYCI study that formal volunteering is generally undertaken by those who are well-educated and members of certain social classes. Other studies have linked perceptions of formal volunteering as a middle-class pursuit with lower rates of participation in working class areas. Research by Davies (2018) with young people in deprived areas of Scotland found that volunteering was largely viewed as an activity that went against peer norms and expectations. Participants in this study viewed volunteers as "geeks" and "teachers' pets" and believed volunteering would mark an individual as different. Similarly one Youth Volunteer Adviser reported that young people drew on the notion of a volunteer as a "middle-class granny working in a charity shop" and saw it as "something other people do" (Davies, 2018: 266). Davies notes that the stigma associated with volunteering and the threat it posed to young people's reputations was particularly evident as young people negotiated their transitions into secondary school and their early teenage years. Moreover, the potential reputational damage was felt to be more significant for males than for females because volunteering was viewed as a 'feminine' pursuit. Dean (2016) has argued that the delivery of recent youth volunteering policies in the UK has unintentionally reinforced participation within the middle classes, rather than widening access to diverse populations including working-class young people. Drawing on interviews with volunteer recruiters, his research suggests that the pressure to meet targets leads workers to focus their efforts on middle-class young people, rather than reaching out to harder to reach cohorts.

2.5 FACILITATORS TO VOLUNTEERING

As well as identifying the barriers to volunteering research in Ireland and internationally has sought to identify the factors that might represent facilitators or enablers of young people's volunteering. Our review of the research literature and practice guidelines highlights the importance of developing more flexible volunteering opportunities, including episodic and project-based opportunities (McLay, 2015; Smith et al., 2010; Walsh and Black, 2015; Williams, 2017). Being mindful of young volunteers' existing commitments and being flexible around term dates and exam schedules is important for recruitment and retention (Buckley and Caffyn, 2022). Cyber-volunteering (increasingly emerging in Australia and internationally during the COVID-19 pandemic), might provide further opportunities for youth engagement in volunteering (Nursey-Bray et al., 2022; Tansey et al. 2020). Research carried out in Scotland found that being able to volunteer with friends was the main factor that would encourage non-volunteers to get involved, and that would encourage existing volunteers to do more. The importance of making volunteering appealing and fun for younger cohorts has also been highlighted in several reports (Gaskin, 2004; Nursey-Bray et al. 2022). There is also evidence that awards and recognition schemes can encourage young people to take up volunteering opportunities (McKnight et al., 2022).



Research Findings

In relation to recruitment and support, schools and colleges are key enabling institutions for volunteering (Nurse-Bray et al. 2022; Walsh and Black, 2015). Culture, sports and youth clubs are also important hubs for youth activity and potential volunteer recruitment. Volunteer Involving Organisations should therefore consider mapping out partnerships within their local communities and investing time establishing relationships with local schools, FE colleges, universities and community organisations (Buckley and Caffyn, 2022). Finally, there is a need to engage with young people to shape volunteering policy and strategy. Participants in research conducted by McKnight et al. (2022), for example, were clear that they want to be involved in determining and shaping volunteering activities.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Previous studies have highlighted the contribution that young people make to the voluntary and community sector through volunteering. Young people also derive important benefits from volunteering, including meeting people, developing transferable skills and greater confidence. However, young people continue to face barriers to volunteering. As we shall see in the following chapter, many of the issues raised in the literature review in relation to youth volunteering, resonate with the findings of the current study.

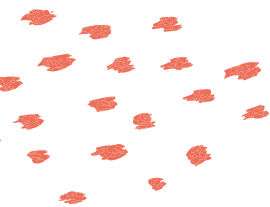
The current and following chapter presents the research findings from the surveys with Volunteer Centres (VCs) and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), the six participatory workshops with young people and the interviews with case study organisations. The research sought to identify the measures that VIOs and VCs are already taking to support youth volunteering, which may provide useful examples for others. It also looked at what more VCs and VIOs would like to do; and the suggestions (from all cohorts in the research) on how to promote youth volunteering (chapter 4).

3.1 HOW VOLUNTEER CENTRES PROMOTE YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

The primary role of the Volunteer Centres is to provide a placement service, matching individuals who want to undertake voluntary activity with non-profit organisations that involve volunteers. Volunteering opportunities are advertised through I-VOL, a national database that is owned, managed and administered by Volunteer Ireland and the network of VCs. Volunteer Centres also offer advice and support to both volunteers and VIOs through a range of services that include information provision, consultation, volunteer management training and Garda vetting administration (Volunteer Ireland, 2020). In addition, they campaign and respond to legislation that may impact on volunteering and seek to inform planning and policy at regional and national level. There are currently 29 VCs in the Republic of Ireland.

ACTIVITIES VCS UNDERTAKE TO RECRUIT OR RAISE AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

It was clear from the survey data that Volunteer Centres play a significant role in raising awareness of volunteering amongst young people, principally through their engagement with schools, colleges and Youthreach Centres. VCs have forged relationships with Transition Year coordinators, Students' Unions, clubs and societies, and course coordinators to reach out to second and third-level students. In addition, they have facilitated the development of volunteering opportunities and recognised the contribution of young volunteers through awards and certificates.



The following is a summary of the main activities identified in the survey with VCs.

- **VC information sessions and workshops delivered in schools and colleges.**

VC information sessions in schools are often targeted towards Transition Year students and explore a range of issues including: the nature of volunteering and the different forms it can take; the impacts of volunteering on the community; and the benefits to volunteers themselves (see Carlow VC case study in the Youth Volunteering Toolkit). These events also provide a chance for VCs to show young people the I-VOL system and identify volunteering opportunities. Volunteer Centres run stands in universities, usually during annual Volunteer Fairs or similar events, facilitated by staff in HEIs that are student volunteer managers and professionals (see the StudentVolunteer.ie case study).

As well as the mainstream schools and colleges, some VCs work with Youthreach Centres. This is important in terms of broadening the volunteer base and ensuring that the benefits of volunteering are open to all young people.

Our VC has linked with Youthreach services to support at risk young people into volunteering. We have facilitated information sessions for the participants and encouraged them to plan and coordinate their own volunteering. E.g., after our engagement in 2023, the group signed up to be Community Organisers for Daffodil Day and organised their own fundraiser in our local shopping centre. This gave them ownership over the whole process from start to finish. (VC)

- **Organising/developing volunteering opportunities**

Some VCs are active in facilitating or developing volunteering opportunities with school students. These are usually one off-events or short-term projects designed to give young people an introduction to volunteering. As one respondent noted, it gives students 'an opportunity to experience volunteering, in some cases for the first time'.

- **Recognition/celebration of young volunteers**

Examples include providing a youth category in the VC's annual volunteering awards; issuing certificates for engagement in volunteering programmes; and featuring volunteer stories from young people on the VC's website.

