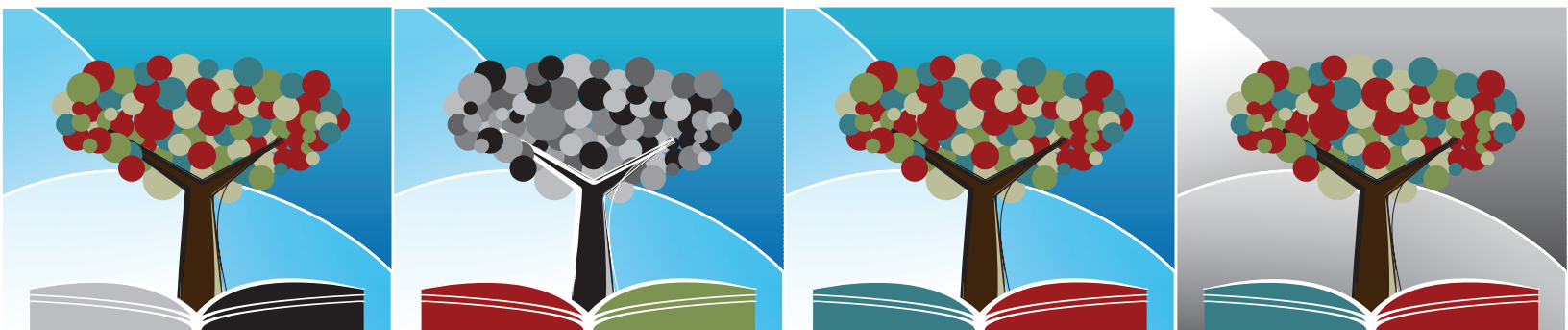


K N O W L E D G E D E V E L O P M E N T C E N T R E



Facilitating Experiences for Volunteers Aged 8 to 12

A Manual for Leaders in Youth Organizations

Charlene Shannon
University of New Brunswick

and

Brenda Robertson
Acadia University

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For more information about the Knowledge Development Centre, visit www.kdc-cdc.ca.

Knowledge Development Centre
Imagine Canada
425 University Avenue, Suite 900
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5G 1T6
Tel: 416.597.2293
Fax: 416.597.2294
e-mail: kdc@imaginecanada.ca

www.imaginecanada.ca

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

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Facilitating Experiences for Volunteers Aged 8 to 12: A Manual for Leaders in Youth Organizations

Introduction

Volunteering is beneficial to young people and to the organizations with which they volunteer. Research shows that adolescents who volunteer perform better academically during high school and are more likely than non-volunteers to pursue post-secondary education (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Volunteering also provides an opportunity to reinforce positive social values and increases connection to community (Youniss, & Yates, 1997). Finally, volunteer service is an avenue for adolescent civic development (Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003).

To date, most of the research on youth volunteers has focused on those aged 15 and over. But youth younger than 15 also volunteer in communities, in schools, as part of after-school programs, and through youth-serving organizations such as Girl Guides and Boy Scouts. Our understanding of these younger youth volunteers is limited and mainly reflects the experiences of those who are white and middle-class. Little is known about the volunteer experiences of disadvantaged youth.

In 2005, researchers at the University of New Brunswick and Acadia University undertook research on youth volunteers between the ages of 8 and 12. We interviewed 73 youth between the ages of 8 and 12 (referred to in this manual as “younger youth”) in the four Atlantic provinces who had volunteered as

part of their involvement in a Boys and Girls Club. We also interviewed the executive directors of seven Boys and Girls Club. The findings of this research, which form the basis of this manual, are presented in a report entitled *Youth Volunteers: Understanding the Experiences of 8- to 12-Year-Olds*.¹

This manual is intended to help staff and volunteers in organizations that involve, or are considering involving, younger youth as volunteers. It includes:

1. information about the volunteer experiences of 8- to 12-year-olds (e.g., what they think about volunteering, how they became involved as volunteers, what motivates them to volunteer; what they like about volunteering; and what barriers they face);
2. suggestions and strategies for creating positive and satisfying volunteer experiences that make best use of the assets of younger youth and that will help develop in them a volunteer ethic and a lifelong interest in volunteering; and
3. suggestions and strategies for overcoming the challenges associated with younger youth volunteers.

¹ The full report, including background on participants, methodology, and complete findings, is available at www.kdc-cdc.ca.

Definition of terms

We use two key terms in this manual:

- *Younger youth.* The term “youth” has been used in the research literature to identify young people ranging in age from 6 to 32. Our research examined youth between the ages of 8 and 12. We refer to them as “younger youth.”
- *Disadvantaged youth.* We use this term to refer to young people who live in poverty or are deprived of supportive relationships with adults in their families, schools, and communities.

How this manual is organized

This manual has ten sections, which cover the following topics:

1. *Background on the younger youth research participants.* Who were the youth who participated? How old were they? Where did they come from? How many were male/female?
2. *The value of younger youth volunteers.* Why should organizations consider involving younger youth as volunteers?
3. *How younger youth understand the word “volunteering.”* What does volunteering mean to younger youth? How do they put this understanding into action?
4. *Younger youths’ perceptions and attitudes about volunteering.* What do younger youth expect when they volunteer? What positive or negative ideas do they have about volunteering? What can be done to help younger youth develop a positive view of volunteering?
5. *Motivating younger youth volunteers.* What motivates 8- to 12-year-olds to volunteer? How do their motivations differ from those of older youth and adults? What can be done to attract and motivate younger youth?
6. *Recruiting younger youth volunteers.* How do younger youth become involved as volunteers? What can be done to get more of younger youth involved?

