



Youth Volunteering Toolkit: Guidelines for Volunteer Involving Organisations & Volunteer Centres

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project team would like to sincerely thank the members of the project’s Youth Advisory Group for their guidance at different stages of the research. We are also indebted to the young people who participated in the six workshops, without whose input this research study would not have been possible.

We would like to thank the Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Involving Organisations that participated in the two online surveys, and the representatives from the eight case study organisations/initiatives: YMCA, Localise, Irish Red Cross, Spunout, StudentVolunteer.ie, Carlow Volunteer Centre, Foróige and the Voluntary Inspired Participation (VIP) Programme. We would also like to thank Harry Keogh (Localise), Sinéad Kirwan (Carlow Volunteer Centre) and Denis O’Brien (Foróige) for participating in a stakeholder meeting to review the Youth Volunteering Toolkit.

We are also very grateful to Dr Lorraine Tansey, from the National Volunteering Strategy Implementation Group, for her support and guidance throughout all stages of the project. Sincere thanks also go to Adam Lacey, Manager of the Cork Volunteer Centre, for his insight and support throughout the project.

The Youth Volunteering Toolkit was commissioned and funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development through the Irish Research Council’s New Foundations scheme. The research was carried out in partnership with Cork Volunteer Centre.

AUTHORS

Dr Margaret Scanlon, Dr Eileen Hogan, Dr Shirley Martin and Professor Fred Powell, School of Applied Social Studies and the Institute for Social Science in the 21st Century (ISS21), University College Cork.

Institute for Social Science in the 21st Century, University College Cork, Cork. 2024.

Contents

1. Overview	4
2. Developing Volunteering Roles	5
3. Connecting with Young People	7
4. Application and Selection Process	11
5. Young People in Leadership Roles	12
6. Creating Supportive Environments for Young Volunteers	13
7. Reflection and Recording	14
8. Recognition	15
9. Inclusiveness	16
Case Studies	17
Irish Red Cross	17
Spunout	18
YMCA – Youth Spaces	19
Foróige Youth Volunteering Pathways	21
Voluntary Inspired Participation (VIP) Programme	22
Localise – Classroom to Community Programme	24
Carlow Volunteer Centre’s ‘Making a Difference’ Volunteer Programme	25
StudentVolunteer.ie	26

1

Overview

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 this toolkit, you will find recommendations for practice that are informed by research commissioned by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) through the Irish Research Council. The aim of the project was to develop a research-based toolkit for Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) and Volunteer Centres (VCs) on how to promote youth volunteering. We are delighted to present this toolkit, and hope that you find inspiration in its pages.

The *National Volunteering Strategy* defines volunteering as ‘any time willingly given, either formally or informally, for the common good and without financial gain’ (DRCD, 2020: 18). Volunteering is ultimately about contributing to society with the aim of making the world a better place. Young people have extraordinary capacity for change-making and, in the right circumstances, can bring passion, enthusiasm, creativity, optimism, fresh perspectives, and new skills to Volunteer Involving Organisations. However, young people are discerning about where they will devote their energies, and organisations need to create youth volunteering opportunities that meet young people’s expectations and sense of purpose.

In this toolkit, you will find advice on how to attract, support, and recognise young volunteers. This advice is inspired by good work undertaken by organisations across the country. It is also informed by insights from young people who have volunteer experience or young people from different backgrounds and with disparate interests, who aspire to volunteer. This toolkit aims to help VIOs and VCs to learn what young people value as volunteers and to design meaningful opportunities informed by those values.

While there is no minimum age for volunteering, the guidance in this toolkit is aimed to support VIOs working with young volunteers aged between 12 to 25 years. It is important to bear in mind that there can be considerable variations within this age group: motivations for volunteering change over time and at key transition points such as starting college or work. School students often want to volunteer with their friends and classmates, while those leaving home to start further or higher education may volunteer in order to meet new people.

2

Developing Volunteering Roles

It is important that Volunteer Involving Organisations provide a rewarding volunteering experience. Volunteering roles should be suitable for young people and ideally should be flexible, meaningful, and appropriate to the young person’s capabilities.

Timing/flexibility of roles

School students are not available to volunteer on weekdays, and evenings may be taken up with homework and extra-curricular activities. In addition, there are considerable variations in the amount of time that school and college students can volunteer over the course of the year due to exam preparation, coursework deadlines, and part-time work. Ensuring flexibility and taking into consideration young volunteers’ existing commitments is therefore an important consideration when engaging with this age cohort.

- The timing of volunteering roles and the time commitment required should be appropriate to the young person’s life circumstances.
- Episodic, short-term, or project-based opportunities with clear goals and outcomes can be appealing to young people, where these can be built into or around their existing schedules.
- Providing opportunities to engage in volunteering online may be attractive to some young people. This might, for example, involve young people writing online content or participating in discussion panels online (see Spunout case study).

Nature of Roles

Young people want to feel that their work has value and purpose. Giving young people too many mundane tasks or being vague about their role in the organisation are barriers to retention.

- Provide meaningful, fulfilling, and attractive volunteering roles that utilise the skills that many young people have developed through their engagement in sports, arts, and other activities, including teamwork, creativity and communication skills.
- VIOs should take into consideration the skills and strengths that young people bring with them when allocating roles and responsibilities. Helping young people to recognise these skills in the first instance is important. The National Youth Council of Ireland's Volunteering & Volunteer Support in The Youth Sector manual includes a training needs analysis template and list of skill areas, which could be useful in identifying training requirements, as well as the skills and experience young people bring to their volunteering roles. This strengths-based approach is evident in one of our case studies (Carlow VC), which explores with young people the skills they can bring to volunteering and the (often unacknowledged) volunteering activities in which they are already engaged.
- Provide opportunities for young people to volunteer with friends and other young people. Young people, particularly those of school-age, are more likely to volunteer if their friends are involved. One of the advantages of reaching out to young people through schools and youth clubs is that you are reaching out to them as a group.
- Where volunteers are with a VIO over the longer term, there should be opportunities for development and progression whereby they take on more responsibility and experience different aspects of the organisation's work.

Finding out how youth volunteers want to volunteer, and the ways in which they would like to get involved in volunteering can help open doors, and support them on their journey. (VC)

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)

3 Connecting with Young People

Although many young people are interested in volunteering, they may be shy about making enquiries or simply lacking in knowledge about what volunteering possibilities exist. Some young people may not be familiar with the term 'volunteering' or have a narrow conception of what volunteering entails.