- **Consultation with young people.**

One VC consulted young people with regards to their service: '[We] have asked a group of young people to evaluate their "customer experience" of using the service to gain insight into how we can develop particularly in relation to social media'.

- **Support for VIOs in the recruitment of young volunteers**

Five out of the 14 VCs in our survey indicated that they provide training or resources (e.g., information sheets) to VIOs on how to recruit and support young volunteers, and this informational aspect of their work is an area that VCs are keen to develop.

- **Advertising through I-VOL**

The initiatives identified above are targeted at young people, but of course young people will also be reached through the VCs' general promotions and through the I-VOL service. When advertising through I-VOL, VIOs have the option to set age restrictions for a role (over 15/16/18/21/23/25/55). Several VCs reported that the majority of roles advertised by VIOs through I-VOL are not open to the under 18s – this was attributed to additional regulations and greater support needs for this cohort, as well as the timing of opportunities (discussed below). This poses a challenge for VCs in terms of promoting volunteering to younger age cohorts, as one survey respondent pointed out: 'We have to say in presentations that there might be nothing for them now, but we hope they will come back to us when older, like holidays from college.' Another VC noted that the roles advertised to under 18s tend to be for one-off events, where there are likely to be fewer regulations. Therefore, there are implications not only for the number of opportunities advertised for under 18s, but also for the nature of the roles.

When asked what types of volunteering roles are available to young people through the VCs/I-VOL, the following were the main categories: events (e.g., stewarding/marshalling); clean-ups; charitable collections; charity shops (assistants); Special Olympics; social media/IT roles; and letter writing.



3.2 WHAT MORE WOULD VCS LIKE TO DO TO SUPPORT YOUTH VOLUNTEERING?

All 14 VCs indicated that they would like to do more to support youth volunteering. The following were the main suggestions, provided through an open-ended question.

- Provide training to VIOs on how to recruit and retain young volunteers; and highlight the value of involving young people as volunteers.
- Provide more support and guidance to VIOs on safeguarding and child protection issues in order to address barriers to the recruitment of volunteers aged under 18.
- Develop informational materials on volunteering for young people so that they are better informed on the nature of volunteering and opportunities open to them.
- Employ staff with a remit to develop youth volunteering, for example as Youth Engagement Officers.
- Organise more events to promote volunteering, including a Family Volunteering Day.
- Provide additional supports to teachers and Transition Year Coordinators to develop volunteering opportunities with their students.
- Develop a Youth Ambassador Programme whereby young people are trained in their schools to be Ambassadors for volunteering.
- Develop the VCs' social media presence to reach more young people, for example through TikTok.

We would like to develop a workshop to support VIOs with tips and information on how they can best engage with and support youth volunteers in their service. We would like to better support teachers and in particular transition year coordinators to develop short-term volunteering opportunities with their students. (VC)

I would love to be able to properly support VIOs around child safeguarding and Child protection policies. This seems to be the main stumbling block for VIO's not wanting to engage with U-18's. I would like to be able to offer a package of support to VIO's (similar to what we do with Garda Vetting) - where we can truly be a one stop shop for them to get all the relevant information on what they need to have in place/where to go for this and how to adjust and simplify it for their needs. When a VIO goes searching for info it is all very overwhelming and easier not to involve young people. I recognise we are not experts - but I feel we should have a level of expertise to signpost people, to offer them a proper steer and sound advice. (VC)

We would love to have the dedicated staffing resources to focus specifically on developing and delivering a framework of activities that would lead to increased appetite, rates of, recognition, supports and roles for young people to volunteer with. (VC)

We would love to develop a Youth Ambassador Programme whereby Youth People are trained up in their schools to be Ambassadors for volunteering and where they can develop in-house projects and activities to encourage other students to volunteer. (VC)

3.3 HOW VIOS RECRUIT, SUPPORT AND RECOGNISE YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

The survey of VIOs explored the ways in which they recruit, support, and recognise young volunteers, as well as what more they would like to do.

Table 2: Recruitment of Young Volunteers

	%	N
'Word of mouth' or asking young people	60%	40
FE colleges, universities & other third level institutions	57%	38
Online platforms & social media	51%	34
Volunteer Centre / iVol	43%	29
Promotional events (e.g. volunteer fairs, stands)	34%	23
Recruited from organisation's members	31%	21
Schools	28%	19
www.StudentVolunteer.ie website	16%	11
Churches/religious organisations	7%	5
Newspaper/radio/TV advertising	3%	2
Other	3%	2

N=67

Survey participants were asked to indicate how their organisation usually recruits volunteers. As Table 2 shows, 'word of mouth'/asking people; third level institutions; and online platforms and social media were the principal means of recruitment. These findings are in line with previous research, outlined in chapter 2.

SUPPORTS, TRAINING AND RECOGNITION

The principal means by which VIOs support young volunteers, involve them in decision making and acknowledge their contribution are outlined below.

Training and Mentoring

This included: induction for new volunteers; mentoring and buddy systems; training for specific roles within the organisation; and more generic training that fostered important life-skills and attributes, for example in leadership, communications, presentation skills, and so on. As well as in-house training, some organisations provide funding towards external courses.

Communication and Inclusion

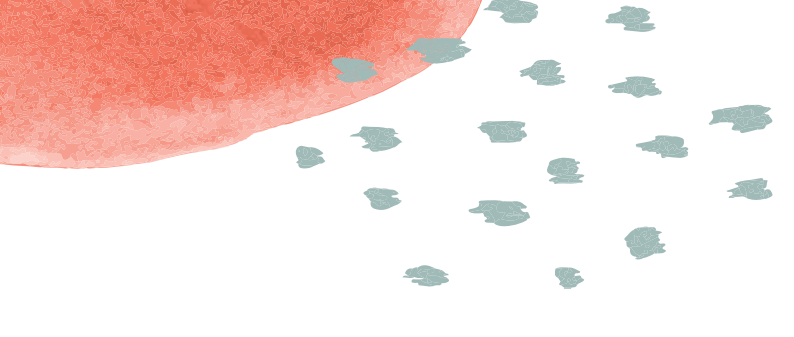
VIOs described their 'open-door policy', 'regular check-ins with volunteers', and 'frequent meetings' between staff and volunteers. Some organisations also elicited feedback from volunteers on different aspects of the organisations' work, as well as their experiences as volunteers. For example, one VIO noted that they ask volunteers for feedback and suggestions after every event they run with volunteers, while another carried out polls and surveys to get their opinions.

Decision-making and Leadership Roles

Structures are in place in some VIOs to ensure that young people are involved in leadership at different levels of the organisation, including designated places on the board.

Recognition of Young Volunteers

Some VIOs include a youth category in their organisational awards; nominate young people for external volunteering awards; or provide support towards the achievement of Gaisce awards. Aside from formal awards, VIOs show their appreciation of their volunteers in different ways, for example by acknowledging them on social media (with their consent); sending thank you notes and messages following events and projects; or giving small gifts for special occasions.