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7. *Preparing younger youth to volunteer.* How are younger youth prepared for volunteering? What can be done to prepare them better?
 8. *Appropriate tasks for younger youth volunteers.* What are younger youth doing as volunteers? What are they capable of doing?
 9. *Challenges in facilitating volunteering among younger youth.* What challenges do adults face when they seek to engage younger youth in volunteering? How can these challenges be overcome?
 10. *Recognizing younger youth volunteers.* How do younger youth feel about recognition? How do they like to be recognized? What are the best ways to recognize them?

In each section, we first present the highlights of our research findings, with quotes from research participants. We then give a brief summary of what these findings mean. We end each section with practical suggestions for staff and volunteers who are interested in involving younger youth as volunteers.

Background on the younger youth research participants

Our study involved 73 youth and seven executive directors. Of the younger youth who participated, all were active in a local Boys and Girls Club. More than half of the youth participants (57%) were female and more than two thirds (70%) lived in urban areas. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of male and female participants in urban and rural areas of the four provinces we studied. Table 2 shows the number of male and female participants by age.

Table 1: Number and percentage of participants from each community, by gender

Community	Total	Male		Female	
	Number	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Urban New Brunswick	11	5	45	6	55
Rural New Brunswick	10	5	50	5	50
Urban Newfoundland	16	5	31	11	69
Rural Newfoundland	5	4	80	1	20
Urban Nova Scotia	11	1	9	10	91
Urban Prince Edward Island	13	6	46	7	54
Rural Prince Edward Island	7	5	71	2	29
Total	73	31	43	42	57

Table 2: Participants, by age and gender

Age (years)	Number of males	Number of females	Total number	Percentage of total
8	2	5	7	9
9	9	4	13	18
10	8	14	22	30
11	6	12	18	25
12	6	7	13	18
Total	31	42	73	100

The value of younger youth volunteers

Many organizations may overlook the volunteer potential of younger youth between the ages of 8 and 12. In fact, younger youth are valuable assets: they are interested in contributing to their communities and are at a stage of life when volunteering can play an important role in their development.

Younger youth are assets to the community.

- Younger youth have energy, enthusiasm, positive attitudes, and new ideas to share.
- Unlike adults and older youth who have jobs and responsibilities, younger youth have plenty of discretionary time and flexible schedules.
- The skill set of younger youth is not the same as that of older youth or adult volunteers, but younger youth are willing and able to take on a wide range of tasks that can be useful to organizations (e.g., selling things, making posters, providing leadership in certain situations).
- Younger youth have strong social networks; they know other youth and can encourage and influence them to participate as volunteers.

Younger youth want to contribute to community.

- Younger youth, including those who are disadvantaged, want to help out in their communities.
- Most of the younger youth understand how volunteering affects their communities and what would happen if no one volunteered to help.
- If the desire to make a contribution is encouraged, younger youth learn to appreciate their communities more.

“[Volunteering for the town clean up] helps clean up and make the environment a better place and if you start volunteering, someone else is going to want to volunteer and so on and so on and so on.” (Female, 11 years old)

“[I volunteer] for our town because it makes our town a lot nicer when tourists come. They don’t have to look at a town full of garbage.” (Female, 12 years old)

Volunteering has a positive effect on the development of younger youth.

- Many staff and volunteers who work with younger youth recognize that youth between the ages of 8 and 12 are at a critical stage in their development. The attitudes they develop and the choices they make about how they spend their free time at this age often carry through into adulthood.
- Staff and volunteers who work with younger youth recognize that engaging younger youth as volunteers helps keep them involved in positive pursuits and connected to positive adult influences and may help reduce the risk that they will be drawn into less socially acceptable and developmentally beneficial activities.

“You learn to volunteer. You have to know what it means and you have to want to volunteer. You don’t just volunteer for the prizes or the rewards.”
(Female, 11 years old)

"I think [volunteering] is important. I think for the kids to have ownership in the Club and in the community, they need to be involved in what goes on in the Club and the community." (Executive Director)

Summary

Youth aged 8 to 12 and the staff and volunteers who work closely with them believe that younger youth have something valuable to offer as volunteers. Volunteer experiences can also play an important role in the lives of younger youth.

Points to consider

Promote the idea of younger youth volunteering and build awareness in the community of what younger youth have to offer.

Younger youth have a great deal to offer as volunteers. They are energetic and enthusiastic and have relatively flexible schedules.

Youth who begin volunteering at a young age are more likely to volunteer later in life. Organizations that involve younger youth as volunteers may be building a pool of volunteers for the future.

Soliciting media support to highlight the events and activities younger youth participate in as volunteers may help members of the community to see the role that younger youth can play.

Explain the benefits of getting younger youth involved in volunteering.

Younger youth have a lot of discretionary time available to them that can sometimes lead to destructive activities or habits. Volunteering exposes them to more positive leisure choices. Provide youth with a variety of structured and unstructured options with few associated costs. Low cost is particularly important for disadvantaged younger youth.

Volunteering creates a sense of connection to one's community and may help to lessen the amount of time spent in less socially acceptable forms of behaviour such as criminal activity. Communicate this information to community members and organizations that need volunteers so that they can see that there are mutual benefits to involving younger youth in their activities.

Another important rationale for involving younger youth in volunteer opportunities is that they are at an important developmental stage. In Erikson's (1968) fourth stage of psychosocial development, children aged 6-12 are striving for a sense of competence, coming to believe in their own skills and abilities, learning new tasks, and beginning to achieve their own goals. Volunteering can help younger youth to achieve these goals. It will help build their self-esteem, increase their competence, and build their confidence levels.