Based on our research, the following practical tips may be considered when connecting with young people.

3.1 DESIGNING VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Visual design

- Include images and/or profiles of young volunteers in websites and recruitment materials. Use examples of 'real' volunteers (rather than stock images) – young people perceive that these are more authentic depictions of what is involved and convey a sense of community that welcomes young volunteers.
- Recruitment materials should be designed in a youth-friendly style. Consult with young people in the design of recruitment materials and the recruitment process more generally.
- Be wary about trying to appear too current or 'cool'. Youth cultural tastes change rapidly, and trendy materials can become quickly outdated or irrelevant. Instead, focus on making space for young people to be creative in designing events and activities.

Content of volunteer recruitment materials

- Deliver your message clearly and succinctly, with easily accessible links to further information and application forms (in the case of websites). QR codes could also be used to link to further information.
- Terms such as 'helping-out' and 'assisting' can help young people understand what volunteering entails because not all young people are familiar with the term 'volunteering'.
- Be clear about what volunteering entails and identify what kind of work or activities are involved.
- Clearly communicate how your organisation positively impacts the world. Establishing a culture of volunteering relies on effectively communicating to young individuals the compelling reasons for engaging in volunteer work within your organisation.
- Highlight the benefits to young people of volunteering, including the opportunity to develop skills and gain valuable experience, as well as to meet people, make friends and have fun. Keep in mind age differences: what appeals to someone in their early teens may not be the same as that for someone in their 20s.



3.2 REACHING OUT TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth-centred spaces are important sites for targeted recruitment, including sporting and cultural organisations and youth clubs. Youth workers and others who engage with young people in informal settings can be effective advocates of volunteering. Volunteer Involving Organisations should consider mapping out partnerships within their local communities and investing time establishing relationships with local schools, colleges and youth and community organisations.

Schools, colleges and other educational organisations are important spaces for reaching out to potential young volunteers.

The following suggestions and observations emerged from the research.

- Information events and workshops in schools, often targeted towards Transition Year students, are valuable activities for reaching 12–18-year-olds. (Two of our case studies are concerned with working with schools: Carlow VC has developed a school's programme; Localise works with schools to provide volunteering opportunities.)
- Presentations on volunteering in educational settings should be engaging and interactive. Information sessions should be followed up with volunteering opportunities or taster activities, wherever possible, to maintain interest.
- When establishing volunteering projects within a school environment consider large national programmes and bodies with expertise that you can leverage for support and information, these include the Young Social Innovators programmes, Gaisce President's Award Leaders programme, National Youth Council of Ireland programmes and the Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU) which is the national representative body for school Student Councils. These organisations are often active within schools and are ready and willing to connect with you.
- Educational spaces outside the mainstream formal school system are equally important sites for reaching out to potential volunteers, for example there are over 100 [Youthreach](#) centres nationally, offering young people (aged 15–20) an integrated programme of education, training and work experience and a progression route to further education and employment.

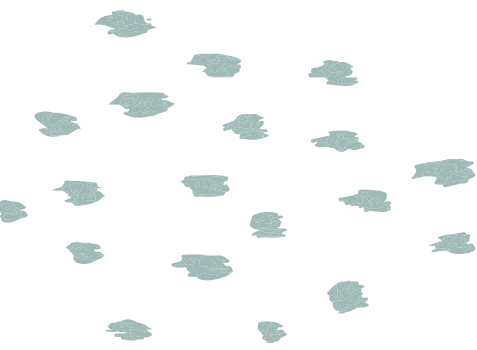
The volunteering infrastructure in third level education is an important route for VIOs to reach the 18–25 age range who are still involved in education.

- **StudentVolunteer.ie** is a network of volunteering programmes with a valuable free interactive online platform for higher education students, higher education institutions (HEIs) and community organisations to connect (see case study at end of toolkit).

- HEI community engagement initiatives can enhance volunteering opportunities. Some HEIs have developed initiatives to support volunteering, for example the
 - ALIVE programme in the University of Galway
 - President's Volunteer Award and Office in the University of Limerick
 - UCD in the Community at UCD
 - Graduate Attributes Programme at UCC
 - Student Volunteering at TU DublinAll match student volunteers to community projects, provide training to enhance volunteering experiences, and recognise commitment through awards (<https://www.studentvolunteer.ie>).
- Volunteering is also supported through HEI Clubs and Societies, Chaplains, and Students' Unions.
- Volunteer fairs are another means by which VCs and VIOs can reach out to students.
- In addition to advertising opportunities to students who are already interested, VIOs and VCs could promote volunteering through other avenues (e.g. posters in student accommodation) to reach those who may not have considered volunteering. Connecting and partnering with the local StudentVolunteer.ie representative is an important method of building a relationship with students.

Social media can be an effective means of raising awareness of your organisation and advertising volunteering opportunities to young people.

- Consider the media that young people are most likely to use. The most popular platforms identified in our research workshops were Instagram and TikTok, but it is important to note that trends change quickly and there are likely to be age-related variations in social media preferences and usage.
- Creative content is valued. For example, one group in our research suggested creating a 'day-in-the life' TikTok video to give a sense of what is involved in volunteering.
- Content should not be overwhelming; making an initial pitch through social media, then linking to more detailed information is helpful.
- Social media is valuable for communications and community-building. For example, WhatsApp can facilitate young volunteers to stay in touch and share information on other opportunities (where GDPR has been considered).



Young volunteers can be effective advocates and ambassadors for volunteering amongst their peer group. 'Word of mouth' and 'being asked' are important routes into volunteering for all age groups including young people.

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).

We would love to develop a Youth Ambassador Programme whereby young 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)

Have photos from actual events not just stock images [in recruitment materials]. I know I've always found them more helpful when you're trying to promote something, and I know I would feel more enticed if it was real stuff.

Target college societies that share the same values/goals as your organisation. They often look for ways to get involved with local organisations in terms of volunteering but also fundraising.

Start with schools for awareness of volunteering (primary and secondary) ...Get them to engage with it. If you get someone in and they just talk it can be really boring. If you get them to engage and interact, it's more likely that it will have an effect on them, and they might think about it then.

Target groups because young people won't want to go by themselves. It doesn't have to be youth groups, it could be GAA teams, because people will come as part of a group, but they won't come by themselves.