Examples of the activities identified here (training, engagement, leadership) are illustrated in our case study organisations, presented in a separate Youth Volunteering Toolkit.

We encourage them to provide input (ask questions, allow time for feedback sessions, or simply have coffee with them during breaks) and we actually listen to what they have to say, we note their feedback and incorporate it in the following event where applicable. All volunteers receive a post-festival thank-you letter where they are asked to share any feedback with their coordinator. (VIO)

We organise leadership training for volunteers. As part of our AGM we have a short awards ceremony for volunteers. We have two places on our Board reserved for volunteers under 25 years to encourage their participation at Board level. We also run workshops and focus groups to involve both volunteers and members in decision making. (VIO).

We are currently putting together our own youth focused policy and have held focus groups with what we term youth 15-23 year old (those involved and those not involved). We have a schools prog. we are rolling out to pilot schools and we are in the process of designing a tool kit for our clubs to attract and retain younger volunteers (VIO).

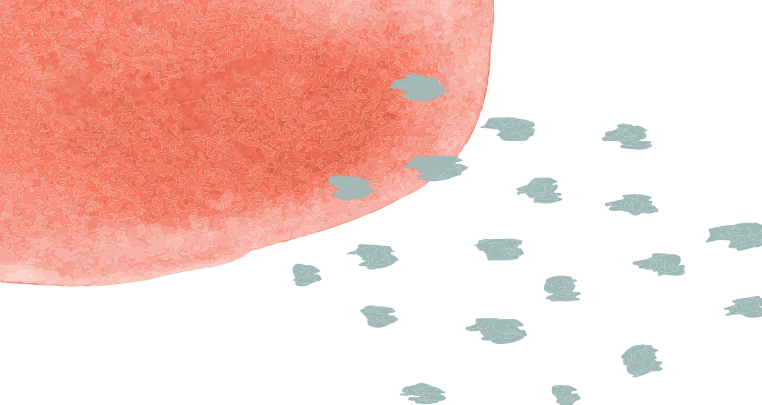


3.4 WHAT MORE WOULD VIOS LIKE TO DO TO SUPPORT YOUTH VOLUNTEERING?

In an open-ended question, VIOs were asked if there was anything more they would like to do to support/promote youth volunteering. The following are the main objectives identified by survey respondents:

- Provide more opportunities for training and mentoring of young volunteers.
- Develop structured youth volunteer programmes.
- Offer volunteers pathways for development and progression.
- Develop their recruitment strategy to reach more young people (e.g., through greater/more varied use of social media, more engagement with schools and colleges) and involve young volunteers in the recruitment process.
- Recruit young volunteers from more diverse backgrounds.
- Provide introductory packs and other supports specifically for young volunteers.
- Offer certificates on completion of volunteering.
- Provide opportunities for young people to visit the VIO and find out what they do and what is involved in volunteering.
- Develop/identify specific volunteer roles/projects that will suit young people's schedules.
- Provide more opportunities for young people to be involved in decision-making and take on leadership roles.
- Organise events where VIOs can share ideas with each other and consult with young people on what they would like to get out of volunteering and what would encourage them to get involved.
- Find out more/put a system in place regarding supervision of under 18s.
- Provide more social events and 'get togethers' for their volunteers

We would like to reach more young people...through more varied platforms to therefore reach more varied audiences. We would like to recruit from not only universities but connect with young people who would also benefit from the volunteering experience and bring their own perspectives and worldviews. (VIO)



As well as identifying the additional measures they would like to implement, some VIOs identified the barriers to implementation, including staff shortages and a lack of funding and other resources. The following are some of their comments:

We would like to provide more training and mentoring to volunteers but due to having very few paid staff this is not always possible (VIO).

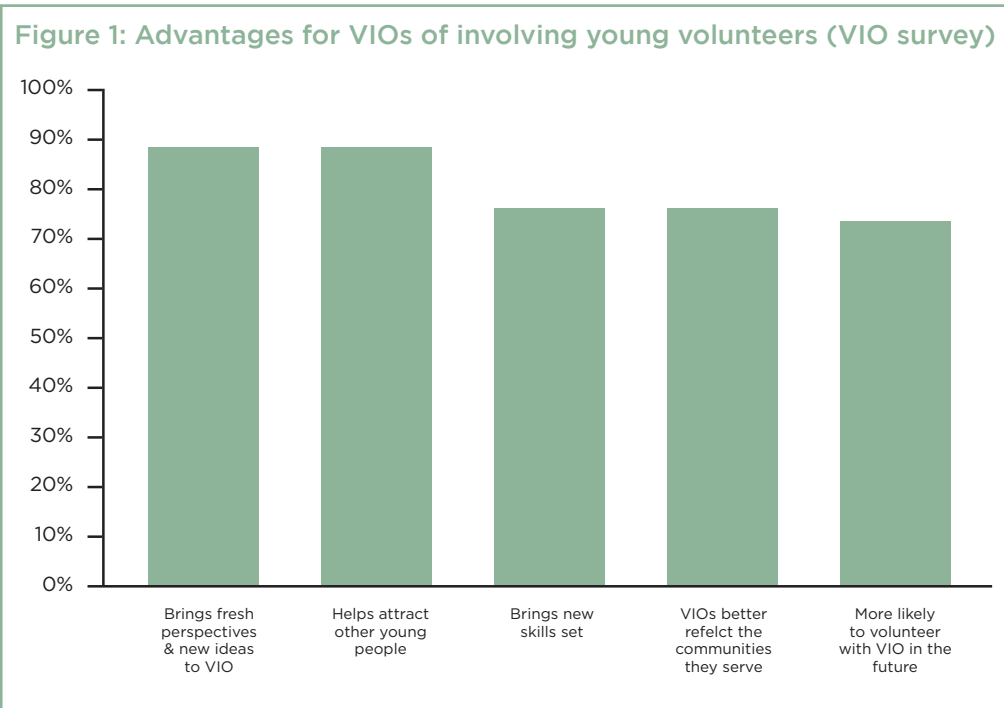
We have ideas for more volunteer projects, but we need volunteer managers to coordinate those projects (VIO).

To facilitate and support youth volunteering, we require more staff and resources, including best practice training on policies, toolkits, youth volunteer co-ordination and how to ensure that young volunteers have a beneficial experience in our organisation (VIO).

[To] develop a more structured youth volunteer programme strand to our activities - we would need funding to support a Youth Participation Officer to oversee this programme and allow us to deliver activities related to this.

3.5 BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

3.5.1 ADVANTAGES FOR VIOS OF INVOLVING YOUNG VOLUNTEERS



VIOs and VCs were presented with a series of statements on the potential advantages for organisations of involving young people as volunteers. All 14 VCs and the majority of VIOs agreed with these statements (see Figure 1 for VIO survey).