How younger youth understand the word “volunteering”

Many youth-serving organizations develop or facilitate volunteer opportunities for youth in an effort to educate them about volunteering. Although many younger youth are able to explain what “volunteering” means, they apply the concept more broadly than adults do and do not always recognize the volunteers in their lives.

Younger youth have a general understanding of “volunteering.”

- When younger youth explain what volunteering means, they tend to focus on helping others, especially vulnerable individuals and groups.
- Younger youth see volunteering as involving sacrifice (i.e., giving up time, the chance to do something else, money).
- A few younger youth describe volunteering as offering to do something without being asked.
- For some younger youth, volunteering includes the notions of choice and community benefit.

“[Volunteering is] doing stuff that you wouldn’t normally do, like for your friends if they fall down and they’re hurt and you just go and get help and probably help them and comfort them and maybe just help out teachers and counsellors and whatever.”

(Male, 10 years old)

“[Volunteering is] like, mainly asking to do something instead of being told by someone else to do something. Volunteering is a choice.” (Male, 10 years old)

Young youth are sometimes confused about volunteering in practice.

- Younger youth do not distinguish taking initiative (being the one who asks or offers), being part of a family (helping with household tasks), and being a good neighbour (helping with groceries) from true volunteering (i.e., the volunteering they did for their Boys and Girls Club).
- Many younger youth have not learned that volunteering generally requires a commitment of time (e.g., more than the couple of seconds it takes to hold open a door for someone) and usually involves something that is not part of their day-to-day life.

“I open the door when we go outside.”

(Male, 9 years old)

“I volunteer to help mom with the dishes.”

(Female, 8 years old)

“I volunteered to ask my friend’s mother if my friend could come over for dinner.”

(Female, 9 years old)

Younger youth do not always recognize the volunteers in their lives.

- Most younger youth are unable to recognize volunteer efforts that are done on their behalf.
- Younger youth tend to think that anyone who helps them (e.g., teachers, parents, and friends) is a volunteer.

“My friends [volunteer] I guess, my teachers, quite a few people around me often help me; I guess that’s volunteering, kind of towards me.” (Female, 11 years old)

“I know my mom volunteers a lot because she helps my uncle build the stairs and she helps my uncle do a lot of things.”
(Female, 9 years old)

Summary

The word “volunteering” can be applied in a number of ways, and this can confuse younger youth. Younger youth may need help understanding what volunteering means and identifying the volunteers in their communities.

Points to consider

Explain to younger youth what volunteering means.

Many younger youth think helping is the main element of volunteering and think of their friends, family, and teachers as volunteers. This notion may be a good starting point for helping younger youth to develop a more accurate understanding of volunteering. For example, the courteous act of holding the door open for someone can make a young person feel appreciated. Explain to youth that people often feel the same way when they volunteer.

Explain the three features of volunteering: volunteers are people who give up some of their spare time and contribute their skills to help out because they want to, not because they have to; volunteers do not expect to be paid; and volunteering contributes to making a community a better place for everyone.

Help youth to distinguish between helping and volunteering. Contrast these two situations: opening a door for someone and operating a time clock at a basketball game. The first involves no real time commitment, no significant sacrifice, and no real skill. In most cases, the person could have opened the door for him- or herself. The second case requires a commitment of at least a few hours, sacrifice of a significant amount of spare time, and a certain amount of skill. It also makes a real contribution to the game, which could not take place without a timekeeper.

Increase the visibility of volunteers in the lives of younger youth.

Ask younger youth to name people they know who volunteer (e.g., parents, siblings, coaches, firefighters, celebrities). Point out and discuss any volunteers they do not mention.

Ask younger youth about the volunteering they have done. Ask them to explain what they did and why they think it was volunteering.

Develop a simple way to identify volunteers, especially in youth clubs and youth groups. Have volunteers wear nametags (e.g., “Hello. I am a volunteer. My name is _____”), buttons (e.g., “I am a volunteer”), or t-shirts with “volunteer” printed on them. This will ensure that youth see who the volunteers are and what they are doing.

Look for volunteers to serve as role models for younger youth (e.g., local celebrities, athletes, coaches). Ask these role models to share their volunteer experiences and explain what volunteering has done for them.

Younger youths' perceptions and attitudes about volunteering

Younger youth have a variety of positive and negative perceptions and attitudes about volunteering based on what they have heard and their own experience as volunteers. In general, their attitudes are related to how much fun they have when they volunteer, how they perceive the value of the volunteer efforts, and the quality of their volunteer experience.

Fun is an important component of volunteering.

- Many younger youth have fun volunteering and enjoy their experiences.
- Younger youth are more likely to have fun volunteering when their friends or peers are involved.
- Younger youth who have not yet volunteered may think that volunteering is “un-cool,” boring, or no fun.

“I just think it’s so fun to do and I get to meet other people and talk to other people and make friends.” (Female, 12 years old)

“Like I thought, oh my God, I’m just going to be a little goody two shoes for volunteering.” (Male, 11 years old)

“Well, I didn’t think volunteering would be very fun. I thought it would be really boring and just not having a good time. But I really enjoyed it and it wasn’t that bad and I liked going there and I learned that if I wanted to do it, then I should.” (Female, 10 years old)

Younger youth have different perceptions of the value of volunteering.

