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## Managing volunteers - the essentials

### Factsheet 3 - Involving Young Volunteers

#### 1. Why involve young people as volunteers?

Tower Hamlets has one of the largest and fastest growing youth populations in the country. Young people are a valuable resource that volunteer-involving organisations cannot afford to overlook. There are a number of very good reasons for involving younger people in your organisation:

- they bring a fresh, youthful perspective
- they often have plenty of energy, enthusiasm and stamina
- they may be able to reach clients that older volunteers cannot reach as effectively, especially their peers
- many clients appreciate help from young people
- you will be building a solid foundation for the future, as they may volunteer for several years
- you will be implementing your equal opportunities policy
- you will enable younger members of the community to become active citizens and to gain much needed work experience.

#### 2. What motivates young people to volunteer?

There are a number of common reasons why many young people in Tower Hamlets volunteer:

- to help people and make a contribution to their community
- to gain work experience and improve their employability
- to develop new skills and/or receive training
- to complement their academic qualifications
- to be recognised for their contribution (through references, certificates and awards)
- to meet people, make friends and have fun
- to fill their spare time doing something useful
- to turn their lives around if they have made poor choices in the past



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### 3. Good practice in working with young volunteers

A high quality volunteering experience helps young volunteers achieve their goals and enables them to make positive contributions. There are some important issues you should be aware of when relating to young people, particularly those who are under 18 years old.

#### 3.1. Legal restrictions on employing young people

While there are legal restrictions on employing young people, they do not generally apply to young volunteers. However, it is a good idea to be aware of the following restrictions.

Section 18 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 limits employment to those aged 14 and over, in order to protect young people from child labour. It states that children may not be employed before 7am or after 7pm on any day, or for more than 2 hours on schooldays or Sundays. The legislation also requires children to have at least 2 consecutive weeks free from work during school holidays. The Act states that “a person who assists in a trade or occupation carried on for profit shall be deemed to be employed notwithstanding that he receives no reward for his labour”.

Many local authorities (councils) have bye-laws that further restrict the paid work that young people can do. Some of them have defined “for profit” to include charity shops, and require organisations running them to apply for child employment permits for any young volunteers. In Tower Hamlets you can check the current bye-laws relating to the employment of school-age children by contacting the Child Employment Team at the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. In addition to legislation governing employment, young people of compulsory school age are not permitted to volunteer during school hours without the permission of their school.

#### 3.2. Parental Permission

You should always seek consent from a parent or guardian when involving a young volunteer. Technically, parents are responsible for their children until the age of 18, but the nature and extent of this responsibility is blurred between 16 and 18. If you want to be on the safe side, you should seek parental consent for any volunteer under the age of 18.

It is important that the young volunteer and their parent/guardian fully understand what the volunteering involves. Parents in Tower Hamlets are much more likely to support their children in their volunteering if they understand your project’s aims, and can see that you will take good care of their children. Make sure that you provide them with information about any time commitments, the location of the volunteering, the tasks to be performed, and how the young volunteer will be supervised and checks conducted on adults working with their children and other Safeguarding measures.



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Think about having this information translated into community languages for parents that do not read English, and about encouraging parents to come along to your events, or even the young volunteer's first session. That way, they can reassure themselves that you are a reputable, respectable organisation, and they will be proud that their children volunteer with you.

### 3.2. Health and safety and the Duty of Care

Section 3 of the Children Act 1989 places a "duty of care" on organisations that involve young people. Organisations must legally do "what is reasonable for the purpose of safeguarding or promoting the child's welfare". There is an enhanced duty of care towards young volunteers, reflecting their relative immaturity. Any risk assessments should not take responsible behaviour for granted. Organisations must consider the need for increased supervision, and for more explicit instructions and guidance.

Under Health and Safety legislation, risk assessments specific to the individual must be carried out before someone under 18 can be employed. This legislation does not specify young volunteers, who are different to young employees, but it is always good practice to carry out regular, comprehensive risk assessments when working with young volunteers. For more information see the Health and Safety Executive website - [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) - or contact VCTH for advice on risk assessing volunteer roles.

### 3.3. Insurance

Young volunteers must always be insured. People under the age of 16 or 18 may not be automatically be covered by your existing insurance policies, so it is worth reviewing these with your insurers to establish that you have adequate cover. For more information, see the factsheet on Insurance for Volunteers available from [www.vctth.org.uk](http://www.vctth.org.uk)

### 3.4. Child Protection Policies

Organisations that involve young volunteers should put a Child Protection Policy in place. The contents of your policy will depend somewhat on the work your organisation does. As a minimum, the policy should set out adequate safeguards around day-to-day working practices, how complaints can be made, procedures for dealing with problems, and recruitment procedures for paid staff that work with young volunteers.

If you employ paid staff or involve adult volunteers in "caring for, training, supervising, or being in sole charge of children" (under 18s) as part of their normal duties, they are considered to be in "regulated positions" under the Criminal



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Justice and Court Services Act 2000. You will need to consider obtaining Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures for staff or adult volunteers who work in such roles with young volunteers. For more information on CRB disclosures, see the Home Office website [www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk/](http://www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk/) or contact VCTH for further advice.