In the comments section, respondents noted that young volunteers help VIOs to ‘keep up to date with developing trends in society’, ‘allows organisations to expand and grow in serving the community’, and ‘bring a different dynamic to the group’. According to one VIO, ‘young people are less likely to self-censor their questions [including] fundamental queries about the organisation’s purpose, processes etc.’ Respondents also noted that having young volunteers is important for VIOs that work with young people: ‘young service users enjoy learning from people who are not a great deal older than them’.

Respondents also highlighted the skills and knowledge that young people bring to volunteering, particularly in relation to IT and social media. For example, one VC noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic young volunteers had provided important support to VIOs in the transition to online meetings and events. Another respondent noted that young people in further or higher education can bring important skills and knowledge to their volunteering roles.

Finally, engaging young volunteers often attracts other young people to the organisation (‘they encourage their friends to join’, ‘brings more young volunteers in’); and builds capacity for the future (‘hopefully gives them a positive experience that will ensure that they continue volunteering’).



3.5.2 BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Volunteering is considered to be a mutually beneficial relationship: in addition to the benefits to organisations and the community, volunteers themselves gain from the experience in a number of ways. In the current study, young people (most of whom had volunteered at some point) reported that volunteering had enabled them to:

- Meet people, make friends and develop networks.
- Cultivate important life skills and attributes.
- Have fun and pursue their interests.
- Work with inspirational role models.
- Build confidence and a sense of belonging – this was particularly important for those who might have struggled to ‘fit in’ at school.
- Access training opportunities across a range of topics including leadership; personal development; communication; diversity and inclusion.
- Enhance their CVs and secure references for job applications - this is an important benefit for young people, who may have little or no work experience.

It was noted that these benefits should be highlighted in recruitment campaigns, as some young people may not be aware of the social, personal and career-related benefits of volunteering.

Growing up, I was always struggling to make and keep friends in school, but then I started volunteering. I've never had so many friends in my life. It's brilliant...I wish more young people knew about the benefits. It's really made my social skills better and I'm happy talking to people now. It's got the real-world benefits, you know, like to be able to network and to be able to just, like, talk to people that you don't know very well. (Youth workshop participant)

I cannot say enough about how brilliant the networking is and it's opened a ton of doors for me. (Youth workshop participant)

Youth volunteering can and does allow young people to explore their innate strengths, exercise choice, gain an insight into rewards and responsibility of teamwork and an avenue to access mentors, realise their uniqueness, overcome challenges, witness their impact and become leaders (if they so choose). (VC)

A lot of young people who do this [volunteering] are in transition year at the time – feedback from transition year teachers that they have noticed an increase in the self-esteem in these young people and in their confidence... (VIO)

3.6 PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE

Participants in the workshops were asked for their views about what constitutes volunteering and who volunteers. Previous studies have highlighted the fluidity that characterises young people's understandings and definitions of volunteering. Research in Ireland found that even some of those who are active volunteers do not connect with the terms ‘volunteer’ or ‘volunteering’ (NYCI, 2011). Findings from the current study also suggest there is ambivalence about the term: youth club members in one workshop, for example, said that they would not describe the unpaid work they performed in the community (such as clean-ups and charity collections) as volunteering, but rather as ‘helping out’. Carlow VC, which works closely with students through its schools’ programme, noted that many young people do not identify with the term, particularly those involved in sports clubs (‘They really don’t recognise that as volunteering at all’). VIOs also reported that volunteering was a little-used term, and attributed this to a narrow understanding of what is involved:

I think people think volunteering is, going to a nursing home for a few hours a week and talking to someone who's there, they think it's very, I suppose, practical help in a way...So I think sometimes it's just showing that there's different ways to volunteer. And even some of our volunteers probably wouldn't call themselves volunteers like they'd [say] ‘oh, yeah, I just, you know, I help out with Spunout or whatever’. You know they phrase it in very different ways. I think lots of people don't see themselves as volunteers, you know, not only our volunteers, but other people as well (VIO).

This ambivalence about what constitutes volunteering clearly has implications in terms of recording and recognition, as well as recruitment: a narrow conception of volunteering may make it more difficult to reach out to those not already involved.

3.7 BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

The research sought to identify the barriers that may deter young people from accessing volunteering opportunities or that might make it difficult for VIOs to recruit those aged under 18. An open-ended question on barriers was included in the VIO and VC surveys, and in the case study interviews and participatory workshops with young people. The main points raised are listed in the table below and explored in the following pages.

TABLE 3: BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING
Timing and time commitment
Lack of Transport
Nature of roles offered to young people
Organisational culture
Additional requirements for under 18s
Need for extra support and supervision
Lack of information about volunteering opportunities
Demographic profile of VIOs
Perception of volunteering
Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions
Young people moving away from rural areas
Multiple challenges to achieving diversity

TIMING AND TIME COMMITMENT

Young people in full-time education are often not available at the times when VIOs need volunteers. Clearly school students are not able to volunteer on weekdays, and evenings may be taken up with homework and extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, there are considerable variations in the amount of time young people can volunteer over the course of the year due to exam preparation, coursework deadlines, and part-time work. Survey respondents noted that:

Young people may have extracurricular and social activities that take them away from volunteering. They may have intense periods of study that require their time and focus, they may have holidays with their families and summer holidays which takes them out of the organisation for longer periods of time. (VC)

There is no problem recruiting young people as there are always plenty who wish to volunteer. The issue is finding suitable and appropriate roles within VIOs that fit around young people's limited availability. (VC)

A lot of youth-volunteers look for short term, episodic volunteering opportunities. This can be more challenging for VIOs who may need to spend a significant portion of that volunteer placement training the volunteer... (VC)

We haven't had any young volunteers in our service; our volunteers are generally retirees as they have greater availability during weekday daytime when our service is required. (VIO)

In addition, volunteers may not be able to participate as fully as they might like, due to clashing time schedules, as one volunteer explained:

I volunteer with [an environmental organisation] and although I really like it and I enjoy it, a lot of the events are held during the day while I'm at school. So, I can't actually go to a lot of the really cool events, and I'm just sort of trying to keep up. Umm which is a bit frustrating. (Youth workshop participant)

The findings highlight the need for flexible volunteering opportunities, an issue also raised in international reports (see section 2).

