

“Walk beside me, and be my friend”

**Framework for volunteer involvement for
youth ages 15 to 19 in Montérégie.**

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Loisir et Sport Montérégie

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The logo for Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag icon above the letter "a".

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“Walk beside me, and be my friend”

Introduction

The purpose of this framework is to help the community close the gap between young people’s willingness to express their needs, demands and hopes, and the means and structures society offers for this purpose, and thereby prevent citizen disengagement.

The objective is to enable Montérégie’s municipalities, schools, and sports and recreational associations – important places for youth experience and training – to create ideal conditions for mobilization, intake and support, with a view to encouraging youth to take ownership of their own volunteering. This framework sets out youth’s reasons and expectations, as well as the barriers, with regard to volunteering and proposes values, principles, attitudes and behaviours that organizations ought to take into consideration. These factors emerged from our study conducted in Montérégie – the results of which are set out in tables throughout the document – as well as a review of the vast amount of literature on the topic.

It is our hope that this document will encourage innovation, communication and cooperation between youth and those in charge of organizations. We wish to encourage stakeholders to create an environment that will enable all young people to be at the centre of their own recreational volunteer work and to give them the opportunity to participate in the community, to be heard, listened to and recognized.

Society’s need to involve youth in volunteerism is clear. Even if much has changed in thirty years, volunteerism remains a major vector of self-esteem and recognition, without which it is difficult or even impossible, to be a productive member of society.

Young people, however, are not always comfortable in a world that is planned and managed by adults. Youth’s field of action is not necessarily the same as adults’ who do not always understand how youth express themselves. Young people are seeking their own experiences in their own way. Many of them wish to become involved in projects that are meaningful to them and beneficial to others but struggle to find the right niche for realizing their aspirations. Moreover, the information that could help them channel their energy is often scattered and obscure. The support and advice that would enable them to build on their experience and make it a tool for personal growth and accomplishment are often missing. What’s more, their efforts in this area are not adequately recognized, whether at school or in society in general. Statistics show, however, that young people with volunteer experience are more likely to volunteer as adults.

However, if much of the research refers to youth’s motivations for involvement as volunteers and the obstacles they encounter, very little research addresses the perspective of organizations and institutions regarding volunteer involvement of youth.

A Framework: Why, For Whom and How?

Why a reference framework?

A great deal is said about youth's inclination towards business, their consumerist behaviour and scant involvement as volunteers. Yet, many young people today display the desire to become involved in projects that are meaningful to them and beneficial to others. All these young people wish to participate in a meaningful way in programs that are of concern to them. The message is clear. Youth want to be in charge of their recreational and social activities in their communities in the broad sense: school, the city, sports and recreational associations. Nonetheless, youth involvement in the sense of [translation] "all action by a young person directed towards others and the life of the city" (Teinturier, 2000, p. 24) has developed considerably in the last thirty or so years. If for a very long time, involvement was only basically political, today it does not necessarily occur through political organizations, or even through associations at all. It takes much more personalized forms, which nonetheless does not mean individualistic. There has been, in fact, a shift in the ways to invest in society.

Moreover, the systems, programs and services in place to welcome, support and recognize youth participation in the community have occasionally been shown to be ill-suited to the task. Certainly, it is difficult for the highly structured organizational cultures of schools, municipal environments and associations to become more welcoming to youth; their operating procedures cannot be challenged and changed overnight. Besides the misconceptions they encounter, organizations have not adapted to the conditions for involving today's youth, whose pattern of involvement is different from that of their elders.

This framework is, therefore, an essential support tool for community stakeholders as they adjust their approaches, strategies and programs to today's youth. They will be better able to meet the challenges facing young people and with the community as well as youth deriving lasting benefit from their participation in community life.

What is the intended audience of this framework?

This reference framework is intended for various stakeholders in the community likely to engage and support youth volunteering. It is essential to develop young people's participation and involvement in various segments of society, starting through school and the classroom but also through student councils and educational activities outside of school. Young people can also become involved in volunteering in other communities, since the city, neighbourhood and village are the places that are closest to citizens and consequently, to young people. Youth involvement can also occur in associations; the wealth of human resources and range of activities are formidable tools for developing youth volunteerism and enabling young people to blossom. There are numerous fields for them to explore: sports, youth movement, culture, the environment, humanitarian work, and outreach and citizen participation.

Methodology

This approach is based on a three-step action research process. In the first step, we conducted a literature search and analysis of scientific literature and the policy trends of institutions and associations. It also included exploratory interviews with key stakeholders with experience in mobilizing and integrating *Loisir et Sport Montérégie* youth volunteers. The purpose of these interviews was

to determine the conditions, and perceptual and organizational barriers to youth involvement. The information drawn from the analysis of the literature was used to develop a tool (questionnaire) for consulting groups targeted by this research.