- Although some younger youth think that volunteering is worth sacrificing their time and the opportunity to do other things, others have not yet developed a volunteer ethic.
- Some younger youth think that people should get paid for the work they do as volunteers.
- When younger youth understand the personal benefits of volunteering (e.g., learning new skills, improving social skills, developing self-confidence, overcoming shyness, having opportunities to socialize, meeting new friends, having fun with friends, etc.), they tend to value volunteering more.
- When younger youth understand how volunteering has helped others or made their community a better place, they tend to have a more positive view of volunteering.
- Volunteering helps younger youth feel good about themselves, proud of themselves, respected, valued, appreciated, brave, and accomplished.

“I learned that mostly when you volunteer, it’s helping out your whole community and it is making you a better person at the same time.” (Female, 11 years old)

“I feel like I can be a good subject for one of the kids to learn off of.” (Male, 12 years old)

The quality of the volunteer experience affects younger youths' attitudes.

- Some younger youth worry about their ability to complete their volunteer task.
- A few younger youth worry that they will not be treated well when they volunteer (e.g., they will be rejected when they are fundraising; people will be rude to them).

"I definitely don't want to go and volunteer with people I don't know. I want to be able to volunteer with people I know and I think they [other youth] find it hard ... to get there or to find time, mostly just stuff like that. Or, they might not want to do it because they are shy like I used to be, or they are nervous." (Female, 11 years old)

"I learned when I volunteered that I do have enough courage to get up and speak to people about a good cause and I do have enough courage to talk to strangers when I have to if it's something important. I learned stuff I never thought I could do." (Female, 11 years old)

Summary

Youth who have not yet volunteered may have a negative view of volunteering that may deter them from getting involved. This can be overcome by explaining the many benefits of volunteering for volunteers, for the organizations they volunteer with, and for the community.

Points to consider

Counter younger youths' negative perceptions of volunteering.

Point out notable volunteers (e.g., coaches, celebrities) and what they contribute through their volunteer efforts. Recruit other youth volunteers to talk about their experiences and what they like about volunteering (e.g., it is fun, they get to spend time with friends, they make new friends, they feel good about themselves afterwards). Not only will this encourage younger youth to volunteer, but it can also make volunteering seem acceptable or "cool."

Prepare younger youth for their volunteer assignments.

Younger youth often lack confidence in their ability to perform volunteer tasks, especially when they are new to volunteering. Lack of preparation can lead to fear of failing and may make younger youth reluctant to volunteer. On the other hand, teaching younger youth the specific skills they will need to carry out their volunteer assignments will boost their confidence and overcome their reluctance (See "Preparing younger youth to volunteer" on page 16).

Explain the personal and community benefits of volunteering.

Younger youth are more positive about volunteering when they understand how they can benefit from the experience. Youth benefit from volunteering in the following ways: they have fun, they can socialize with friends, they can meet new people and make new friends, they develop a variety of skills (e.g., leadership, coaching, communication, and/or

organizational skills), and they learn skills that can help them get a summer or part-time job in the future. As well, people “feel good” when they volunteer and help others or their community. Explaining how volunteering can produce feelings of pride, satisfaction, and accomplishment can help youth understand why people volunteer.

Explain how volunteering can help make the community a better place. For example, before a community clean-up, explain what would happen if no one picked up the garbage (e.g., tourists might think the town is dirty and not want to visit). Before an event organized to raise money for a hospital foundation, explain that the money raised will be used to purchase a machine that can help people who are sick or help diagnose illness so people can be treated. Younger youth will feel more powerful when they understand how their efforts will make a difference.

Involve younger youth in volunteer recognition activities in the community.

Ask younger youth to volunteer at volunteer recognition nights or banquets. This will give them an opportunity to see volunteers in their community, find out about their contributions, and hear about the difference their efforts have made.

Motivating younger youth volunteers

Adults tend to volunteer because of a personal belief in the cause, because they want to use their skills or experience, because they are interested in improving the community, because they want to help others, and because they want to put their time to good use (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Hall, McKeown, & Roberts, 2001). Although younger youth may volunteer for these reasons, they put more emphasis on having fun and being with friends. Some younger youth may also need some incentive to volunteer, especially for the first time.

Younger youth value enjoyment and opportunities to socialize.

- Younger youth want to have fun! They enjoy spending time with their friends and socializing and view volunteering that involves their friends as an opportunity to have fun. They are also more comfortable when they are volunteering with friends.
- Younger youth enjoy meeting new people and making new friends and are attracted to experiences that offer this opportunity.

“It was definitely way more fun to be there with your friends and to be doing something good for your community. It was way more fun than hard.” (Female, 11 years old)

“I just think it’s so fun to do and I get to meet other people and talk to other people and make friends.” (Female, 12 years old)

Younger youth enjoy the positive feelings associated with volunteering.

- Many younger youth volunteer because it makes them “feel good inside,” proud of themselves, and happy about their accomplishments. These feelings motivate younger youth to continue volunteering.
- A few younger youth volunteer to reduce or eliminate feelings of boredom.

“Helping people and volunteering makes people feel good inside and makes them feel happy because they help someone else.” (Male, 12 years old)

“I never knew it could make me feel so good. I never knew I could be so happy when I did it.” (Female, 10 years old)

Younger youth care about others.

- Younger youth want to help others, especially vulnerable people such as the elderly, the sick, the abused, and/or the poor.
- Younger youth want to make their community a better place (e.g., by keeping it clean).

“I was there with my friends, helping the community and making the world a better place.” (Female, 10 years old)

“I like helping everybody because I think it’s nice to help everybody that is sick or they are in the hospital or they have a broken arm or something.” (Male, 8 years old)

Some younger youth need an incentive to volunteer.