YOUTH WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

A very effective way is to engage with education providers where volunteering / active citizenship is part of the curriculum. In our VC, we have now forged a good relationship with the Youthreach coordinator as well as key staff in local secondary schools which has ensured that we are invited back year on year to engage with the students. This benefits the VC, it benefits the school in terms of advancing the curriculum and it benefits the students to engage in volunteering. (VC)



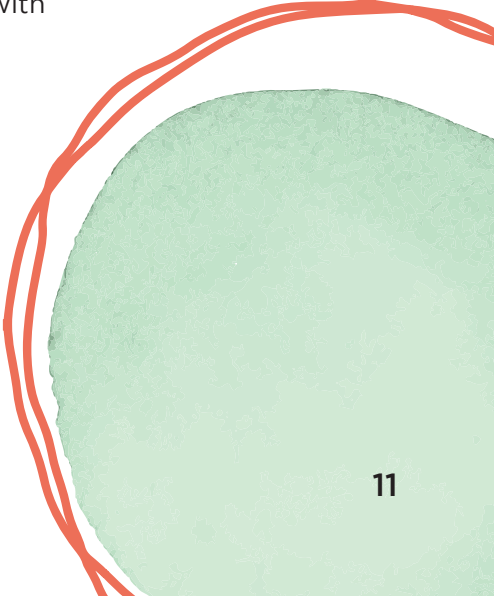
4 Application and Selection Process

This is the prospective volunteer's initial contact with the VIO, and it is important to make a positive impression.

- How to apply for a volunteering role should be made clear in recruitment materials, websites or presentations.
- Make the application process as straight forward as possible and only ask for essential information.
- Applications should be acknowledged and processed as quickly as possible. Where there is a delay (as in cases where VIOs run an annual national recruitment campaign), VIOs are advised to stay in touch with applicants to maintain the momentum. This could be an email or text message to thank them for their patience, provide interim welcome sessions, training, shadowing or invitations to events.
- Including a young volunteer in the recruitment and selection process conveys a strong sense that this is a youth-friendly environment.

CHILD SAFEGUARDING FOR VOLUNTEERS UNDER 18 YEARS OLD

When working with young people under 18 years old, child safeguarding is an essential consideration. Guidance can be found in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Children First). Organisations should contact Volunteer Ireland or their local Volunteer Centre to seek advice on current child protection and safeguarding procedures, to ensure they are compliant with legislation and adhering to good practice.



5

Young People in Leadership Roles

Offering young people leadership roles gives them the opportunity to gain valuable experience and to develop leadership skills and attributes and is an essential part of creating a culture of volunteering for your organisation. It can engender a stronger sense of ownership and commitment to the VIO, as well as giving newer volunteers or members something to aspire towards. They are your potential future staff, donors, ambassadors. Involving young people in decision-making is also highly beneficial to VIOs, bringing in new perspectives, skill sets and energy. Young people can be involved in leadership and decision-making at different levels of an organisation: from youth leader positions in local youth and sports clubs, to membership of regional and national advisory committees and boards.

- Giving young people the opportunity to lead projects could be an effective route into leadership.
- Experienced young volunteers could also be given positions as mentors to other young volunteers joining the organisation.
- In terms of organisational decision-making and governance, it may be fruitful to set up committees or advisory groups composed of young people.
- Look for ways to integrate young people into existing committees and structures so that their voice is heard at different levels and so they can learn from others. How young volunteers are integrated into governance structures will need to be considered carefully so that they are involved in a meaningful way.
- Training and support for young leaders is central to their success. Our case study VIOs provide examples of how young volunteers can move into leadership roles, backed up by well-structured training and supports.
- It is important to recognise that leadership can be enacted in different ways and that organisations can benefit from different leadership styles. Some young people might be intimidated or daunted by the idea of becoming leaders. Therefore, making space for different ways of leading, and providing leadership opportunities at different levels, can help to alleviate these concerns and support inclusive, strengths-based practice.
- 'Leading Ireland's Future Together' (LIFT) is a national leadership programme that is available to young people. VIOs/VCs can mobilise youth volunteers through this programme. Young people trained as LIFT leadership facilitators can deliver the LIFT programme to small groups. LIFT leadership training is available online.
- Hub na nÓg is the national centre of excellence on giving children and young people a voice in decision-making and provides practical resources such as tool kits, case studies and checklists for organisations to support the involvement of children and young people in decision-making. These resources are based on the *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making*.

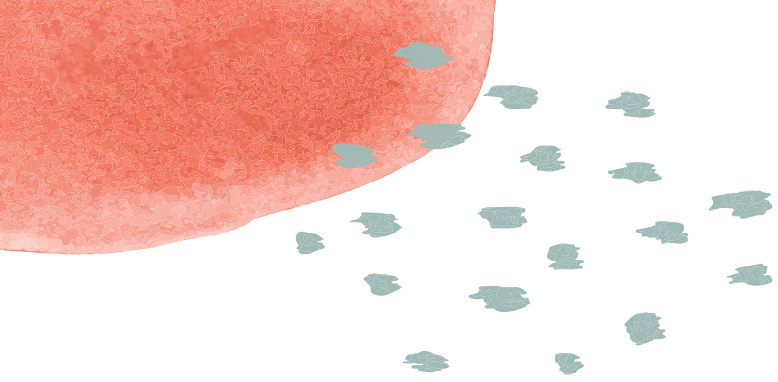
6

Creating Supportive Environments for Young Volunteers

It is important to create a welcoming, supportive, and professional environment for young volunteers, that fosters a sense of belonging. Having a positive experience may also encourage them to recommend volunteering to other young people.

The following are some ideas based on our research.

- **Getting off to a good start.** To help new volunteers settle in, they could be linked to a 'buddy', peer mentor or other dedicated contact person whose role is to provide information, support and guidance.
- **Preparing existing staff and volunteers.** Current and previous research suggests that some VIO staff and volunteers may underestimate young people's capacity or suitability for volunteering, for example they may be seen as less responsible or less capable than older volunteers. In such situations, prepare current staff and volunteers for working with young people and address negative perceptions (where applicable). It is important that young volunteers feel accepted and valued by those around them if they are to remain with the organisation. VIOs with little experience of working with young volunteers, may need be particularly mindful of treating them in the same way as they do other volunteers.
- **Offer induction and training.** Training adds further value to the volunteering experience by enabling young people to develop important life-skills and attributes, such as communication, leadership and organisational skills. In addition, young people are better prepared for their volunteering role and likely to feel more confident.
- **Identify rights and responsibilities.** Young people might be invited to examine their rights and responsibilities within the organisation as part of the induction process.
- **Consult young volunteers.** Participants in the research (young people, VIOs and VCs) emphasised the importance of consulting with young people and listening to their views. This could be in relation to their volunteering experience, as well the organisation's work and future direction. Where young people are consulted, it is good practice to provide feedback on how the information was used and what impact it had. One case study organisation, for example, described a 'feedback loop', whereby young volunteers are consulted on aspects of the organisation's work and provided with feedback on the outcome of the consultation.