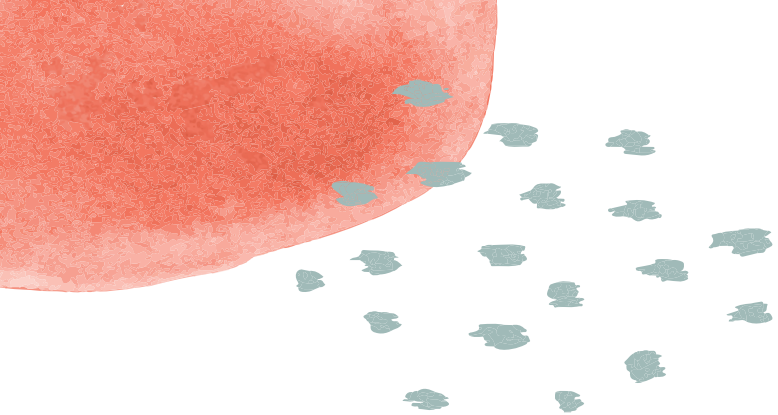
LACK OF TRANSPORT

Lack of access to transport was identified as a potential barrier by all three research cohorts (young people, VIOs, VCs). It was noted that young people are often reliant on parents or other adults for transport, particularly those living in rural areas. Some VIOs are not accessible by public transport, or bus services are reduced in the evenings and at weekends (when young people are most likely to volunteer). The cost of public transport represents an additional barrier for young people. The following are typical comments:

They [young people] are likely not autonomous and in control of how they get around (especially in a rural area where transport is an issue) ... Any cost incurred or expected may also be a problem - i.e., if the shift involved transport costs, lunch or out of pocket costs - this may be difficult for the young person to bear (VC).

Better and cheaper public transport [is needed] in rural areas - we met one volunteer in [his] early 20s who was spending a quarter of his weekly [social welfare] money on bus fares to volunteer. (VC)

Lack of transport was identified as a significant challenge by young people living in a rural area of Co. Cork, with one workshop participant noting that 'transport is key'. These young people emphasised the importance of developing volunteering opportunities locally.



NATURE OF ROLES OFFERED TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people may be deterred from volunteering with organisations that appear to assign them the most mundane and unengaging tasks, or that do not value their potential. For example, one workshop participant reported that while she had had many rewarding volunteering experiences, there were also instances when she 'disengaged':

The successful experiences are easy to remember but there have been moments when I have disengaged. Because I am young, I look young, sometimes I find organisations won't see the value in youth. They will give us tasks that are not fulfilling for us, repetitive, basic things, that's when I'm not interested, when I feel like they don't see the potential in me that they see in the people I'm working with. ...Sometimes it seems we're not being valued because we are young. And for me that would be an obstacle. It comes from prejudice, I suppose. I really feel I have encountered difficulties because I am young. (Youth workshop participant)

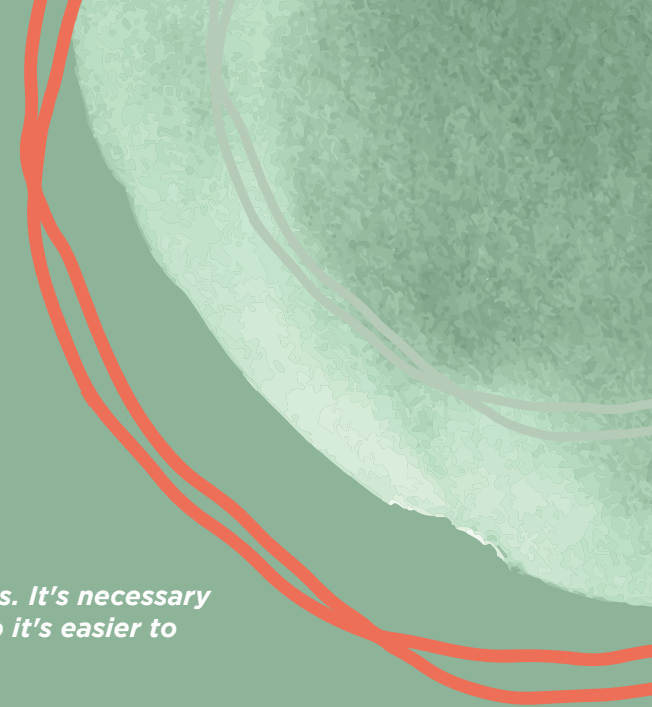
Similar issues were raised by several VCs and VIOs. They noted, for example, that 'sometimes the roles advertised are not enticing for youth volunteers'; that their knowledge and experience is 'overlooked'; and that some adult volunteers do not see them 'as equals or value their contribution the same as adult volunteers'.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Other barriers to recruitment and retention identified by young people related to organisational culture including: a lack of communication/poor communication between staff/management and volunteers; over-reliance on volunteers leading to 'burn-out'; and lack of recognition of the contribution made by volunteers.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR UNDER 18S

When asked about the barriers to recruiting young people aged under 18, the main issues identified by VIOs were the additional requirements in relation to garda vetting, safeguarding and child protection. Several respondents emphasised that they supported the regulations to protect young people – there was no suggestion (from any respondents) that these should be changed. Nonetheless VIOs were less likely to recruit under 18s because of the additional administration and responsibilities, as the following comments from the survey illustrate:



Child protection legislation and Garda Vetting requirements. It's necessary to have these protections but they throw up extra admin so it's easier to work with over 18s. (VIO)

There is a lot of extra responsibility on our management to achieve 100% compliance with child protection regulations. We are fully committed to maintaining child safety, but we are a small organization, and it is a definite drain on our resources of time and energy. (VIO)

Unfortunately (although understandably), it is difficult to have youth under the age of 18 volunteer because of child protection laws and the work that comes along with it. (VIO)

Some of the charity shops won't take under 18's because their volunteers normally don't need to be Garda vetted because they are not in contact with children or vulnerable adults on a regular basis like you would be in a programme. But if they take on a volunteer that is under 18, then all the other volunteers have to be Garda vetted. That creates a barrier – it creates hassle for the organisation – that they mightn't want to do. (VC)

One VIO located these challenges within the wider context of increased bureaucracy and compliance across the volunteering sector, which makes it difficult for VIOs to take on and support new volunteers:

Youth organisations in particular are under immense pressure due to reporting and compliance over the past number of years and this has impacted volunteers on two levels: 1. Paid staff are less available to support and mentor new volunteers. 2. More and more administration work is required to run youth clubs. (VIO)

Several VIOs also raised concerns about insurance – that it might be more difficult to procure, or that the rates would be higher.

VCs also recognised the challenges of recruiting under 18s as volunteers. However, several respondents suggested that VIOs are sometimes uncertain about the requirements and tend to err on the side of caution. Uncertainty about the requirements (rather than the requirements themselves) can be a barrier, as one VC noted:

It's the confusion around what's actually needed sometimes and what should be in place... [Organisations are] definitely erring on the side of caution particularly if they have never had young people involved before. It is very much a reluctance because they see it as a big hassle – they don't know what is involved. (VC)

Several VCs noted that there needed to be greater clarity and more support for VIOs to help them negotiate the regulations concerning the recruitment of under 18s.