- Younger youth are motivated to volunteer when they think that their efforts will benefit their youth organization or, indirectly, themselves.
- Younger youth are motivated by rewards (e.g., certificates, equipment for youth club, trips) and recognition.
- Some younger youth understand that volunteering can give them an advantage in the future when they are looking for a job or applying to university.

“Volunteering probably will help me when I’m older, like jobs and getting into college.”
(Female, 11 years old)

“I thought it would help the Club out and more kids would be able to do stuff cause it would help buy more equipment for the gym and the computers and stuff like that.”
(Female, 12 years old)

“I did it for myself and for all the other kids ‘cause when I came here they had really nice stuff and they tried to keep it good and stuff but they didn’t have any volunteers to help do the ‘round up’ and stuff. So I did it for the kids so that they’d be able to have the fun that I had.” (Female, 12 years old)

Volunteering leads to personal growth in younger youth.

- Although younger youth do not typically name personal growth as a reason for volunteering, adults who work with younger youth believe that volunteering helps younger youth develop interpersonal, communication, leadership, problem-solving, decision-making, and social skills.
- Volunteering also helps to build self-esteem, a sense of empowerment, and pride in younger youth.
- Volunteering helps younger youth learn how to take initiative and teaches them responsibility.
- Adults who work with younger youth believe that volunteering helps these youth to develop a sense of ownership in the organization or community and to learn about citizenship.

“You help people and then that makes you feel good about yourself and gives you self confidence.” (Female, 12 years old)

“I find it helps the [youth organization] a lot no matter how many people do it. It helps in some way and... in order for us to have the kind of equipment we do here, we have to volunteer and we have to help out or else we won't have these things.” (Female, 12 years old)

“When you volunteer, it's helping out your whole community and it is making you a better person at the same time because not doing anything for others isn't really a good way to put your energy forward, but if you're putting your energy to a good cause, it makes you feel way better.” (Female, 11 years old)

Summary

Fun is the most important factor that motivates younger youth to become volunteers and to continue volunteering. But the desire of younger youth to help others should not be underestimated. Once younger youth experience the positive feelings associated with volunteering, they are likely to want to volunteer again.

Points to consider

Include a social component in volunteer opportunities for younger youth.

Create volunteer opportunities that provide the chance for younger youth to interact with others their age. This can make volunteering more comfortable for them, ease any feelings of nervousness, and increase the likelihood that they will volunteer again.

Point out how volunteering will make a difference.

Demonstrate to younger youth that their volunteer efforts will make a difference. Ensure they know who they have helped and how. For example, if youth are picking up garbage in a local park, take a picture of the park before they begin and after they have finished. They will be able to see their accomplishments and feel proud of their efforts.

Emphasize the intrinsic rewards of volunteering.

Incentives can be useful in getting younger youth to volunteer, but it is important to point out the intrinsic rewards (i.e., feeling good, a sense of pride, a sense

of accomplishment) of volunteering. These are the rewards that lead to personal growth and a sense of community. If you are going to give incentives, ensure they are relevant to the volunteer assignment. For example, after younger youth have participated in a community cleanup, give them each a tree or seeds to plant. This will reinforce the importance of what they have just accomplished (e.g., the importance of the environment and the role of plant life in ensuring good air quality).

Recruiting younger youth volunteers

Younger youth typically become involved as a volunteer in one of three ways: they take the initiative and volunteer without being approached; they are asked to volunteer; they are told to volunteer.

Taking the initiative

- Some younger youth take the initiative to help out.
- Younger youth who are aware of, or have experienced the benefits of, volunteering are more likely to take the initiative to volunteer.

“I asked [to help with a task].”

(Male, 12 years old)

Being asked

- Some younger youth wait for someone to ask them to help.
- Younger youth feel privileged when asked to volunteer.
- Many younger youth become involved as volunteers when they are asked because they have the right skills for the task.
- Sometimes younger youth are asked to volunteer because adults think it will be a positive experience for them.
- Younger youth do not always know why they are being asked to perform a certain task.
- Some younger youth think that they are asked to volunteer only because there is no one else available.

“If the Club asked me, I’d volunteer to do anything.” (Male, 11 years old)

Being told

- Younger youth sometimes volunteer because they are told they must participate. This may lead to confusion about what “volunteering” means.
- In some cases, younger youth think that they had to “volunteer” as a punishment for unacceptable or undesirable behaviour.

Summary

Younger youth are most likely to become involved as volunteers when youth leaders approach them to participate in initiatives. Youth leaders may wish to consider ways to recruit younger youth that help them understand the importance of the volunteer task and their value as volunteers.

Points to consider

Offer rewards.

Offering rewards is sometimes necessary. However, youth leaders may want to avoid using this strategy every time there is a need to involve younger youth as volunteers. When younger youth volunteer for the first time, incentives may peak their interest and motivate them to overcome apprehensions about doing something new. With ongoing recruitment, youth leaders can make use of their knowledge of the younger youth, their assets and skills, and then ask them to volunteer according to the contributions they can make.

Highlighting the intrinsic rewards or benefits of volunteering is another way to entice younger youth to volunteer. When youth receive rewards too frequently, they can become indignant when there are no rewards in place. Taking time to explain the impact of their volunteer efforts and the importance of volunteering for its own sake can help lessen the expectation of rewards. If it is necessary to use rewards to entice younger youth to volunteer, try to relate the reward to the volunteer experience.

Try to ask rather than tell younger youth to volunteer.

When younger youth are asked to volunteer, they feel important and privileged. Be sure to tell younger youth why they are being asked to help; don't assume that they know. One way to do this is to highlight the skills that qualify them for the task such as their friendliness or their soccer skills. Avoid saying, “I need you to volunteer because I can't find anyone else.”

