

# Youth volunteering in a recession

## Talking with young people

### Executive summary

#### Introduction

This report is the first strand of a National Youth Agency research project exploring the impact of the recession on young people's volunteering. The research was carried out as part of the NYA's work with the Office for Civil Society (OCS). The project set out to explore whether young people are more likely to volunteer now than before the recession, their motivations for volunteering and the role of volunteering as part of a pathway to employment. It also sought to consider whether volunteering could be seen as offering a lifeline to young people during and after a time of recession and conversely, whether the increased interest in volunteering among people of all ages may make it more difficult for young people, particularly the most marginalised, to find appropriate volunteering opportunities and support.

The research was carried out by Dubit Research for the National Youth Agency and used a variety of online methods to seek young people's views and experiences. These included an initial review of existing research and literature, four online focus groups with volunteers and non-volunteers in two age groups (13 to 15 and 16 to 19), four video diaries and reports produced by a selection of young volunteers and non-volunteers in two age groups (13 to 15 and 16 to 19) and an online survey of 1,500 13 to 19-year-olds across England.



## Key findings

- The young people's perception – particularly early on in the online discussions – was that the recession had had little direct impact on their lives. The impact was stronger on older people they knew. Direct immediate impact on young people was limited to having less money, prices going up and a perception of higher costs for education. Older participants felt it was more difficult to find a job (in most cases part-time or summer jobs).
- In spite of this, when asked about the possible future impact of the recession, young participants were quick to express their concerns. These focused on it becoming harder to find jobs in the future, when their time for active employment arrives. Most participants were pessimistic, and did not think that the 'crisis' would improve soon enough not to affect them.
- The strategies used to address the perceived increased competition for jobs included achieving higher qualifications and doing extra-curricular activities, such as work placements, work experience and volunteering.
- Around a fifth of young people agreed that the recession had changed their views of volunteering, in most cases towards being more aware of its benefits.
- Perceptions of volunteering were generally positive, but a significant proportion of young people think organisations are not interested in young people or what they have to offer. These views suggest a need to improve information about volunteering and also to improve the image of charities.
- For most young volunteers there had been altruistic motivations behind their volunteering: helping others, doing something for the community. But they had also done it for fun, experience and to make friends. For a minority motivations were personal development and improvement of their CV.
- The expectations young people had from volunteering varied for different age groups. The youngest were not expecting much back apart from basic training and appreciation. They did not expect subsistence such as travel expenses. Older young volunteers also mentioned that they expected some appreciation, to be treated as adults, and to be involved (for example, in taking decisions). They also expected to receive some training and recognition, but were not expecting any financial support, like travel expenses.
- Training and appreciation came out as the two most common expectations with over half of all respondents who had volunteered mentioning they expected these. One-in-three also expected to be involved in decision making and planning but this expectation was only met in around half of the cases. This meant that only around one-in-six volunteers were as involved as they wanted to be.
- The main skills gained through volunteering were 'social skills', self-confidence and teamwork skills. Volunteering provided useful contacts for around a third of young volunteers.



- Nearly two-thirds of young people who had volunteered had previously mentioned their volunteering experiences in some sort of application process. This was more common for further/higher education applications than for jobs. A quarter of employers or educators were very interested in the volunteering mentioned in job or course applications. Most young people who had never volunteered thought that mentioning volunteering in their CV could help in finding a job or getting into university.
- Around four in every five young people involved in this project were not currently volunteering. The main reasons were having 'lots to study' and 'not much spare time', followed by leaving the group/school where they volunteered. Only a small minority of previous volunteers had not enjoyed their volunteering experiences.
- Young people of different ages face different barriers to volunteering, with those under 16 feeling there were more barriers for them. The 13 to 15-year-olds complained of a lack of opportunities and little advertising or volunteering websites for their age.
- The 16 to 19-year-old non-volunteers thought that their time was required to find jobs or to study. This reveals a double-edge effect of the recession: it is important to 'stay above the competition' and volunteering is one way of achieving this, but young people may feel more reluctant to dedicate time to volunteering – especially if they have never tried it and have little awareness of its benefits.
- One-third of those who never volunteered said they could not find any volunteering opportunity they liked. This may indicate that there is some work to be done in understanding what sorts of opportunities could actually attract non-volunteers.
- The idea of alternative 'bite-size' volunteering opportunities, possibly done online and from home, was received with enthusiasm. Participants were clearly interested in knowing more about these. It seems important to offer 'bite-size' opportunities, in accessible formats (such as volunteering from home; flexible timetables; online forms of volunteering).
- In the majority of cases, the time young people had to wait from starting to look for volunteering until starting was short, with over two-fifths waiting just for up to one week. For one-fifth it took over a month.

The full report is available on the National Youth Agency website at [www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk)



## About the National Youth Agency

The National Youth Agency works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support and improve services for young people. Our particular focus is on youth work and we believe strongly that by investing in young people's personal and social development, young people are better able to live more active and fulfilling lives.

Working with young people, we advocate for more youth-friendly services and policies. We have four themes:

- Developing quality standards in work with young people
- Supporting services for young people
- Developing the youth workforce
- Promoting positive public perceptions of young people.

We deliver our work through training and consultancy, campaigning, publishing and online communications. Through our activities we want to ensure that young people have a strong voice and positive influence in our society.

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