- **Make the experience enjoyable.** Participants in our research noted the importance of creating 'a fun environment' and making volunteering an enjoyable experience. This can be achieved by providing opportunities for young people to volunteer with friends and peers, as noted above. Small additions/thoughtful gestures, such as providing refreshments at break time or playing music, can also make volunteering more enjoyable, especially where the activity itself is routine.
- **Costs and expenses.** Consider what expenses young people might incur and whether these can be paid by the organisation. These might include small fares for public transport, for example.
- **Stay in contact.** Where there are time lapses between volunteering activities, stay in contact through social media or with the occasional text message. For example, Spunout uses the Slack platform to keep in touch online in-between meetings (see case study).

I think it's important to have an open dialogue with young volunteers. Volunteer satisfaction and feeling like your volunteering is making a difference often helps retain volunteers longer...Support and supervision are also important factors, as it ensures the volunteers feel secure and comfortable to ask for help, should they have any questions. (VC)

7 Reflection and Recording

Volunteering is widely seen as a vehicle for informal learning and the development of skills. This is true for all volunteers, but it may have an additional significance for young volunteers who are developing new skills and interests. Where possible, organisations should provide opportunities for young people to reflect on what they have learned and to map their progression over time. Further value is added where structures are in place to enable young volunteers to record the skills they have developed in a more formal way.

- Use a skills summary tool (available through the National Youth Council of Ireland) to enable young people to assess the skills gained through volunteering at different points.
- On completion of their volunteering, issue a written report on the skills they have developed (endorsed by the VIO) that can be used in CVs and for interviews.

Volunteering portfolios are another means of documenting informal learning, thereby providing young people with evidence of their achievements. (See Localise and YMCA case studies for examples of reflection and recording models.)

8

Recognition

Feeling part of the organisation is important for any volunteer and therefore efforts to foster a sense of belonging will be impactful for younger and older volunteers alike. As for any volunteer, using awards programs and events, alongside informal recognition and feedback, is important to helping young volunteers feel valued for their contribution.

- Certificates and/or ceremonies are a positive way to mark the completion of a volunteering programme/project.
- Annual volunteering awards are another means of recognising achievement. Some VIOs and VCs already include a youth category in their annual volunteering awards (for example Tidy Towns, Cork Volunteer Centre).
- Where VIOs do not run volunteering awards programmes themselves, they may wish to nominate young people for outside awards, such as those provided through VCs or higher education institutions.
- Young volunteers could also be encouraged to take part in the Gaisce Award programme. Gaisce – The President's Award is a self-development programme for young people aged 14-25. Participants achieve a Gaisce Award by completing challenge areas, including community involvement. President's Award Leaders deliver, guide and support Gaisce Participants undertaking the Award.

Recognition of the contribution of volunteers can also be part of the culture of an organisation and support a sense of belonging for young people.

VIOs could:

- Send thank you notes and text messages following events and projects.
- Acknowledge the contribution and achievements of volunteers through social media (with their consent).
- Give small gifts at holidays or other points during the year.



9

Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness is important to young volunteers and essential for creating a supportive environment and ensuring diversity in volunteering. It was noted by young research participants, for example, that some young people are highly active volunteers and will volunteer with more than one organisation or go from one volunteering role to another. However, young people's capacity to volunteer is shaped by social differences such as class, gender, and ethnicity. Therefore, not all young people feel empowered to volunteer or they may underestimate what they can offer to an organisation. Furthermore, recruitment campaigns may only reach those who are already interested in volunteering, e.g. those who seek out information online or through volunteer fairs. The challenge is to reach out beyond the cohort who are already interested/involved to those who have never considered volunteering, but who could make a valuable contribution and benefit from the experience. This was identified as an important consideration in both the participatory workshops with young people and the surveys with VCs and VIOs. The following are some suggestions emerging from the research with respect to inclusive practice.

- Reach out to young people in areas where there are traditionally lower rates of formal volunteering, for example by working with schools in these areas to offer volunteering opportunities.
- As well as promoting volunteering in schools and colleges, engage with young people who are outside mainstream education, for example through the Youthreach programme.
- Ensure that language and imagery used in recruitment material and websites are inclusive
- Reach out to under-represented groups including people with disabilities, for example by making sure venues are accessible, or having quiet spaces for those who need them at meetings and events. The Red Cross has developed a valuable resource on the inclusion of young people with disabilities in volunteering available at: [Inspired-Action-toolkit-6.pdf \(spiritof2012.org.uk\)](#). The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) also provides a range of resources on inclusivity, available on their website at: Equality, Inclusion, and Intercultural resources - National Youth Council of Ireland.
- Challenge societal perceptions and stereotypes of volunteering. Our research found that there is often a narrow perception of volunteering which acts as a barrier for young people. If volunteering is to be promoted to a wider cohort of young people, there needs to be a better understanding of the diversity of the roles involved. Carlow Volunteer Centre's schools programme provides one example of how to address pre-conceptions by exploring different facets of volunteering with young people (see case study).

Case Studies

IRISH RED CROSS

Background and Mission

The mission of the Irish Red Cross is to provide humanitarian assistance, both at home and abroad, to those who are most in need. In Ireland the Red Cross delivers a wide range of services to communities through 75 local volunteer-led branches. **Irish Red Cross Youth** is one of the organisation's three divisions, the others being First Aid and Rescue, and Community Support.

Volunteering with Irish Red Cross Youth

Local Red Cross Youth groups provide activities, training, and volunteering opportunities for members aged from 4 to 25. Volunteering roles range in scope from short-term/one-off activities to projects run over weeks or months. A notable example from recent years was the involvement of young people in the Family Connections project which provided training in first aid and healthcare to prison inmates and their families. The main aim of the project was to enable in-mates to set up their own Red Cross branch, whilst also strengthening their relationship with their families through the shared training programme. Volunteers (16+) from Irish Red Cross Youth provided valuable input to the project, particularly in terms of developing online content to support learning and communication. They also co-facilitated online classes, and their involvement was seen as especially important for interactions with younger family members. A key principle in this, and other Red Cross Youth initiatives, was to listen to the voice of young people and incorporate their ideas. This approach not only enriches the organisation's work but empowers young people:

We try - in everything that we do with young people - to give them as much control over what is happening as possible. That they make as many decisions to do with the program as possible. (Irish Red Cross National Youth Officer)

Young people are also encouraged to use their skills and knowledge to volunteer more informally in their communities and to raise awareness of humanitarian issues.