Give younger youth a choice about deciding whether to volunteer.

Choosing to give one's time is an important component of volunteering. If younger youth think that they have to volunteer, they will develop an inaccurate understanding of volunteering. For the same reason, it is important to avoid using volunteering as a punishment. Instead, consider making the punishment *not* being able to participate in a volunteer event.

Preparing younger youth to volunteer

Many organizations that involve adult volunteers provide orientation sessions or handbooks to prepare their volunteers to be effective in their roles. Younger youth also need preparation.

Many younger youth are not adequately prepared for volunteering.

- Younger youth volunteers are often inadequately prepared for their volunteer assignments (e.g., they are not shown how to do the task; they are not told about some feelings they may experience while doing the task; they are not shown how to interact with strangers, etc.).
- Many younger youth say that no one talked to them about their volunteer assignment before they volunteered.
- Most of the information that is given to younger youth tends to be descriptive (e.g., what the task involves, where the volunteering will take place, how long it will last). There is typically little mention of why volunteering is important or the difference it will make.

“They just said we were going to clean off the shelves [at the food bank] and put stuff back up.” (Male, 12 years old)

“All we do is we talk about what kind of fundraisers we are going to do and we talk about the trips that we are going to go on if we raise the money. I don’t think we really talked about what we were going do.” (Female, 10 years old)

Fears and anxieties about volunteering are not always addressed.

- The feelings, concerns, or anxieties that younger youth have about volunteering (e.g., shyness, nervousness, negative attitudes, perceptions that tasks are too hard) are often not discussed by staff or older volunteers.
- When fears and anxieties about particular volunteer tasks are not addressed, some younger youth will not participate while others do not enjoy the volunteer experience.

“Sometimes they just don’t understand what it is they’re going to do. You know, when you say we’re going to [the nursing home] to volunteer with the old people, to everybody that would mean something different, but if you’re specific about it... okay you’re going over to [the nursing home] to play bingo today, then it’s more clear to them about what they’re doing and they’re probably not as afraid to go.” (Executive Director)

“[I was] scared sometimes [to ask people for money]...because I didn’t know them.” (Male 12 years old)

Parental involvement

- There is sometimes a lack of family support or parental involvement in preparing children to volunteer. A number of younger youth indicated their parents did not talk to them about volunteering prior to their participation.
- In cases where parents do prepare younger youth for volunteer experiences, mothers generally were the ones who talked to their children, discussed what volunteering involved, and why they should participate.

“My mom told me about it and said I should go in it. She talked about volunteering a little bit. She said that you’ll be helping out the community and everything and you should do it.” (Male, 11 years old)

Summary

Younger youth often have a number of concerns about volunteering. They may be nervous, fear rejection, or worry that tasks will be too too hard. If younger youth are not adequately prepared for their volunteer assignment, they may have a negative experience and be reluctant to continue volunteering.

Points to consider

Explain what they will do and why it matters.

After youth have been recruited as volunteers, be sure to tell them about the what, when, why, and how of their volunteer assignment (e.g., what will take place, when it will happen, why they are doing the task, how they will perform the task, how long will it take). Do some role playing so that younger youth know what to say to people or how to behave while volunteering. To help them understand the impact of their participation as volunteers, have someone who is going to be affected by their volunteer efforts speak to them about the difference their volunteering will make.

Find out if they have concerns about volunteering.

Ask them about their concerns or worries and help them to overcome these before they undertake their assignment. Consider pairing a shy youth with a more outgoing youth.

Get parents involved.

What parents say and do can influence their children’s attitudes and behaviours. Encourage parents to discuss their own previous or current volunteer experiences with their children. They can also talk with their children about any concerns, anxieties, and fears they may have about an upcoming assignment. Make parents part of the volunteer process; ask them to help out or participate with their child; and invite them to celebrate their child’s volunteer achievements.

Involve peers in volunteer preparation.

Youth often put more value on what their peers say than on what adults say. Invite experienced youth volunteers to share their experiences with newer volunteers. Ask them to talk about how they felt before they volunteered for the first time and what they learned from the experience. This can help address and alleviate any anxieties, fears, or negative perceptions.

Hold debriefing sessions.

Gather youth together after their volunteer assignment to discuss what went well and what didn't. Ask them how they felt about the experience and what they would change next time. Ask them what they liked the most about it. Use this information when selecting other volunteer opportunities, recruiting youth volunteers, and preparing youth for volunteer assignments.

Appropriate tasks for younger youth volunteers

Younger youth are able to perform a wide range of tasks as volunteers. Their efforts can benefit their youth organization as well as individuals and organizations in the community.

Fundraising

Younger youth can:

- get sponsors, pledges, and donations (e.g., for bowl-, curl-, or walk-a-thons);
- canvass for donations;
- participate in "selling" activities (e.g., selling raffle tickets; helping with hot dog sales, bake sales, chocolate bar sales);
- participate in bottle and food drives; and
- organize car washes.

"I think with adult supervision there's no reason why they can't fundraise on their own, collecting pledge money and selling tickets and that stuff." (Executive Director)

"We've fundraised, already this year. We've done donations to the Terry Fox Run; we've done pennies for Hurricane Katrina. Last year our class did 'a penny a page' where for every page you read, the teacher gives a penny towards the tsunami relief fund."
(Female, 11 years old)

Providing service within youth organizations

Younger youth can:

- help clean up (e.g., wash dishes, clean up after arts and crafts);
- help with decorations for events (e.g., balloons);
- help the staff with a wide range of tasks (e.g., stuffing envelopes, making posters, setting up activities); and
- provide leadership or mentoring (e.g., reading stories and playing with younger children, tutoring or helping with homework).