NEED FOR EXTRA SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION

In addition to the formal requirements reported above, some VIOs believed that young people would require additional training, support and supervision, which they might not be able to provide due to limited time and resources. In some cases, VIOs were reluctant to give young people the same responsibilities as adults: 'unable to give as much responsibility due to their age, must be conscious of their safety (not left alone etc.)'. Or they felt the roles were not age appropriate: 'Our Street run can be difficult at times as we deal with volatile people, so we never recruit anyone under 18'.

LACK OF INFORMATION ABOUT VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Several of the young people who had moved to Ireland in recent years reported that they had had difficulties in locating volunteering opportunities; or found the online information on volunteering difficult to access. Lack of information was raised in a second workshop, with one participant noting that she had found it more difficult to identify volunteering opportunities since leaving school. In a few cases, VCs and VIOs reported that volunteering opportunities were not being adequately promoted to young people, for example: 'Some VIOs, especially those who are long established with an aging demographic, can face a challenge in recruiting young volunteers due to their lack of social media presence in displaying their services, outcomes and impacts in the community.' (VC)

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF VIOS

Several VCs and VIOs noted that young people may be deterred from volunteering with organisations that do not have volunteers from their age group. While young people themselves did not identify age differences as a barrier *per se*, they reported that they were more likely to volunteer with friends and classmates.

PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING

Other barriers relate to the way in which volunteering is constructed by young people. Participants in two of the workshops noted that there is a perception of volunteering as 'uncool' and of volunteers as 'do-gooders' (though they themselves did not necessarily subscribe to these views). They located negative perceptions of volunteering within the wider context of peer pressure within schools and fears of being judged by one's peers. Similar points were raised in the VC and VIO surveys with several respondents noting the need to make volunteering 'trendy' and more 'fashionable' and attractive to young volunteers. The findings also suggest that some young people tend to have a narrow perception of volunteering, so they are less aware of the range of volunteering opportunities open to them, as noted earlier.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

Membership-based youth and sports organisations are generally at an advantage in terms of recruiting young people as volunteers, for example as coaches and youth leaders. However, the COVID-19 restrictions (introduced from March 2020 onwards)

meant that their activities and intake were limited, with the result that they currently have fewer young volunteers coming through the ranks. The drop in numbers due to COVID-19 was noted in the VIO survey and by workshop participants. According to one youth work volunteer, 'COVID reduced their opportunities to get involved so we have lost a generation of younger leaders that we usually hold aged 14-18'. He added that volunteering 'fell off a cliff' during this period and numbers have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. The psychological impacts of the pandemic may also have had a knock-on effect on volunteering levels and experiences, according to one VC: 'I have found that a lot of work needs to be done with this generation of young people as their confidence around volunteering is gone due to the impact of COVID. When the young person is comfortable, this has been mainly when they are in a small group with some people their own age.'

YOUNG PEOPLE MOVING AWAY FROM RURAL AREAS

In addition to transport barriers, VIOs in rural areas noted that young people tend to move away when they finish school to find work or attend college, thereby reducing the pool of potential volunteers in the 18+ age range. It was noted that counties with no third-level education institutions are particularly affected by this trend. Depopulation represents a significant challenge for rural VIOs because, as one respondent pointed out, 'many parts of rural Ireland are entirely dependent on volunteering to provide necessary social and economic infrastructure'.

CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING DIVERSITY IN VOLUNTEERING

The difficulties of attracting young volunteers from different social backgrounds, areas and abilities was noted by all three cohorts in the research. There were regional disparities, not only between rural and urban areas but also between counties – one organisation noted, for example, that it was much easier to recruit people to their Dublin-based youth panels. It can also be difficult for VIOs to reach out to young people beyond a core group that volunteer across several organisations. As a representative from one VIO explained:

I think often you only attract maybe people who are already volunteering or already in that headspace of, like, wanting to do something. It's hard to maybe attract people who have never thought about volunteering before...But I would say the majority [of our volunteers] have volunteered in some shape or form [before], either in their local community or with other youth organizations. I think that's the tricky bit is getting to people who don't even know that this type of volunteering is an option for them I suppose. (VIO)

It was also noted that some communities do not have a strong tradition of formal volunteering, (though there may be informal volunteering), making it more difficult for VIOs to recruit from these communities. In the case of people with disabilities, lack of accessibility to buildings or events, can present significant barriers. It follows that some cohorts of young people are less likely to reap the social capital benefits of volunteering; while VIOs may struggle to reflect the diversity of the communities in which they operate.

Promoting Youth Volunteering

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIOS AND VCS EMERGING FROM THE RESEARCH

All three cohorts (VIOs, VCs and young people) were asked for their views on what more could be done to promote and support youth volunteering. The main issues raised by respondents are outlined below and form the basis for the Youth Volunteering Toolkit. Some points relate to recruitment; others to the nature of the volunteering role; or to the organisational culture and supports provided to young people.

4.1.1 RECRUITMENT AND APPLICATION STAGES

Working in collaboration with schools, colleges and other educational providers can be an effective means of informing young people about volunteering and recruiting young volunteers. Some VCs are already active in this area, running information events and workshops in schools, often targeted towards Transition Year students. Young people in our participatory workshops noted the importance of making presentations on volunteering engaging and interactive, and following up with volunteering opportunities or taster activities in order to maintain the momentum. Similarly, one VC suggested: 'When presenting volunteering to a class or group - plan an event with them so that they can volunteer immediately and see the effects of giving their time and skill.' The importance of reaching out to young people attending educational programmes outside the mainstream school system (e.g. Youthreach) was also noted.

VIOs should make the most of the volunteering infrastructure within higher education, including StudentVolunteer.ie, an online platform that enables VIOs to promote their volunteer opportunities to students in participating HEIs. Recruitment of volunteers can also be facilitated through student unions and student societies. One VIO advised for example: 'Target college societies that share same values/goals as your organisation. They often look for ways to get involved with local organisations in terms of volunteering but also fundraising.' Social media was identified as another effective way of raising awareness of volunteering opportunities. It is important to take into consideration the media that young people are most likely to use, as one workshop participant noted 'you need to keep up with technology if you want to use technology'. The most popular platforms identified in our workshops were Instagram and TikTok, though trends can change quickly.

Young volunteers can be effective advocates and ambassadors for volunteering amongst their peer group. The current and previous research indicates that 'word of mouth' and being asked are important routes into volunteering for all age groups including young people. Participants in our workshops said that they had become involved in certain volunteering roles on the recommendation of their peers, or because their friends were involved. Similarly, one of our

case study organisations (Spunout) reported that while they only advertise opportunities online, a significant proportion of incoming volunteers said that they had found out about the organisation from their peers. Organisations that already have young volunteers could seek their help in recruiting other young people and provide them with information/resources to distribute through their networks (in-person and online).

An issue raised in several workshops was that young people are more likely to volunteer if their friends are involved, therefore VIOs should reach out to young people in group settings. Working with peers can help young volunteers feel more confident in their role.