Leadership Roles

From the age of 16, members of Red Cross Youth have the option to become Emerging Youth Leaders and they can take up the role of Youth Leader from 18 onwards. Leaders play a pivotal part in the running of the local Red Cross youth groups. The majority of Leaders are aged between 24-28.

Young people are also represented at senior levels of the organisation. The role of National Youth Representative (NYR) was introduced about 10 years ago at the request of youth members to directly represent their views at the highest levels of the organisation's governance structure. Elected by youth members, the National Youth Representative must be aged between 18-29 when appointed and serve for a period of three years. The NYR sits on the General Assembly - the highest deliberative authority of the Irish Red Cross - and is also a member of the National Youth Working Group.



Training and Support

The Irish Red Cross runs a weekend residential training event for both Emerging and current Youth Leaders. At the local level, Emerging Youth Leaders are mentored and supported by current leaders and are given responsibility (under supervision) to take on certain aspects of the role, for example overseeing a small group or developing a group project.

All Red Cross Youth members undertake training which provides the basis for volunteering with other branches of the organisation, for example as First Aid and Rescue volunteers (from age 16+), should they choose to do so.

Find out more about Irish Red Cross Youth at: Irish Red Cross Youth
- Irish Red Cross

SPUNOUT

Background

Established in 2005, Spunout is Ireland's youth information and support platform. The organisation's aim is to support young people 'to be informed, feel empowered and heard'. Through its platform and channels, the organisation shares the stories and experiences of young people across Ireland and provides factual information on mental health and wellbeing. Spunout is 'by young people, for young people' – a community of young contributors and volunteers supports and guides the organisation's work. The Spunout website currently provides information to more than 200,000 readers each month.

Volunteering with Spunout

A central tenet of Spunout's approach is the inclusion of young people (aged 16-25) at all levels of the organisation – from website content providers to membership of the Spunout board of directors. With regards to content development, young people contribute by writing articles, proofreading, making videos and giving feedback. The organisation currently has a group of over 100 contributors with varying levels of involvement: some young people produce a single article/video, while others provide numerous outputs for the website. The flexibility of the contributor role is important in attracting volunteers, some of whom may not be able to make a longer-term volunteering commitment. Content providers are recruited principally through social media campaigns and word of mouth. Once the organisation has identified the key themes or campaigns to focus on during the year, it invites contributors to pitch ideas, write content, and work with Spunout staff in producing the final article.

Leadership and Decision Making

As well as providing website content, young people can become involved in the leadership and decision-making processes of the organisation through the Spunout Youth Action Panels, which currently have a combined membership of over 130. There are five regional Action Panels that meet three times a year, and

one nationwide panel representing the BAME (Black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic) and Traveller communities. Each Action Panel elects members to a National Panel, which meets twice a year. The main purpose of the panels is to work with Spunout staff to decide on what overarching topics to run on the website each year. Panel members are also consulted on different aspects of the organisation's work (for example recruitment materials) and they represent Spunout at festivals and events. Spunout recognises the importance of showing volunteers the impact of their contribution through regular feedback, as their Head of Engagement and Participation explained: 'We show them how their feedback makes a difference to the organisation... So when we ask them for feedback on an issue, we go back and say to them, *look, this is what we did with your feedback, and this is how it influenced our work*'.

The importance of young volunteers to the leadership of Spunout is reflected in the organisation's constitutional structures. Two members of the Action Panels can be nominated to join the Spunout Board of Directors. These members attend board meetings to represent Panel members across the country and have the same rights and responsibilities as other board members. Action Panel members can also be involved in governance structures, such as the Finance or HR sub-committees.

Training and Support

Spunout provides an annual training programme to Action Panel members to build core skills and promote personal development. Panel members are consulted in the choice of training topics, which have included public speaking, advocacy and activism, workshop facilitation, and diversity and inclusion. There are opportunities for social events and gatherings throughout the year, including an annual town hall event which brings together volunteers from across the country. Action Panel members and Spunout personnel are also connected via the Slack platform to keep in touch online outside of meetings.

Find out more at: spunout - Ireland's Youth Information Website

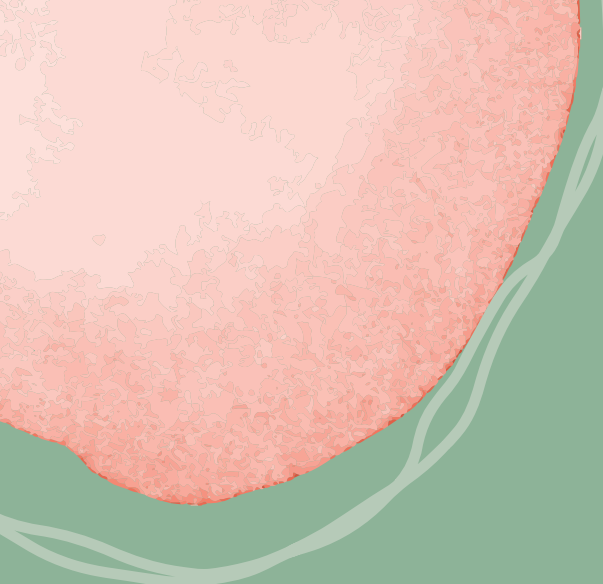
YMCA – YOUTH SPACES

Background

The YMCA in Ireland has existed since 1849 as a voluntary organisation that works with children, young people, families and the community, with particular regard to those who are disadvantaged and disaffected. Each YMCA responds to local needs and seeks to share and learn from being a part of a national and international movement. Initiatives for young people include the YMCA's Youth Spaces, which is targeted at young people in the 15-25 age range.

Volunteering within YMCA Youth Spaces

Youth Spaces (YS) are 'youth-led, informal spaces where young people can make friends, make and create together, make progress in their lives and make a difference in their community'. Young people attending Youth Spaces contribute



to the community in different ways, for example, they have performed (music and spoken word performances) at intercultural and awareness-raising events, including an anti-racist summit in Cork City Hall and Africa Day. However, like members of other youth groups, they do not necessarily describe their contribution to these events as ‘volunteering’.