“Well, I’m a mentor in training now and I help out with the staff, because sometimes we don’t have a lot of staff. We play games with them [other kids at the Club] to make sure they don’t get hurt, try to keep them away from dangerous things, have them in sight the whole time. We help out with snack.” (Male, 12 years old)

“I could help younger kids learn how to read. I could teach them how to skate. I could teach them how to play soccer.” (Male, 9 years old)

Providing service within the community

Younger youth can:

- visit people in nursing homes;
- help prepare and hand out food at a soup kitchen;
- participate in community clean-ups;
- do yard work, such as mow lawns, rake leaves, plant flowers, and shovel snow; and
- help put food on the shelves at the local food bank.

“Every spring and summer we go to mow lawns. Every fall we rake leaves. Every winter we shovel snow.” (Male, 12 years old)

“I volunteered to pick up garbage around town.” (Female, 9 years old)

“We went to the food bank and helped put up the food on the shelves.” (Male, 12 years old)

Facilitating recreation opportunities

Younger youth can:

- run games and give out prizes at an event;
- help with sporting events (e.g., handle the time clock);
- help staff look after younger children;
- teach children how to play sports/games; and
- serve food.

“First I helped set up the games. Then I had to run the frisbee toss and the clothes pin game, then the jumping things... bean bounces, and the gym.” (Male, 12 years old)

“There was a dinner last year where we helped. We gave them the food and took away the plates when they were done, and helped with their appetizers and brought them coffee and stuff.” (Female, 10 years old)

Summary

Younger youth are capable of handling a wide range of volunteer tasks. With suitable adult supervision and monitoring, the possibilities are endless.

Points to consider

Keep it simple.

Choose activities that are simple and fun. Activities do not always have to be orchestrated in advance. They can be as spontaneous as grabbing a few shovels and heading down the street to shovel people's driveways.

Promote activities that help younger youth develop skills.

If younger youth are to develop new skills, they need to be exposed to a variety of volunteering opportunities. For example, community clean-ups allow children to develop problem-solving skills (e.g., deciding what should and should not be picked up). Interpersonal and communication skills can develop when younger youth are involved in activities that allow them to interact with people who are not normally part of their lives (e.g., people in nursing homes).

Encourage younger youth to do things that benefit the community.

When promoting volunteer activities to younger youth, try to strike a balance between activities that will benefit them directly and activities that benefit the community. This will help younger youth understand that there is more to volunteering than, for example, fundraising for their organization and their own benefit. Start by selecting projects with obvious or immediate community benefits, such as community clean-ups or a visit to a nursing home.

Challenges in finding appropriate opportunities

Younger youth rely on others (e.g., staff and volunteers in youth-serving organizations) to help them find volunteer opportunities. This typically poses three types of challenges: interpersonal challenges (i.e., factors that arise out of interactions with others and involve the relationships between the youth or other people), intrapersonal challenges (i.e., psychological factors within youth themselves), and structural challenges (i.e., environmental factors that interfere with youth participation). Interpersonal challenges are the most common.

Interpersonal challenges

- Some organizations that are looking for volunteers have negative perceptions of younger youth. They may underestimate the abilities and potential contributions of younger youth or view them as untrustworthy or "too young" to volunteer.
- Younger youth volunteerism depends, in part, on parental support. Lack of parental support or involvement (e.g., when parents think their child is too young to volunteer) can limit participation.
- Parents, other youth, and community organizations sometimes have concerns about the behaviour of younger youth volunteers (e.g., they may be destructive, cannot follow instructions, or will interact negatively with other youth).

"I think that age group is not seen as a target age group to recruit volunteers."
(Executive Director)

“Family support, something as simple as signing a permission slip, is sometimes really difficult to get from parents. Sometimes we do have to stick to our guns and [say] we can’t take a child somewhere if the parent won’t take the time to fill out a form.” (Executive Director)

“Providing the people to supervise and maintain volunteers is critical and challenging.” (Executive Director)

“We usually get phone calls. ‘Why is a little 8-year-old going around with [a pledge sheet]? They’re too young. They’re too young to be doing that. Why is the Club letting them do it?’” (Executive Director)

Intrapersonal challenges

- Not all younger youth are interested in volunteering.
- Younger youth may not want to participate unless they get a reward.
- Some youth lack confidence in their abilities, are shy, or are nervous about some aspects of volunteering (e.g., interacting with strangers). This can affect their participation.

“Sometimes kids don’t think they want to volunteer but then they go and they have a great time doing it.” (Executive Director)

“Well, the main challenge is why. Why should I get off my couch, stop playing my Nintendo...? Why should I stop doing that and help somebody? What’s in it for me?” (Executive Director)

“It’s [volunteering] never going to be the number one thing that kids are looking for at that age because they are looking for self-fulfillment. They are looking to be happy and to do things for them[selves].”
(Executive Director)

Structural challenges

- Younger youth rely on others to take them places, so transportation is often a problem.
- Some of the volunteer opportunities that younger youth enjoy may not be available on a consistent basis (e.g., a one-time event or fundraiser).
- Not all tasks that organizations need done are appropriate for 8- to 12-year-olds, even with adult supervision.
- There are few resources (e.g., how-to guides) and little information available on how to involve younger youth as volunteers

“Transportation is definitely a challenge; we aren’t allowed to take anyone in a vehicle unless it’s an emergency and then it has to be kid in the backseat, another staff in the front....Everything is so far and to rent a bus is just insane. To have a bus transport us to the food bank would be probably \$200 for the trip.” (Executive Director)

“The volunteer activities or opportunities that exist sometimes aren’t suitable for kids.” (Executive Director)

“Transportation is a big concern; also money for staffing and providing materials. Age is a factor as well. There are certain activities that can be run with teens that cannot be run with younger children.”