The second step was using the questionnaire for consultation on the perceptions, ideal conditions and barriers to involving and supporting young volunteers. In all, over 80 educational and municipal institutions, non-profit, and sport organizations and approximately 220 young people, volunteers and non-volunteers, were consulted.

The third step was a discussion group. Participants were prevailed upon to discuss and take a position, first individually, and were then regrouped into samples that were representative of the five groups of the field of study (volunteer and non-volunteer youth, non-profit organizations, recreation and sports, municipal, school). These exchanges pertained to intake, support, and performance conditions likely desired by each group. Finally, they debated the courses of action to be taken for solutions to satisfy each group.

Volunteerism and Volunteerism in Recreational Activities, Seen by Youth and Host Organizations: Different Realities

Volunteers in general and volunteers in recreational activities in particular

In all the areas where volunteers work, recreation and culture are those that attract the greatest number of volunteers. In Canada, the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP), conducted by the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy in 2000, counted 6,513,000 volunteers, 30% of whom were active in the recreation sector whether in sports, the outdoors, art or culture. It was estimated that in Quebec in 2000, there were 359,000 volunteers in recreation and 51 million hours of volunteering.

Volunteering in the recreation sector contributes to the quality of life of citizens and communities and gives satisfaction to those taking part. In addition, because recreational volunteerism demonstrates that the community is taking ownership for its development this type of volunteerism is itself an indicator of the quality of a community's social capital (Thibault and Fortier, 2003, p 325).

But what is it that motivates people to volunteer and above all, what makes them continue? In fact, according to Henderson (1980), their motivation level depends on the intensity of their needs and the degree of satisfaction they expect. Other studies, including Street's (1994) and Godbout's analysis (1995) on reciprocity, show that the reasons given today for volunteer involvement go beyond the "altruistic". This simply means that the concept of "exchange" would be at the core of volunteerism. Street adds, in following his line of reasoning, that

[translation] “all volunteering, even altruistic, assumes an exchange of some sort.”

Henderson’s studies (1980, 1981, 1984, 1985), Arai’s (2000) and Stebbins’ (2000) on recreational volunteers’ motivation take up essentially the same arguments. They highlight the expectations of accomplishment (need to accomplish something), power (mastery) and belonging (relationships with others) that are part of the recreational experience; in this case volunteerism is considered a recreational activity.

In addition, volunteerism is increasingly considered good for professional advancement. According to the NSGVP (2000), more than 1 volunteer in 5 (23%) acknowledge doing volunteer work to improve their professional opportunities. This is more frequently the case of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 (55%).

The main reasons for volunteering differ according to age. Young people have the greatest desire to gain skills related to work, while older people are more motivated by contributing to social causes (Volunteer Canada, 2001).

Youth and recreational volunteering

The number of hours of volunteering performed by young Canadians ages 15 to 24 is shrinking. According to the National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participation, this rate has gone from 33% in 1997 to 29% in 2000. During this time, the number of hours of volunteering in the rest of the population increased, going from 125 hours in 1997 to 130 hours in 2000. Youth are mostly involved in education and research (23% of volunteer work), social services (20% of volunteer work) and the arts, culture, recreation and sports (20% of volunteer

work). This means that volunteer involvement in recreation occupies an important place among activities valued by youth.

Nonetheless, this social capital cannot be taken for granted; it is shrinking and requires attention. The necessary increase in volunteerism, an act of citizenship among young people, will not occur without new recruiting, intake, integration and support efforts.

According to Leduc (2003), young people do not have a real and significant place in our society and have never been such a small minority in the population. The integration of youth in volunteer environments requires openness and adaptation, as youth need a different kind of support. “In most cases, organizations will extend existing volunteer positions to young people without taking the time and resources needed to craft something youth-specific. In other cases, organizations are reluctant to involve youth as volunteers given the difference they bring in attitude, availability and interests.” (Volunteer Canada, 2001, p. 5)

However, young volunteers and organizations may benefit one another. According to data from Statistics Canada (Jones, 2000), volunteer involvement enables youth to acquire knowledge and improve their human relations and communication skills. It also enables them to receive training in organizational and management skills. Still according to Jones (2000), statistics show that people who have positive volunteerism experiences early in life are more inclined to be involved as adults.

In addition, young people bring a fresh, energetic outlook to organizations and the activities in which they take part, and the organizations that recruit them often derive numerous benefits. Young people are generally open, curious and enthusiastic. In addition, they must be able to put their own stamp on their involvement. In short, “their opinions and input can help voluntary organizations adapt to change and be prepared to meet the needs of the future.” (Volunteer Canada, 2001, p. 13).