Young Leaders

Volunteer Leaders (aged up to 25) play a key role in creating the supportive, youth-centred environment that is the cornerstone of the YS initiative. Young Leaders are active in welcoming new people to Youth Spaces, promoting a positive ethos within the group, and developing new projects and initiatives in response to young people’s interests and needs, and reflecting the leaders’ skills sets. Leaders are essential to communicating the norms and values of the space to other young people.

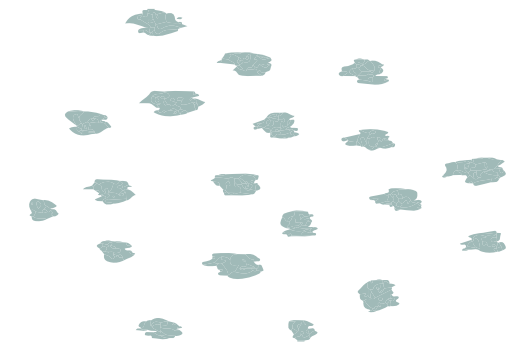
Young Leaders represent the YMCA at national and international events and use their training and experience to advocate on behalf of young people. Plans are currently in progress to develop a Youth Advisory Panel for Youth Spaces (Cork YMCA), which would create a mechanism whereby Leaders could advise staff on the direction of Youth Spaces.

Training

The YMCA offers a comprehensive Leaders in Training Programme, at the end of which participants receive a certificate. The YMCA also supports Young Leaders to access external training, for example if a leader is interested in developing a project or initiative, the YMCA will support them in identifying and accessing training in that area.

Reflective practice sessions are an important element of the ongoing support which Youth Leaders can access. Cork YMCA is also in the process of introducing a skills summary tool (available through the National Youth Council of Ireland) which will enable Leaders to assess the skills they have gained through volunteering, at different points in their volunteering journey. On completion of their volunteering with the YMCA, Leaders will receive a written report on the skills they have developed (endorsed by youth workers) that can be used in their CVs and for interviews. A representative from the YMCA noted that the skills tool is an important way for young people to recognise the soft skills they develop through volunteering, and it enables them to better communicate the value of these skills to prospective employers.

Find out more about YMCA Youth Spaces and the National Youth Council of Ireland Skills Summary Tool at Youth Work & Youth Spaces - ymca Ireland (ymca-ireland.net)



FORÓIGE YOUTH VOLUNTEERING PATHWAYS

Background

Founded in 1952, Foróige is one of Ireland’s largest youth work organisations reaching some 40,000 young people each year aged 10 to 21. Foróige operates in every county of the state in both urban and rural settings. It has designed a range of programmes, club models and projects to ensure young people can join in a way which best meets their needs.

Volunteering Activities

Foróige has several pathways for young people to experience and grow in volunteering, outlined below.

- **Group Volunteering in Foróige’s Youth Citizenship programme**

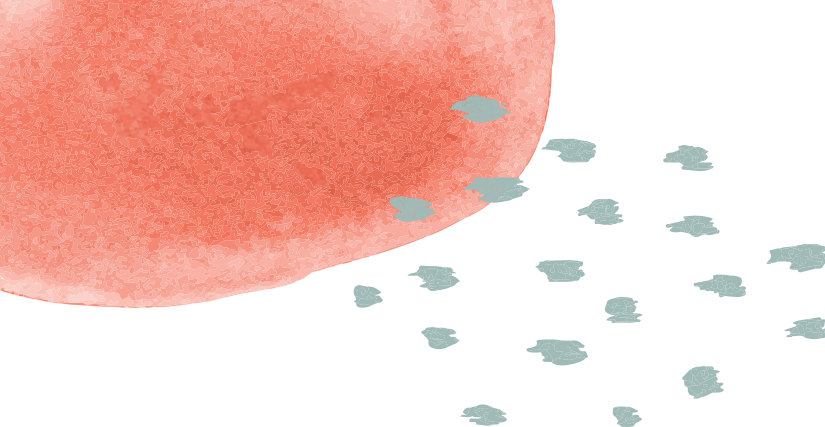
The Youth Citizen programme empowers young people to volunteer to make a difference in the community. Participants take practical steps to identify and respond to a community or social issue, and evaluate the outcomes of their action. Examples of this volunteering include improving local access for people who use wheelchairs, creating sensory gardens, bringing the community together to advocate for better facilities, and organising community clean-ups.

- **Volunteering in Community Leadership**

Foróige’s Leadership for Life programme is designed to support young people to volunteer to lead change in their community and the wider world. While adult facilitators guide young people to learn about their own strengths and interests, the young people are encouraged to engage in a community action project where they voluntarily exercise leadership in the community. This programme is currently accredited by the University of Galway and Queen’s University Belfast. Completion of the programme gives young people the opportunity to graduate with a Foundation Certificate in Youth Leadership and Community Action.

- **Individuals volunteering in club leadership and governance**

Young people volunteer individually for roles in the leadership of their Foróige club, including Club Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and Communications Officer. More than 1,200 young people take up these opportunities annually. Young adults aged 18 to 24 are supported to volunteer as adult leaders in Foróige clubs. Many of these are past club members. As part of this they get access to developmental opportunities through learning and training. There is also an opportunity for these young volunteers to get more involved at local and regional level through some of the more formal structures such as District Councils, Event Organising and Development Committees.



Through a series of Regional Conferences held annually young people can volunteer to go for election to a “Reference Panel” of some 64 youth representatives from various parts of the organisation. This panel is consulted by Foróige on youth issues and organisation policies. It also elects 16 of its members onto the National Council of Foróige and from there, elects two young people to the Board of the organisation where, along with adult volunteers, they are responsible for overseeing the whole organisation. If they turn 18 during this time, they can be full directors of the company.

Volunteer Training and Leadership

Foroige is conscious of the need to support young people in all the above roles. For each of the roles outlined, there are particular training courses offered by adult staff and volunteers to support the young people to volunteer to make a difference and to exercise leadership. Foróige has invested in creating videos, developing hard and soft copy resources and online learning platforms to make learning as attractive and relevant as possible for young volunteers.

Volunteering Impact

Evaluation is an important part of all volunteering in Foróige. Adult volunteers and staff are trained to help young people reflect on what their volunteering has achieved for others but also what they have learned for themselves. This reflection can then lead to more volunteering as new needs and motivations are identified.