### 3.5. Inappropriate Tasks For Young Volunteers

Young volunteers may be more vulnerable than adult volunteers. There are therefore some tasks that may be inappropriate for young volunteers including:

- making unaccompanied home visits to clients' homes
- certain types of fundraising, for example conducting house-to-house collections
- physically demanding work
- certain types of advice work
- lone working
- overly repetitive tasks with little opportunity for learning or development

### 3.6. Involving Young People as Trustees

The Charities Commission recognise that “Young people are under-represented on the boards of charities. Their experience, perspective and enthusiasm mean they have a great deal to contribute, and not just to charities 'for' young people. There are 11 million children under 18 in England. There are 180,000 registered charities in England and Wales, with nearly 850,000 trustees, but less than 4,500 of those trustees (less than 1%) are under 25”.

They have recently published a research report, *A Breath of Fresh Air: young people as charity trustees, (2010)* which identifies potential solutions to the barriers that prevent more young people taking up and retaining trustee positions. For further guidance on how to successfully involve young people as trustees visit [www.charity-commission.gov.uk/About\\_us/About\\_charities/under18scc30.aspx](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/About_us/About_charities/under18scc30.aspx)

## 4. Other issues to consider

### 4.1. Balancing education and volunteering

Many young volunteers in Tower Hamlets are in full-time or part-time education at school, college or university. It is essential to build in some flexibility to volunteering roles for young people, so that they can maintain a healthy balance between their education and their volunteering commitments. For example, revision and course work will quite rightly become a priority and restrict availability for volunteering during term-time or exam periods (often late spring and early summer).

On the other hand, many young volunteers have plenty of free time during their summer holidays, when they may even be able to volunteer full-time for several



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weeks. It is always helpful to ask the young volunteer to consider their time availability and any academic pressures at the start of their volunteering involvement. You can help them to be realistic about their commitments by asking them to start out volunteering for a small number of hours, and increasing commitments gradually, if they feel able. This will reduce the likelihood of them leaving suddenly, or having the negative experience of feeling that they have failed. A good tip for negotiating time commitment is to ask the volunteer to think about how many hours s/he wants to volunteer each month, and then halve this number.

### 4.2. Family commitments

In Tower Hamlets, there are significant numbers of young people who are the main English-speaker in their household. This can mean that some of your young volunteers will have considerable responsibility for liaising with schools, GPs and social services on behalf of their parents and younger siblings. Family obligations are likely to be prioritised, impacting on volunteering commitments. Try to be understanding, flexible and supportive. Remember that young volunteers with this level of domestic responsibility are likely to bring a level of maturity and life experience to their volunteering that even some of your adult volunteers may lack.

### 4.3. Young Volunteers' Finances

Most young people survive on very low incomes. Some young volunteers will be living on welfare benefits, earnings from poorly paid part-time jobs, or they may live with their parents and have no income of their own. Others are parents themselves and have young children to support. Volunteers in these situations cannot wait until the end of the month, or even the end of the week, to be reimbursed their expenses. This makes the prompt reimbursement in cash of expenses for travel, meals and childcare absolutely vital. Remember that not all young people are confident asking for things, so you may need to remind them to claim their expenses.

### 4.4. The wrong side of town?

Volunteers of all ages can be reluctant to travel outside the borough, or even from one part of Tower Hamlets to another. Understandably, some people feel physically and emotionally safer staying in areas and communities that they know well. This can be an advantage if you need volunteers with very local knowledge or connections. However, you may find that some young volunteers are nervous about coming to your organisation for the first time, especially if you are in an area unfamiliar to them. Many volunteers don't use A-Z maps, so they may need very specific directions, or you may like to send them map before they come to see you. You should also bear in mind that some young volunteers, particularly young men, may be apprehensive about venturing into particular gang territories.



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## 5.5. Recruitment and Retention

Most of the usual advice on volunteer recruitment and retention applies to young volunteers, but here are a few specific tips:

- Make sure that your adverts target young people by looking appealing and appearing in the right places or publications
- Respond quickly to any enquiries about your volunteering opportunities, as many young people will give up and move on if they don't hear back from you within 48 hours
- Be approachable, welcoming and young-people friendly
- Keep formality and bureaucracy to a minimum, but offer a purposeful environment with some structure
- Have short task descriptions for your volunteering roles, so that it is clear what is on offer
- Make any applications forms as short as possible. Never ask for CVs
- If you hold formal interviews, include another young volunteer on the panel, and make it friendly
- If the young volunteer needs to undergo a CRB disclosure, explain this to them and help them to complete the form
- Make the volunteering flexible and varied. Try to respond to their lifestyles and interests.
- Some young volunteers will be experiencing a workplace environment and culture for the first time. Many things that adults take for granted, such as timekeeping, meeting etiquette or using a diary will be completely new to them Explain any systems or expectations at induction
- Offer as much support and training as you can. Most young volunteers will be keen to attend training courses, especially those that provide certificates or accreditation that they can add to their portfolios
- Talk to them about their aspirations and jointly identify progression routes, so that they don't get stuck in a rut doing the same thing. If they are bored, they are likely to leave
- Thank them for their contribution and recognise their achievements
- Provide references once young volunteers have spent a reasonable amount of time with your organisation