



1—The benefits of volunteering

Volunteering is usually seen as helping others; giving something back to your community; doing your bit to bring about positive change. All this may be true, but you might be left wondering, “What’s in it for me?” Volunteering provides many benefits to the volunteer as well as to the people or situations the volunteer is helping.

Some of the benefits identified by young people who volunteer include:

- Building up self confidence
- Learning new skills
- Helping towards gaining employment or starting out on a career
- Meeting new people and making new friends
- Receiving certificates or rewards
- Experiencing satisfaction from having helped others
- Gaining respect and trust from others in the school or community
- Having fun!

What to expect as a volunteer:

Organisations and groups vary a lot, but there are some basic things that you should expect from any organisation once you become a volunteer. Usually they happen in this order:



Getting started

You are told about the organisation and how it works. This should cover things like health and safety, what to do if you have a problem and an introduction to other staff and volunteers.

Support while you are volunteering

It is important that you have a named supervisor who you can go to with any problems or questions.

Training to do the volunteering

The exact training you receive will depend on the role, but you will need at least basic training about the work that you will be doing.

Ongoing support

The organisation should talk to you regularly about whether you are happy and if there is anything more it can do to make your role easier or more interesting.

Expenses

You should have any out-of-pocket expenses paid, i.e. money you have spent to do the volunteering, e.g. travel expenses.



Ok – so you get lots of benefits from volunteering and support to carry out the help from the organisation.

But of course, it is only reasonable, that a group or organisation will also have certain expectations.

Volunteering responsibilities:

- To follow the group or organisations policies and procedures
- To be there at the agreed date and time
- Carry out the tasks you have been asked to do, but the ones that you are able to and have been trained to do; say no if necessary
- Respect the confidentiality of people in the group or organisation. Raise any issues or concerns that are worrying you, particularly if they affect your ability to carry out your tasks effectively.



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2—The benefits of volunteering



Mohammed's story

At 18, Mohammed felt inspired to volunteer. He recognised a need for a counselling service that understood the cultural and religious issues that faced many young British Muslims.

After carrying out some detailed research, he set up a confidential telephone service called the Muslim Youth Helpline (MYH).

'When I ran the pilot scheme, we only had six volunteers,' says Mohammed. 'Today we have around eighty people who work three hours or more per week.'

The volunteers are each trained in counselling skills and have since taken thousands of calls. Many are from people who suffer with depression and feel they're living a double life balancing pressures from their own community and Western society.

'You can't compare anything to the feeling you get when a young person says to you that they want to live another day because of the conversation they've just had with you,' Mohammed says.

As well as contributing to his community and society, Mohammed has also established a rewarding career path: 'It all benefits me enormously – I've learned so many new skills setting up this charity,' he says.



Mohammed received Whitbread's Young Community Achiever 2004 award for creating the helpline.

Yasser's story

Yasser is a supervisor on the Muslim Youth Helpline. He has done lots of different jobs there since he started helping out when he was 18 including helping out in the office, researching issues facing young people and being a trustee (helping to manage the organisation).

'I first got involved in the helpline because I believe that every day you should do something to help others. But I also really enjoy what I do. I have had lots of support and training including counselling, advising young people on drug abuse, and administration. We get such a wide variety of calls to the helpline that the really valuable learning has come from just doing the job – listening to, and advising, young people. It's also been great for my social life and I've been able to learn from other people and appreciate a wide range of views on all sorts of issues.'

The experience and training I've had here helped me with my university application, and my CV shows all the things I've done which will help me get summer jobs. It's been a great opportunity to work for an organisation that is run by young people for young people and where else would you get the chance to be a trustee of an organisation at only 18? I would recommend volunteering to

anyone. It's given me a great start to my career and lots of new experiences. I now feel I have the power to help others and with that power to help comes responsibility. I know I'll keep on volunteering!"

Getting started

There are many opportunities for young people to become involved in volunteering. Some of these may be available through school or local youth clubs.

Local Volunteer Bureaux are local organisations that can help you find volunteer vacancies in your area. There are also online databases listing thousands of volunteering opportunities.

www.volunteering.org.uk provides a database that can be searched by area of interest and postcode. You can also locate your nearest Volunteer Bureau through this site.

Further information

For more information on finding a volunteering opportunity that is right for you visit the website www.do-it.org.