According to a study carried out in 1998 in the United Kingdom (Gaskin, 1998, p. 9), youth primarily seek the following qualities in volunteer activities:

- 1) Flexibility: they seek spontaneity and choices in volunteering;
- 2) Legitimacy: information on the scope and importance of the volunteer job;
- 3) Ease of access: more information and easy access points;
- 4) Experience: enriching, interesting and relevant activities;
- 5) Encouragement: tangible rewards, especially references;
- 6) Variety: opportunities to satisfy their own interests and to achieve their goals;
- 7) Organization: efficient but friendly, relaxed, positive atmosphere;
- 8) Humour: makes the job pleasant, satisfying and fun.

Organizations, institutions and youth volunteerism

Organizations like municipalities, educational institutions, and recreational and sports associations face obstacles that complicate welcoming youth volunteers. These obstacles can be organizational (work timetables, availability of management) or procedural (liability insurance for young people).

Welcoming young people requires flexibility, which may be incompatible with some organizations' programs and procedures. In addition, welcoming

young people requires special support and coaching, which require an investment in time – something the employees of an organization don't always have. Youth in fact, have specific needs which must be taken into account.

An organization's leaders face many challenges, including their own fear of young people, due to simple misunderstanding of their situations and needs. They must also ensure the cooperation of the organization's other volunteers and employees in addition to managing the intergenerational dynamics, which is not always easy. Let's add to these difficulties the lack of room in some organizations to appropriately accommodate young volunteers.

Ideal Conditions for Involving Youth in Recreational Volunteering

Adolescence: a process

It is important to specify right from the start that adolescence is a process and not a state (Teinturier B. 2000, p. 12). This is a period of transition and development during which young people are seeking a certain balance. Adolescents go through a phase of gradual discovery of the adult world through family, school and friends. This time is full of hope but it is also one of turbulence and contradictions.

The adolescent wavers between autonomy and dependence. The teen would like adults to give him or her independence and at the same time, recognizes the importance of their support. The adolescent wants a job that would allow him or her to earn some money but does not want this job to become the centre of his or her life nor to give life its entire sense of purpose. Teens are often seen as being individualists but they also love to be sociable and want to be in the midst of their friends as often as possible.

In our survey, we note that no reason for becoming involved in and pursuing recreational volunteering clearly stands out among young people. We observe in the table on pages 17 and 18 that the averages of the 5 main reasons for becoming involved for young people in Montérégie range between 2.9 and 2.8 out of 4 (where 1 represents “never” and 4 “always”). The averages of the main reasons for continuing their volunteering ranged from 2.7 to 2.5 out of 4 (where 1 represents “never” and 4 “always”). By way of comparison, among adult volunteers polled during the survey conducted by the *Laboratoire en loisir et vie communautaire* in 2001 (Thibault, 2002), the averages of the main reasons range from 3.6 and

3.1 (out of 4) for the reasons for volunteering and between 3.4 and 3.1 (out of 4) for continuing their volunteer work. Young people’s less differentiated and personalized answers may reflect their stage of adolescent development in which they are, “trying to find themselves.” Young people may not identify with volunteering, a term often associated with mutual assistance and giving of oneself. It appears that the perception of volunteerism is not very exact among youth. Immediate education in this regard appears to be quite necessary.

Volunteering: a search for balance

In his or her active citizenship, the volunteer is seeking a balance between the following: responding to his or her motivation, expectations and interests; coming to the aid of a social or community cause; accomplishing a useful and realistic task for which he or she expects a certain amount of support; performing this task in a pleasant setting; meeting the needs of users in the time he or she has available (Thibault and Fortier, 2003). The predominance, absence or inconsistency of one of these factors disrupts the balance. In these circumstances, either volunteering loses its relevance or volunteers disengage. This quest for balance is sought by volunteers of all ages.

Moreover, some research confirms the ephemeral nature of youth involvement. Efforts to bring together ideal conditions while respecting the passage from adolescence should probably lead young people to a more lasting involvement in volunteering.

Some activities, especially those related to community involvement, attract more young volunteers. Young people see being involved in recreational clubs or student associations as easy and natural (Sofres,

2002). Let us add that youth prefer to be involved in spontaneous, short-term events and activities, particularly for lending a hand.

Main Obstacles to Youth Involvement in Volunteering in General

Time

Youth say they don't have time for volunteering. It must be said that most young people from 15 to 19 years of age are in school and many of them work part-time. They are afraid of involvement that will take over, to the detriment of their own lives. A commitment is total for young people; when they get involved, they put all the energy they have to into it.

Money

Young people want to be financially independent and have the means to buy the things they want. For this reason, they need to earn money (Royer, Pronovost and Charbonneau, 2004). For young people, income from work enables them to fulfill themselves and achieve happiness. We note that in Canada, many Canadian-born youth work while they are students and do so basically to cover their personal expenses (Belleau and Le Gall, 2004).