Volunteer Recognition

In general, Foroige operates by the principle that recognition from those closest to the young volunteers is most appreciated. Clubs are encouraged to hold celebration events for young people. An annual volunteer conference is held to celebrate all Foroige volunteers, while the annual Citizenship Showcases provide an opportunity for young people to gain recognition from the wider community and various stakeholders. Those graduating from the Leadership for Life programme have a formal graduation ceremony in the university.

VOLUNTARY INSPIRED PARTICIPATION (VIP) PROGRAMME

Background

The Voluntary Inspired Participation (VIP) Programme, initiated by the Limerick Sports Partnership, aims to empower local teenagers to become leaders and volunteers in the realm of sports and physical activities within the community. Recognising the crucial role played by volunteers in fostering sports engagement, the programme seeks to provide guidance, support, and mentorship to nurture the potential of young individuals. The year-long V.I.P programme does not solely focus on students holding leadership positions within school sports teams. Rather, its emphasis lies in identifying potential among students, with the provision of appropriate support and encouragement, to nurture future coaches and leaders within the sports and physical activity sector. Participants are afforded the opportunity to acquire nationally recognized sports coaching qualifications and attend health-related workshops.

Volunteering Activities

Participants in the VIP Programme engage in a variety of volunteering activities aimed at promoting sports and physical activity within the community. These activities include leading physical literacy sessions, assisting with sports training sessions, supporting school sports events, and contributing to community-wide initiatives such as holiday camps for disadvantaged youth and mass participation events.

Volunteering Training and Leadership

The VIP Programme offers comprehensive training and leadership development opportunities to its participants. Through nationally recognised sports coaching qualifications, health-related workshops, and practical experiences, participants enhance their coaching, leadership, and communication skills. The programme emphasises personal development alongside sports leadership, empowering individuals to step outside their comfort zones and become effective leaders.

Volunteering Impact

By volunteering their time and expertise, VIP participants contribute to increased access to sports and physical activities for other members of the community. VIP participants have helped the Limerick Sports Partnership to host large-scale participation events like Operation Transformation, Blanket 5K runs, Sports Hall Athletics and Get Going Get Rowing Blitzes. These volunteer hours have not only benefited the local community but have given the VIP participants a better understanding of the needs of the community and the time and commitment that is required by local sports groups and organisations.

Volunteer Recognition

The contributions of VIP Programme participants are recognised and valued by both the Limerick Sports Partnership and the wider community through various means, including public recognition, certificates of achievement, and opportunities for further development and engagement. Since completing the VIP programme, numerous participants have chosen to pursue sport-related courses in 3rd level education. Notably, a full-time staff member of the Limerick Sports Partnership is a former VIP, along with ten of the regular tutors. Limerick Sports Partnership has an open-door approach in terms of providing VIPs with advice, exploring employment opportunities, or gaining workplace experience while pursuing further education.

Find out more about the VIP Programme at:
Voluntary Inspired Participation | Limerick Sports Partnership

Other useful resources include the Sports Ireland Policy on Volunteering in Sport.

LOCALISE – CLASSROOM TO COMMUNITY PROGRAMME

Background

Localise is a youth and community development organisation which works to promote ‘a culture of volunteerism by enabling young people aged 11 to 25 to carry out local grassroots volunteer projects in the service of others’. One of its core objectives is to promote inclusion and integration through social engagement. While Localise works across a wide spectrum of communities, it has a particular remit to engage young people in communities that do not have a strong culture of formal volunteering. In so doing, Localise helps ensure that all young people have a chance to reap the benefits of volunteering.

How it Works

Localise provides a range of experiential educational programmes focused on youth volunteerism that can be utilised in both informal settings such as youth services or in formal settings such as schools. One of its main initiatives to date has been the **Classroom to Community Programme**, in which Localise staff work with schools to deliver a 10-week learning programme for young people aged 11 and up. The programme is designed to fit with the existing school curriculum and in most cases is run during Transition Year. Originally delivered in-person by Localise staff and volunteers, in recent years the programme has moved to a blended learning approach whereby schools can access an online platform that provides instructional videos and other support materials and resources. Localise personnel support school staff in the delivery of the programme, ensuring young people continue to meet the same outcomes and outputs of a traditional Localise programme. The move to online provision has enabled more schools from across Ireland to access the Classroom to Community Programme.

As well as completing the 10-week programme – in which young people explore the values and practicalities of volunteering, and the skills and attribute they can bring – young people design and carry out a project in their local community. A key principle is that young people themselves choose the project, as Localise’s Education Coordinator explained: ‘it is student-centric, it is not top down – it is bottom up’. Reflection is another important element whereby students address three core questions – ‘What did you do? What impact did it have? What are you going to do next?’ As the final question suggests, the projects are seen as a starting point for future engagement. One of the strengths of the Classroom to Community Programme is that it provides young people with the opportunity to volunteer as part of a group. The findings of the current and previous research indicate that young people are more likely to volunteer with friends and peers, and are also more likely to enjoy the experience.

Volunteering in Action

As part of the Classroom to Community Programme, students from one Dublin school developed a project to highlight the impact of fast fashion on the environment and to demonstrate the value of upcycling pre-loved clothes. They partnered with Friends of the Elderly to stage a fashion show using upcycled clothes from one of their charity shops. As well as raising awareness of the environmental impact of producing, transporting and packing clothes,

the fashion show raised funds for the charity shop. The opportunity for intergenerational connections and cooperation is a notable feature of this and other Classroom to Community projects.

Volunteer Recognition

Annual community graduations are held to celebrate the contribution of young volunteers and a pilot is currently underway to develop youth volunteering portfolios that recognise and document informal learning. Portfolios are seen as important in giving young people ‘the language that they need to discuss what they have done: problem solving, teamwork, leadership’ (Education Coordinator). Localise, working with partner HEIs, has developed an initiative whereby young people will have the opportunity to produce accredited youth volunteering digital portfolios that can be taken into consideration when allocating course places in participating HEIs. The scheme is open to all but targets young people in DEIS schools. The National Youth Volunteering Portfolio myvp.ie will allow young people to build a profile of themselves through the prism of volunteerism. The platform provides young people with a space and a place to record their achievements, store their certificates of achievement, have their skills and attributes endorsed, outline their key learning, reflect on their experiences, and outline a vision for their future. This initiative represents an important step towards the greater recognition of the value of informal learning, especially through volunteering, within the Irish educational system.