Some comments emphasised the importance of making the application process straightforward, replying as soon as possible and keeping in touch while the application is being processed in order to maintain the momentum.

4.1.2 DESIGNING RECRUITMENT/PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

All three research cohorts noted the importance of highlighting the benefits of volunteering in promotional materials and recruitment campaigns, in order to attract more young people:

Outline the benefits of giving time to a voluntary organization in terms of learning to be part of a team, achieving objectives and targets together, and the social enjoyment of participation and making friends. (VIO)

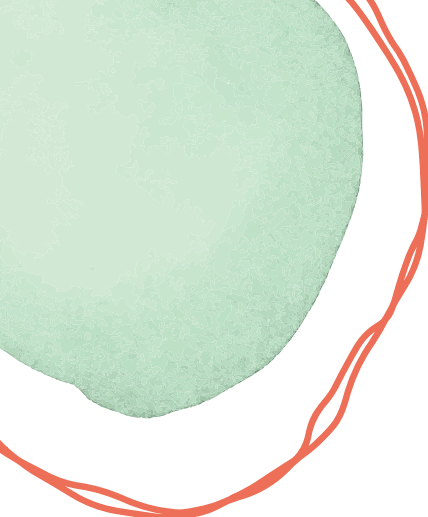
Workshop participants noted the importance of making clear what is involved in volunteering roles; representing young volunteers in visual imagery; and consulting young people in the design of materials and recruitment strategies.

4.1.3 FLEXIBILITY OF VOLUNTEERING ROLES

One of the principal barriers to volunteering identified in our research related to the timing of volunteering roles, as well as the time commitment. A recurring theme across all data sets was the need to develop roles around young people's existing time commitments, as the following comments illustrate:

Young people have limited availability and want flexible volunteering that fits around their lives. The challenge could be to reframe our expectations of retaining young people and embrace short term engagements with young volunteers e.g. through short term projects etc. (VC).

If volunteer organizations [could] have opportunities to volunteer in the evenings or the weekends or during school holidays. It's really important



that it's not just Monday to Friday, 9 to 5, because that's not accessible for most young people. [In the case of] someone who's in school five days a week, evenings aren't really even particularly great either. So, it's the weekends and school holidays. There needs to be opportunities to volunteer during that time. (Youth workshop participant)

VIOs and VCs should consider ways of addressing this barrier, for example, by developing episodic or project-based opportunities. There is scope here to work with StudentVolunteer.ie, as they have considerable experience in this area. Volunteering projects often have the added attraction of allowing young people to work together in groups and enabling them to see the outcomes of their efforts.

4.1.4 NATURE OF VOLUNTEERING ROLES

A range of interconnected issues were raised with regards to the nature of volunteering roles for young people. Some survey respondents cautioned against giving young people the most mundane or repetitive roles, an issue which was also raised in the participatory workshops:

Make the work enjoyable and make them feel involved and appreciated. Often, they get the basic repetitive work but might be more targeted to their particular skills (VIO)

The volunteer should feel valued and should only be called on if there is something to be done. If volunteers spend a lot of time standing around with nothing to do, they won't stay with the organisation (VIO).

Young people should also be considered for a wider range of roles and should not be underestimated on the basis of age:

Don't make any assumptions based on age. Previous experience is not all that counts, and very young volunteers have proved to be essential in the experience of our festival, thanks to their enthusiasm, willingness to learn and freshness of their approach (VIO).

The importance of variety and progression in volunteering roles was also noted by the young people in our research:

[Organisations] need to build on their [volunteers'] strengths and skill set. Also don't keep them in the same role, give them the opportunity to progress. Put in place a stage where they are not [in the same role] for a very long time. Maybe they can grow within that organisation, if they volunteer with the organization over and over again (Youth workshop participant).

In addition, respondents felt that there needed to be more consultation with young people around the development of roles for young people. The following were some suggestions:

Ask the young people themselves what they want to do within your organisation. Host a focus group and get the young people to brainstorm ideas for projects or for volunteering roles. This will give them ownership over the process and will ensure that the roles are actually of interest to them (VC).

Develop engaging youth volunteer roles - Ask your youth volunteers what they are interested in within the organisation and work to facilitate an experience that encourages their interests (VIO).

As well as providing well defined, meaningful roles, respondents (from all three research groups) noted the importance of creating a 'fun environment' and making the experience enjoyable for young people. Suggestions here included: opportunities to volunteer with friends and other young people; providing refreshments; having music; and providing breaks and break areas.

4.1.5 SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND RECOGNITION

A range of suggestions were provided through the surveys and workshops, including setting up a buddy or mentoring programme for new recruits; providing induction and training to develop skills and build confidence; and making young people feel they are part of the team. It was also noted that additional support may be valuable where the volunteering role is challenging (e.g. counselling roles).

VIOs emphasised the importance of consulting with/listening to young volunteers and identified mechanisms for doing this, including evaluation forms (at the end of events) and feedback sessions. The following are some of their comments:

Carry out volunteer evaluations following each event/period of volunteering - Develop a report and learn from the evaluations - Listen to youth volunteers and their experience, be able to adapt and diversify their experience (VIO).

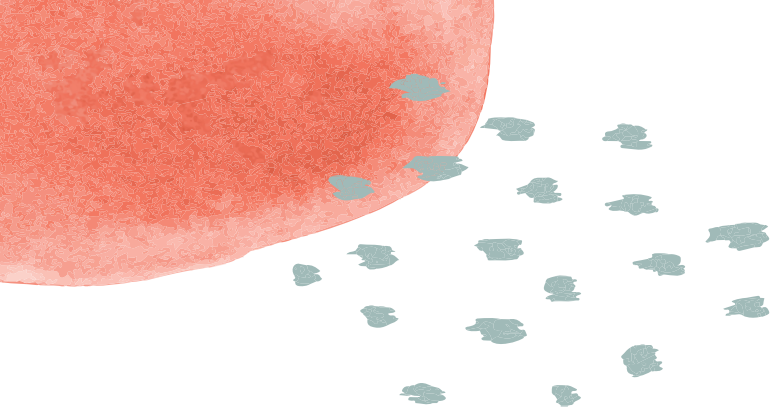
Listen to them and allow them to be part of the discussion in future plans (VIO).

Treat them with respect and listen to their point of view and ideas Be open to teaching them how to do new things, this builds their confidence (VIO).

Young people raised similar issues:

I also think that it is necessary for organizations to listen to volunteers... Then it's easier for me to refer such organization to somebody else and also me coming back next time too. So, it's necessary for organisations to listen to the ideas from volunteers (Youth workshop participant).

As the comment above indicates, a positive experience not only helps retain volunteers, but increases the likelihood that they will recommend the VIO to other potential volunteers.