However, it should be noted that young people are not trying to obtain privileges or rewards in exchange for their involvement in the community. They are primarily seeking to be helpful.

Interest

Young people lack interest in volunteering because they do not seem to consider community involvement an important value. One may wonder if the term "volunteer" concerns youth and if they see a pejorative connotation. We know that the term is not

seen positively by young people who associate it with ideologies from the 50s or 60s (Teinturier, 2000).

To create interest in young people with regard to community involvement, vocabulary should be adapted to their reality so that they feel more called upon. For example, we could talk about "active citizenship", "community involvement", "citizen participation" – terms that resonate more favourably with young ears today.

Information

There are numerous groups and associations for which youth can volunteer; the only problem is choosing. That said, the information that could help young people make a choice is scattered, to say nothing of obscure. Promotion of volunteer opportunities in schools, posting ads in places frequented by young people and word of mouth among friends seem to be good means of communicating with youth.

Abilities

The lack of self-confidence, fear of the unknown and low self-esteem (Teinturier, 2000) feed young people's doubts regarding their abilities as volunteers. Youth, in fact, have the idea that it is difficult to become part of society. Additionally, according to some ambient discourse, volunteers must necessarily bring skills or know-how to the host association or institution (Sofres, 2002), which contributes to young peoples apprehension. We must remember that knowledge, people skills and know-how are often prerequisites for any undertaking.

Once youth agree to get involved, it is difficult for them to participate as equals with adults since youth are often in the minority (token youth delegates). They

find themselves passed by as they really don't know what is expected of them or what they are able to accomplish as members of an organization. Like all volunteers, young people need to feel that they are part of the organization, that there is confidence in them and that they are useful.

Others' prejudices

Adults occupy a dominant position in volunteering and often have prejudices against youth. Even if young people do not themselves fit the image conveyed by the media (Valade, Petit and Zalc, 2003), these prejudices feed their fears of not being taken seriously. Adults' preconceived notions about youth hinder cooperation between them and especially young people's participation in the decisions related to program planning and delivery of services that could be intended for them.

In addition, adults occasionally have unrealistic expectations of youth, as they do not have the same objectives. These differences create tension which makes cooperation difficult. These attitudes increase young people's lack of confidence regarding their involvement and effectiveness. It would therefore seem important for youth and adults to get to know one another early on and then recognize their respective merits.

Organizational factors

A number of organizational factors can frustrate the integration of young volunteers in organizations. Red tape, lack of resources or simply lack of room are all factors that can demobilize youth. Gaps between generations and cultures, resistance to change on the part of adults and logistical factors (location of the organization and lack of transportation for young people) are other not insignificant barriers.

Reasons for Becoming Involved and Continuing Recreational Volunteering

Being with friends and socializing

Youth spend three times as much time with their friends as the rest of the population and friendship is a more important value than family for youth of Canadian origin (Belleau and Le Gall, 2004). The peer group fulfills the function of basic sociability, by addressing the need to belong, facilitating contacts and exchanges as well as the sharing of common values and preferences. In fact, it is most often a friend who brings along another to become involved in an association (Gauthier, Gravel and Brouillette, 2004). That being said, while it is important for them to do their volunteering among friends, young people do not only become involved in order to make friends.

Teenagers are, in fact, open to new environments, new networks and new people. This enables them in part to escape the traditional frameworks of childhood – school and family – and thereby develop independently. They feel the need to belong to a group within which they can have fun. Young people place the most importance on social activities including going out.

Being helpful

Youth become involved in order to be helpful and not in return for money or privileges. They are particularly interested in the forms of involvement geared toward helping others that best meet their needs for belonging, closeness and immediate social benefit (Gauthier, Gravel and Brouillette, 2004). They want to help others above all else.

Table 1: Comparison of Main Barriers to Youth Volunteer Involvement in Montérégie, According to Young People and Leaders of Organizations

Barriers to involvement in volunteer work	Youth Rank (out of 14) Average (out of 4)	Organizations Rank (out of 14) Average (out of 4)
<i>Lack of time in general</i>	(1) 2.8	(3) 2.6
<i>I need to earn money</i>	(2) 2.3	(1) 3.0
<i>Lack of interest in getting involved</i>	(3) 2.3	(4) 2.6
<i>The fact that volunteering does not correspond to my interests</i>	(4) 2.1	(6) 2.5
<i>Lack of transportation</i>	(5) 2.0	(5) 2.5
<i>Lack of time because I work</i>	(6) 2.0	(2) 2.8

It is interesting to note the differing answers given by youth and the organizations regarding the barriers to youth involvement in volunteering. The lack of time in general is the first barrier given by young people, then second, their need to earn money. As for the organizations, young people's need to earn money is given as the greatest obstacle followed by the lack of time due to a job.