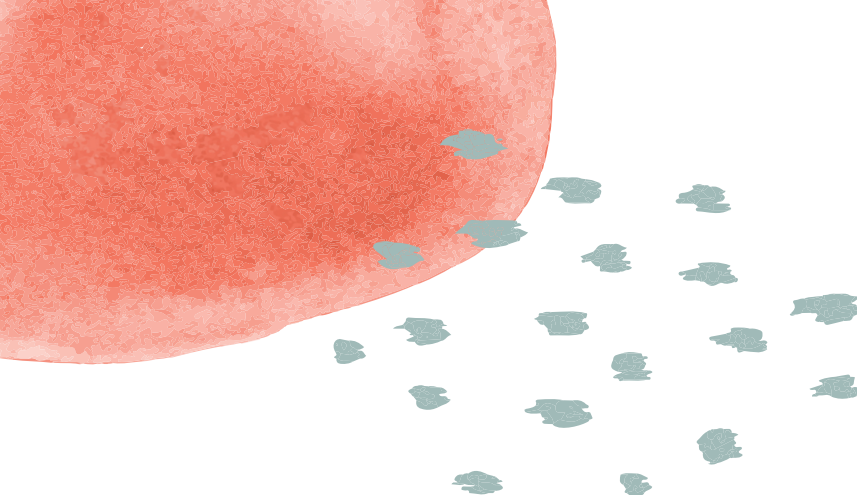
Find out more about the Classroom to Community Programme and the National Youth Volunteering Portfolio at: [Home - Localise Ireland’s National Youth Volunteering Programme](#)

CARLOW VOLUNTEER CENTRE’S ‘MAKING A DIFFERENCE’ VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

Introduction to Volunteering

Carlow Volunteer Centre (CVC) provides a 4-week volunteering programme to secondary schools, targeted principally at Transition Year students. Through interactive sessions and group work, the ‘Making a Difference’ programme explores different facets of volunteering including: the impact of volunteering on communities; the benefits for volunteers themselves; the different forms of volunteering; how to identify and access volunteering opportunities; and the potential barriers to volunteering. A notable feature of the programme is that it looks at the volunteering which many young people are already doing but which they may not regard as volunteering, such as coaching a football team. This is important in terms of recognising young people’s contribution to their communities, and in dispelling preconceptions about what constitutes volunteering.

The Making a Difference programme also links volunteering to young people’s interests and emphasises the fun aspect of volunteering, as the CVC Education Officer explained:



We have a couple of different activities that just help them think about who volunteers might be. You are getting across that volunteering should be fun - it shouldn't be an extra stress on your life. You start off with stuff that you are already interested in doing. So, if you are into sports, you might want to volunteer in a local club or, if you are interested in gardening, there might be a community garden in your area - that kind of thing. It should be based on your interests as much as you can.

Interactivity and group participation are key elements of the 4-week programme: students are encouraged to become active participants in their own learning.

Volunteering in Action

In addition to the four sessions in schools, the CVC Education Officer works with young people to access or develop volunteering opportunities that can be undertaken in the local community or in school. In 2022 CVC piloted a new initiative whereby students undertook an introduction to volunteering, and then planned and developed a bio-diversity garden in their school. With support from the CVC Education Officer and the school's horticultural teacher, students identified a location for the garden, developed worksheets, divided themselves into working groups, and undertook the work over several months. At the end of the year CVC awarded certificates to students who volunteered with the project. The feedback from both students and teachers was very positive. Young people liked the fact that it was a long-term project, and they were able to see the outcomes of their efforts. Teachers reported that the students enjoyed the practical nature of the project - it provided an opportunity for experiential learning that appealed to young people regardless of academic ability. Moreover, by locating the project in the school, it was possible to circumvent the barriers to volunteering often faced by young people under 18. Following the success of the pilot, CVC plans to make this programme available to other schools in the future.

STUDENTVOLUNTEER.IE

Background

Third level students make an important contribution to the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. Based on data from StudentVolunteer.ie, it is estimated that the annual economic value of student volunteering is €28.4 million (SVWG, 2021) while a study in one higher education institution (HEI) found that students volunteered with over a hundred organisations/initiatives across a range of sectors (Powell et al., 2018).

With the national survey of students in Ireland finding that 49% of students have already volunteered or plan to volunteer while in education (StudentSurvey.ie) there are significant opportunities to support and foster active community engagement. StudentVolunteer.ie was established across higher education to support students in their volunteering, to embed civic skills and to connect with Volunteer Involving Organisations for societal impact.

Volunteering Activities

Significant to the acknowledgement and growth in student volunteering over the past decade is the online HE management platform StudentVolunteer.ie. Designed in consultation with students, StudentVolunteer.ie was launched in 2016 as the first-ever online volunteer platform for students, HEIs and Volunteer Involving Organisations. The StudentVolunteer.ie portal provides:

- a one-stop shop, matching higher education students with volunteer opportunities;
- the opportunity for VIOs to showcase their volunteer opportunities; (currently over 300 organisations);
- an online process to apply for local Student Volunteer Awards;
- a tool for university-VIOs partnerships through volunteering.

Guided by a network of HE student volunteer practitioners, StudentVolunteer.ie enables recruitment, management and recognition of student volunteers. VIOs post their volunteering projects and can directly connect with students. Over 2,400 volunteer opportunities have been showcased on StudentVolunteer.ie.

Volunteering Training and Leadership

StudentVolunteer.ie enables volunteering through workshops, resource development and guidance. In addition to connecting with training and leadership opportunities in VIOs, students are volunteering within HEIs through Students' Unions, as student government is pivotal to student voice in decision-making, as well as through student sports clubs and special interest groups and societies, often taking on committee positions (SVWG, 2021). Across HEIs, students volunteer with mentoring programmes, educational Access programmes, and science outreach programmes, growing their skills. HEIs host annual volunteering fairs and acknowledge the contribution of student volunteers through institutional awards achieved through reflection tools with recognition ceremonies. Over 250,593 student volunteer hours have been recorded at StudentVolunteer.ie.

Volunteering Impact

The feedback that we've got from our own research and focus groups [with VIOs] is that these students are a vital, vital resource. They are involved in frontline services, fundraising, all sorts of activities across the spectrum, [such as] engaging with vulnerable youths to help them to overcome barriers in transitioning from second level to further and higher education. So a critical resource in local communities... what students are doing in their communities is phenomenal

(Campus Engage representative).

Find out more about how to share your volunteering opportunities with students by visiting: StudentVolunteer.ie and access the research at *The Value and Impact of Higher Education Student Volunteering in Ireland*, SVWG (2021).