Using awards programs and events, alongside informal recognition and feedback, is another means of making young volunteers feel valued for their contribution.

4.1.6 REINVENTING/RECONCEPTUALISING VOLUNTEERING

The idea that volunteering needs to be reconceptualised or ‘sold’ to a new generation came up at different points in the research, though there was ambivalence as to how this might be achieved. One participant suggested it was in the hands of young people themselves to change how volunteering is perceived:

The only way that it is going to happen is to have more people doing it [volunteering], so people will say ‘Oh, he’s doing it, I’m going to do it’. I don’t think there is any particular way that you can make it cool. I think you have to leave that in the hands of young people (Youth workshop participant).

Carlow VC noted the importance of helping young people recognise the volunteering that they have already carried out, but which they may not regard as volunteering, such as coaching a football team. This could help dispel preconceptions about what constitutes volunteering and show that volunteering can be fun and based on young people’s interests (see case study in the Youth Volunteering Toolkit).

VIOs can benefit from the expertise of youth work organisations who have developed innovative strategies for engaging young people. One such innovation is digital youth work, as demonstrated by initiatives like Foróige’s pioneering Digital Youth Work programme, Foróige Go. These digital initiatives can be easier for young people to join and can address obstacles like transportation limitations for youth engagement and offer online platforms for youth volunteering opportunities.

4.1.7 PROMOTING INCLUSION IN YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

The importance of reaching out to different cohorts of young people was noted in the workshops and interviews, with several suggestions on how that might be achieved, for example:

We need to have more accessibility in general in youth spaces in order to give everyone the opportunity to be able to volunteer. Whether that be for people with physical disabilities, like having calls online is absolutely brilliant, [so] that you don’t always have to be in a physical location. Or having things like quiet rooms when there’s really busy events so that people can step aside if the noise or the people are overstimulating, things like that. I think we need to really take into consideration that we are not all cut from the same cloth (VIO).

Another respondent noted that schools are an effective means of reaching out to a cohort of young people not already engaged in volunteering:

Schools are brilliant, if you [want to] get the people who aren’t usually going to gravitate towards these organizations...We need more diversity in youth volunteering. And I think schools are the way to do that (Youth workshop participant).

4.2 POLICY DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

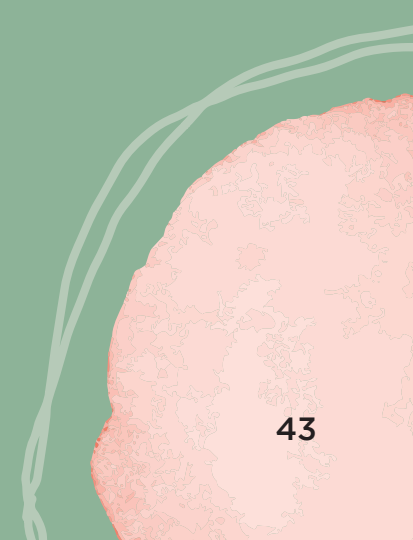
In the surveys, VCs and VIOs were asked an open-ended question on what more could be done at a national policy level to promote youth volunteering. The following were the main suggestions:

- Provide additional information and support to VIOs to help them meet the requirements associated with recruiting volunteers under the age of 18.
- Incorporate volunteering into the school curriculum (beyond Transition Year) and make provision for the formal recognition of student volunteering, for example through a system of credits to be added to formal school qualifications.
- Support and develop the student volunteer infrastructure, including the StudentVolunteer.ie platform
- Provide more funding to VIOs to enable them to recruit and support young volunteers; and ring-fenced investment in VCs specific to youth volunteering.
- Run a national campaign to raise awareness of volunteering opportunities and the benefits to young people.
- Introduce/strengthen public transport networks in rural areas to help overcome barriers associated with access.

Non profit organizations under a certain annual turnover...ought to be supported with significant financial support to cover, inter alia, the cost of insurance and administration, in recognition of the extra work involved in recruiting volunteers aged under 18 (VIO).

It might be good if schools or universities provided recognition in terms of marks/credits if a student did a volunteer experience as part of their studies (VIO).

Clear information for VIOs about what requirements are for child protection/vetting if they involve young volunteers, as distinct from young service users. Require insurance companies to give clear info about whether involving young people affects premiums or cover (VC).





4.3 CONCLUSION

Volunteering plays a significant role in developing greater levels of community and social awareness and involvement amongst young people. Through volunteering, they are given the opportunity to meet people and make friends, to utilise and develop personal and social skills, and to build confidence and a sense of personal achievement. Engaging in volunteering at an early age also increases the likelihood of a person volunteering in the future.

In line with previous studies, our research indicates that young people are keen to participate in volunteering activity and to contribute to local, national and international causes and initiatives. Through participatory workshops the research identified different facilitators to youth volunteering, notably the provision of more flexible volunteering opportunities and meaningful roles that are appealing to young people. The need to make volunteering an enjoyable experience was also highlighted. The research documented what VIOs and VCs are already doing to recruit and support young people. The data on current practice (chapter 3), along with suggestions for the future (chapter 4) form the basis for the Youth Volunteering Toolkit. The eight case studies in particular provide exemplars of good practice and innovation.

The research also suggests that there are significant barriers to volunteering, including the time commitment involved, the timing of volunteering opportunities, the nature of the roles offered, and narrow conceptions of what is entailed in volunteering. From an organisational perspective, the additional requirements involved in taking on young people under the age of 18 are likely to be a significant deterrent. It may also mean that young people are more likely to be called upon for certain roles, such as one-off charitable collections and events. However, several VCs noted that organisations are sometimes unsure about the regulations and tend to err on the side of caution by targeting the 18+ age range. One of the principal messages emerging from the research was the need for greater clarity on the requirements and more support for VIOs in the recruitment of those under 18.

The recommendations to VIOs and VCs emerging from the research are reported in the Youth Volunteering Toolkit, which includes the eight case studies.



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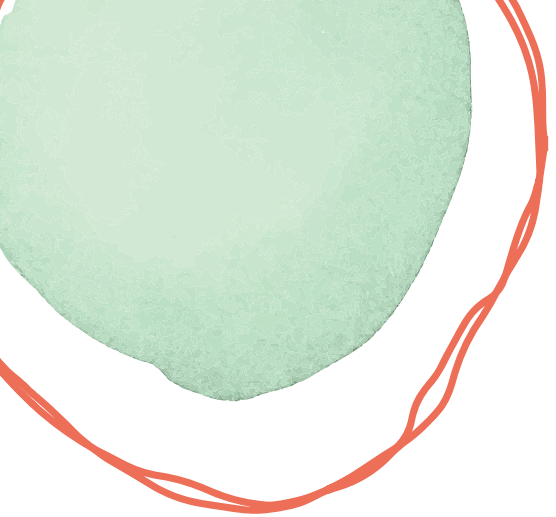
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