In addition, the organizations do not at all seem to question what they have to offer youth, while young people specify that volunteering does not correspond to their interests. Is this divergence between the answers given by youth and those in charge of organizations due to a lack of harmony between what organizations are offering and young people's interests or to the negative perception that youth seem to have of the word "volunteerism"?

At the very least, this divergence tends to confirm a misconception regarding youth and their needs on the part of organizations which seem to view them as consumers to a greater degree than they actually are.

Personal development and learning

Young people clearly show a desire to assert themselves and to learn (Pronovost and Charbonneau, 2004), just as they place great importance on their personal satisfaction, the esteem and pride that community involvement bring. Therefore, they become involved first of all, for personal fulfillment and development.

Youth also place importance on acquiring new knowledge and seeking diversity in their experiences. These experiences must, above all, be enriching, interesting and relevant, and offer them the means to develop and put into practice the values and knowledge they have acquired, enabling them to mature.

For example, a group of teens in the rural municipality of Upton, in Montérégie, wanted a multi-use surface for recreation and sports activities, including skateboarding and in-line skating. A leader provided them with specific support, guiding them in their project. This enabled the young people to visit three existing parks in Montérégie and gain expertise in this area by joining forces with a group carrying out a similar project in the region. This alliance enabled the young people to obtain plans to build three modules themselves. The group collected nearly \$12,000 in sponsorships as well as \$2,000 through fundraising and is currently involved in the design and construction of the modules. Finally, by their taking ownership, the young people demonstrated their desire and ability to participate in their personal development.

Enjoyment

Youth become involved for enjoyment, enjoyment that they want immediately (Assogba, 2004). They hope to work in an organization that includes humour, making the task at hand more pleasant, satisfying and fun.

According to young people, the ideal organization would have a supportive environment and a friendly, relaxed and stimulating atmosphere where they would feel good and enjoy doing their job.

The ability to express themselves and be heard

Youth want to become involved as volunteers if they have the opportunity to take responsibility, exercise leadership and participate in a significant fashion in the decisions concerning them. So, in their involvement, young people first of all want space where they can express themselves and be heard, that they can be in charge of and where they'll have rights. Paradoxically, they show little interest in being on an organization's board of directors, a form of involvement they perceive as being too abstract, static and ineffective. They prefer concrete involvement where they can express their ideas and carry out projects, and where their imaginations are used to advantage and valued, while fostering freedom, effectiveness and togetherness.

Support and supervision

It is clear that youth need support from those in authority in an organization in carrying out their projects. Like any other volunteers, young people prefer that time be taken to integrate, trust, and guide them. They need to feel safe and trusted while having adequate freedom, autonomy and respect from those in charge. For that matter, the title of this document properly illustrates the type of support and supervision youth are looking for: “walk beside me and be my friend”.

Recognition of young volunteers

According to youth, the best ways to recognize their involvement are: 1) thanks from the organizers or directors; 2) respect on a daily basis; 3) thanks from a participant in the activity; 4) support and appropriate training, enabling them to feel respected, valued and appreciated.

Youth are not necessarily interested in pay or other privileges in return for their volunteer involvement. Encouragement in the form of tangible rewards, especially in the form of references, is often appreciated.

Recruitment of young volunteers

Leaders of organizations cry out about the difficulty of recruiting youth. That said, according to young people, the three main topics to address in a recruitment conversation are: 1) the required task; 2) the cause the organization serves; and 3) the length of the commitment.

The length of the commitment appears more important for young people than for the adults who participated in the *Laboratoire en loisir et vie communautaire* survey (2001) (Thibault, 2002) and who ranked this topic 9th.

Table 2: Comparison of the Main Reasons Youth Become Involved in Recreational Volunteering in Montérégie, According to Young People and Leaders of the Organizations

Reasons for becoming involved in volunteering	Youth Rank (out of 19) Average (out of 4)	Organizations Rank (out of 19) Average (out of 4)
<i>Doing something that makes me proud</i>	(1) 2.9	(2) 3.1
<i>Being useful</i>	(2) 2.9	(6) 2.9
<i>Have new experiences</i>	(3) 2.9	(4) 2.9
<i>Serving a cause I believe in</i>	(4) 2.8	(3) 2.9
<i>Acquiring new knowledge and skills</i>	(5) 2.8	(13) 2.6
<i>Enjoyment</i>	(6) 2.8	(1) 3.1
<i>Improving my chances to find a job</i>	(7) 2.6	(12) 2.6
<i>Feeling useful</i>	(8) 2.9	(5) 2.9

No reason clearly stands out in youth's main reasons for volunteering, especially among young peoples whose averages of the 5 main reasons vary between 2.9 and 2.8. In addition, answers given by youth and organizations differ. Young people mainly seek acquiring new knowledge, a reason that organizations appear to underestimate, if they see it at all, according greater importance to enjoyment, which seems to be an adult reason, since youth only rank it sixth.

It is interesting to observe that despite their need to earn money, cited among the main barriers to their doing volunteer work, young people do not become involved in order to obtain something in return (money or privilege), which was ranked last (out of 19) among their reasons for becoming involved.

Table 3: Comparison of the Main Reasons Youth Continue Being Involved in Recreational Volunteering in Montérégie, According to Young People and Leaders of the Organizations

Reasons for becoming involved in volunteering	Youth Rank (out of 19) Average (out of 4)	Organizations Rank (out of 19) Average (out of 4)
<i>Enjoyment</i>	(1) 2.7	(1) 3.3
<i>Acquiring new knowledge and skills</i>	(2) 2.7	(12) 2.8
<i>Success in what I undertake</i>	(3) 2.7	(4) 3.1
<i>Autonomy in what I do</i>	(4) 2.6	(7) 3.0
<i>Feeling useful</i>	(5) 2.5	(3) 3.2
<i>Being with friends</i>	(6) 2.5	(5) 3.0
<i>Being able to give my opinion</i>	(7) 2.4	(8) 2.9
<i>Feeling respected</i>	(9) 2.4	(2) 3.2
<i>Feeling personal growth</i>	(8) 2.4	(10) 2.8

In pursuing volunteer work, youth place great importance on enjoyment, learning, success and autonomy in comparison to those in charge of organizations who favour enjoyment, respect, usefulness and success.

Once again, these results reveal no specific reason for young people's involvement. It is more a set of reasons that appears to make them continue. This tends to confirm the idea that volunteer work is based on the search for a balance of a group of factors (Thibault and Fortier, 2003). The predominance, lack or unconformity of one of these factors disrupts the balance. In this case, either the volunteering loses its relevance or the volunteer disengages. For organizations, the challenge consists then in ensuring the right balance.

Finally, it appeared to us during our research that young people do not have a very clear perception of volunteering, and that this perception is very often quite different from that of adults. Education in this regard appears to be absolutely necessary so that youth and organizations speak the same language.

Courses of action for organizations

Young people are searching for meaning in their experiences. They must be able to express their tastes and aspirations through positive volunteering experiences, in instances of power that allow them to experience their undertaking at the volunteer and community levels. These experiences must offer them the opportunity to satisfy their own interests, to strengthen their sense of responsibility and to achieve their goals.

The previous chapter identified the barriers and reasons for volunteer involvement by youth. On the basis of these data, here are a few areas for reflection to guide organizations and institutions in establishing ideal conditions for involving youth.

a. Demonstrate openness

Youth must be considered partners by society, and the individuals and organizations that form it, even if this is seldom practiced in today's culture. Working with youth volunteers requires a change in approach on the part of institutions and organizations. Educational and municipal institutions ought to be less rigid in order to adapt to young people's reality.

b. The importance of operating in a network

Community stakeholders must think about making serious changes in their structures, like moving to a network logic, which is much better suited to the ways in which youth become mobilized. In addition, organizations must establish contacts with other organizations in order to share resources, keep one another informed and enable youth to meet their counterparts in other organizations.

c. Integrate, listen to and involve youth

Taking youth and their opinions into consideration in decision-making is not enough to get them to participate effectively. Getting young people involved is a process that has to be incorporated in the mission and vision statements and defined with the help of appropriate policies. They are a valuable resource for the community. Moreover, when they fully participate in decisions and management, young people complement other members' maturity, not only through their experiences but also through their ideals (FISCRRCR, 1999).

d. Consult youth regarding their needs

Youth are in the best position to know the needs of youth in the community. They can find the ways and means to reach their peers.

Organizations must see that youth are allowed to participate in decisions, integrating them into existing committees and working groups. In this way, taking young people's opinions into account allows programs to be better suited to their actual needs; they must develop or help to develop the principles and programs for young members (FISCRRCR, 1999).

e. Know how to acknowledge youth

Questions must be asked regarding the procedures for validating the lessons learned by youth from their volunteer experiences and the ways for improving this involvement. Establishing specific support in the form of programs and structures for youth must be contemplated. In addition, the political aspect is seen as being critical for legitimizing youth participation, bringing credibility to this acknowledgement.

f. Develop strategies for cooperation

Organizations and institutions can organize meetings to encourage exchanges between youth and adults and for pooling their ideas and experiences. These meetings must also encourage other members, at all levels, to include young people in their work and allow them to benefit from their skills and knowledge. In these circumstances, a youth sponsorship program by retired volunteer managers could be contemplated.

g. Learning

The opportunity to offer technical workshops, often put on in cooperation with professional bodies, workers' associations or those in charge of associations has proven its worth. A resource person acts as educator and leader with youth in the organization.

In addition, youth volunteers need training in the area of communication and organizational skills. For example, they must be given the opportunity to conduct meetings as well as participate in them. They need experience and training to communicate their ideas effectively.

h. Give them a space

Creation of a space for youth for exchanges, discussion and recording of the results of these activities must be promoted to create a defined but flexible space that guarantees youth's freedom of expression and a spirit of initiative. Youth volunteer involvement must not be isolated from other types of volunteer involvement. To the contrary, organizations and institutions must arrive at a balance between a global approach to volunteer involvement and a specific approach to youth volunteer involvement.

i. Promoting opportunities for youth to become involved

A stop must be put to young people's fears regarding involvement through information and acknowledgement of projects developed by youth. It is not simply a question of promoting young people's initiatives; they must also be offered clear and easily accessible information about causes they can participate in as well as on the associations and institutions able to accommodate them.

j. Support and guidance: balanced autonomy

The integration of youth in volunteer environments demands adaptation, as young people need different types of support and guidance but it is also necessary to show confidence and respect for their abilities, talents and energy.

The organization or institution must create a climate in which young people can be full partners, encouraging them to play a supervisory role in their group.

k. Recruitment: initial training, promotion and reality

The gradual integration in the form of initial training for volunteering may be seen as a serious course, since it offers young people the opportunity to be supported in their integration and training. There should nonetheless be reflection within the organizations, on the transmission of values and intergenerational exchanges.

It is also necessary for an organization or institution to insist on knowledge of and accessibility of programs and resources intended for youth. Steps must be taken so that young people have easy access to the necessary services.

Finally, prior to their involvement, youth must be informed about the task to be performed, on its importance and duration, since this information is very important to them.

I. Recognizing that educational institutions are the place to interact with youth

Most youth between the ages of 15 and 19 years of age still attend educational institutions, excellent places to provide young people with the information and services necessary for their involvement in volunteering. For this it is essential that the mechanisms for an integrated approach be established to promote exchanges and interaction among the various players and sectors where youth are likely to become involved.

Table 4: A Comparison of the Place that Youth Wish to or Should Occupy in the Organization of Volunteering, According to Youth and Organizations in Montérégie

The Place of Youth in the Organization of Volunteerism	Youth Rank (out of 24) Average (out of 4)	Organizations Rank (out of 24) Average (out of 4)
<i>Youth are our region's future and the next generation of volunteers.</i>	(1) 3.4	(1) 3.7
<i>Youth need to voice their opinions and to be listened to.</i>	(2) 3.3	(6) 3.3
<i>In general, adults should support youth more rather than direct them.</i>	(3) 3.3	(8) 3.2
<i>If youth are supported in their community by adults who respect them, youth can carry out their projects.</i>	(4) 3.2	(3) 3.6
<i>Youth need accessible places to meet and organize.</i>	(5) 3.1	(5) 3.4
<i>Integrating youth into the organization is important.</i>	(6) 3.0	(2) 3.6
<i>In their leisure time, youth of my age tend to participate in rather than organize activities.</i>	(7) 2.9	(10) 3.1
<i>Youth of my age need to discover their talents by volunteering in recreation activities.</i>	(8) 2.9	(7) 3.2
<i>Adults should not get involved in organizing recreation activities for youth.</i>	(9) 2.8	(24) 1.7
<i>Too often youth do not have a say in decisions about recreation activities that affect them.</i>	(10) 2.8	(13) 2.9
<i>Volunteering in leisure activities helps youth develop their sense of belonging to their city or school.</i>	(11) 2.8	(4) 3.5

This table shows that youth realize they are the region's future and the next generation of volunteers. The heads of agencies also are coming to think along these lines.

Youth indicate that initially they need space where they are able to meet, give their opinions, be heard and organize themselves. They are aware of their ability to take charge when they are supported by adults who respect them.

The importance of volunteerism to the sense of belonging of youth to their city and their school was rated much higher by the organization leaders than by youth. It may be that youth simply have not pondered volunteering to this extent.

Table 5: Comparison of the Needs of Youth and the Place They Wish to or Should Occupy in the Governance of Organizations, According to Youth and Organizations of Montréal

The Needs and the Place of Youth in Governance of Organizations	Youth Rank (out of 8) Average (out of 4)	Organizations Rank (out of 8) Average (out of 4)
<i>Be able to express and carry out my ideas and projects</i>	(1) 3.2	(1) 3.5
<i>Be able to choose my tasks</i>	(2) 3.1	(4) 3.3
<i>Be free to explore new areas</i>	(3) 3.1	(3) 3.4
<i>Have genuine flexibility in my schedule</i>	(4) 3.1	(7) 3.1
<i>Collaborate on developing, improving and managing programs intended for me</i>	(5) 3.0	(2) 3.4
<i>Manage a budget independently</i>	(6) 2.8	(8) 2.6
<i>Be closely associated with the operation of the organization</i>	(7) 2.7	(6) 3.1
<i>Obtain a seat on the organization's Board of Directors</i>	(8) 2.5	(5) 3.1

The responses shown in this table shed even more light on the needs of youth and the place they wish to occupy in the organizations.

Youth and respondents from the organizations ranked the need of youth to be able to express and carry out their ideas and projects as most important. Youth show a desire to choose their tasks and to explore new areas through their volunteer experience. They would also like to have a certain amount of flexibility in their schedule.

This table also shows that youth have little interest in participating directly in the management of the organization for which they volunteer. Participating in the development, improvement and management of programs designed for them, the independent management of a budget, or the work of the organization's Board of Directors in which they are interested is not as important to them.

Glancing at the average of the responses from organization leaders, we see that they "agree somewhat" or "fully agree" with the majority of the statements regarding needs and the place of youth in the governance of agencies. However, they do not agree that real autonomy of youth in volunteer activities comes from managing a budget independently and attribute little importance, compared to youth, to flexibility in volunteer schedules.

Table 6: Perceptions of Montérégie Organizations About Youth Involvement

Youth Involvement in Organizations	Organizations Rank (out of 8) Average (out of 4)
<i>It is important to invest in our organization to support the involvement of youth in volunteerism.</i>	(1) 3.5
<i>The involvement of youth volunteers would benefit our organization.</i>	(2) 3.4
<i>It is difficult to recruit youth volunteers.</i>	(3) 2.9
<i>Young people must take it upon themselves to volunteer.</i>	(4) 2.8
<i>Youth are sufficiently involved.</i>	(5) 2.1
<i>It is difficult to manage young volunteers.</i>	(6) 2.0
<i>It is not up to adults to recruit young people.</i>	(7) 1.7
<i>Our agency does not need youth volunteers.</i>	(8) 1.6

This table shows the responses of organization leaders regarding youth involvement in their organizations. It is clear that they are interested in engaging youth volunteers in their organizations and they show the willingness to make the investments required to support this involvement. At the same time they recognize the benefits of this investment.

However, the organization leaders point out the difficulty of recruiting youth, a task which they admit is theirs, but which relies on action being taken by youth.

Conclusion: Recognizing the Strengths, Abilities, Talent and Energy of Youth

This framework places in perspective the barriers to volunteering by youth, their motivations for volunteering and continuing their volunteer activities, the place they wish to occupy within organizations, as well as preferred courses of action when welcoming and supporting youth volunteers.

Youth and organization leaders recognize the importance of support for youth volunteerism which, unfortunately, is often hindered by the organizations and even by the youth themselves.

Some of the obstacles to youth volunteerism include: the lack of interest in volunteering, an activity with which youth do not identify at all; doubts about making a commitment requiring a lot of time and knowledge; the lack of information about volunteer opportunities in organizations or associations; and the lack of understanding between youth and adults. These obstacles can be overcome by organizations by becoming open to involvement of youth, building greater flexibility into their structure and providing space for and decision-making power to youth. Pairing youth and adults and networking with other organizations may also promote involvement by youth in volunteering.

For their part, young people are looking for activities that will help them find fulfillment and serve a cause. They wish to take their place in society, enjoy themselves, meet people and be with their friends. They also wish to succeed with a certain independence and to be taken seriously.

The particular needs of adolescents, the prejudices towards them, the fact that they are sometimes marginalized, and the need to use an appropriate approach when working with youth means that they are often neglected by organizations that are not always well equipped to provide adequate support. However, youth must be recognized as a benefit to the host organizations and, for this reason, we must encourage initiatives that will develop youth volunteerism. Organizations must also contribute to putting a younger face on volunteerism, making it more appealing to youth, and heightening awareness among those who welcome and support youth.

As we have seen, the participation and involvement of youth in volunteerism doesn't just happen. Youth volunteerism depends upon a culture of participation, a state of mind, political will, an effort to share responsibilities and to listen to the needs expressed, many factors for which it is difficult to set objectives and to translate into concrete measures.

This framework represents a first step towards starting debate on the involvement of youth within nonprofit sports and recreation organizations and institutions. This debate could be the first phase in a long process of adaptation to the realities of youth.

When posed the question "Should the system adapt to youth or youth adapt to the system?", the parties concerned reply: Both must adapt. Then, participation of young people will not remain theoretical, it will be a mindset and an attitude and, only then will the agencies and institutions be on the way to developing a participation strategy for youth that is fruitful and viable.

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