(Executive Director)

“The opportunities, sometimes they’re there, sometimes they’re not; they’re here for a year, and they’re gone for a year. It’s hard to get anything that’s consistent.”

(Executive Director)

Summary

Adults who seek to encourage volunteerism among younger youth face a variety of challenges. Although difficult, these can be overcome.

Points to consider

Get younger youth interested by asking them what they would like to do.

Ask youth what they are interested in and what they would like to do. Their interests will develop and change, so ask them regularly. If youth are interested in an activity, they will be more likely to make their best effort and to enjoy the experience. This can result in them wanting to volunteer again.

Match volunteer opportunities to the skills of younger youth.

When choosing volunteer opportunities for younger youth, try to match the skills needed for the task with the skills of the youth. If a youth is new to volunteering, start with something small and easy (e.g., participating with a friend or experienced volunteer in a community clean-up). If a youth is experienced, choose something a little harder or more complex (e.g., running a game booth at a community fair) to reduce boredom and provide a challenge.

Search out appropriate opportunities for younger youth.

Organizations that need volunteers may not automatically think of younger youth. This means that it is up to adults who work with younger youth to seek out opportunities and to make organizations aware of the skills that younger youth have to offer. For example, younger youth today are more computer literate than youth of previous generations (and many adults!) and can teach computer skills to others.

Consider opportunities that are related to current events in the world or in the community (e.g., a fundraiser for the victims of a natural disaster). This can make volunteering more meaningful and help younger youth develop into responsible and compassionate citizens.

Help younger youth develop their skills.

As youth get older, they need to be exposed to a range of situations so that they can become independent in their volunteer efforts and confident enough to start taking initiative. Some fundraising activities (e.g., selling tickets; door-to-door canvassing) allow younger youth to develop their communication and interpersonal skills, but are not necessarily experiences that foster the development of leadership skills. Building leadership skills can be achieved through having youth organize a game night for other youth. Helping younger youth to develop new skills and try new things also keeps them interested in volunteering.

Recognizing younger youth volunteers

Recognition is as important to youth aged 8 to 12 as it is for older people. There is no “one size fits all” type of recognition. Younger youth respond to many different forms of recognition.

Younger youth want their efforts to be acknowledged.

- Younger youth want to feel appreciated. They appreciate praise from parents and leaders of youth organizations.
- Younger youth see acknowledgement of their efforts by adults and peers as a sign of respect.
- Younger youth want feedback so that they know whether or not they did a good job. Feedback encourages them to continue volunteering; lack of feedback discourages them.

“I think if they got more recognition, everybody would be volunteering because they’d know, well, that I’m going to be noticed a lot more.” (Female, 10 years old)

“People forgetting to say thank you is what I dislike about it because...if you don’t say thank you, it’s really just saying that you don’t appreciate the hard work you’re putting in to helping them.” (Male, 12 years old)

“She [mother] was really glad that I went instead of saying no. She was really proud of me for going there.” (Male, 12 years old)

Younger youth appreciate many forms of recognition.

- Younger youth respond well to small rewards (e.g., an ice cream), a simple “thank you,” volunteer recognition days, volunteer t-shirts, dinners for volunteers, announcements in newspapers and newsletters, and peer recognition.
- Recognition is most effective when it is tailored to the individual youth (e.g., saying “good job” to a child who responds well to encouragement).

Summary

Younger youth should not be taken for granted. If they are old enough to volunteer, they are old enough to be appreciated for their efforts. Recognition reinforces the importance of their contributions and encourages them to continue volunteering.

Points to consider

Recognition can be an opportunity to help younger youth develop.

Younger youth want to know if they are doing a good job when they volunteer. Positive and constructive feedback builds their confidence. As younger youth become more confident in their abilities, they are more willing to try new things, which, in turn, leads to acquiring new skills (e.g., social skills, leadership skills, problem-solving skills, etc.).

Encourage parents to recognize the contributions of younger youth volunteers.

Parents can reinforce the importance of volunteering by showing interest in and appreciation for their child’s participation. Let parents know how they can recognize the volunteer efforts of their children. Encourage them to give their child’s volunteer assignment(s) prominence by marking them on the family calendar and discussing the assignment with their child both before and after it takes place.

There are many different ways to recognize younger youth.

Feedback is a form of recognition. For example, if younger youth are helping at an event, ask event participants for written feedback on the youths’ contributions and share this with the youth.

Let younger youth know that they make a difference when they volunteer. Invite someone who benefited from the volunteering of younger youth (e.g., the representative of an organization for which they raised funds, a person whom they helped, etc.) to speak to the younger youth who volunteered about the results of their efforts (e.g., money was raised to buy an important piece of equipment for the local hospital, the local foodbank can help feed more people, etc.).

Try some of these types of recognition: a simple “thank you,” thank-you letters or cards, events (e.g., a volunteer appreciation night, a dinner for volunteers), evaluations from youth leaders that highlight the positive aspects of younger youths’ participation, volunteer t-shirts for those who helped at an event. After an event in which many younger youth participated, recognize their efforts in front

of the whole organization. If appropriate, praise their individual efforts. Seek media coverage for youth volunteer efforts. Recognize younger youths' contributions in your organization's newsletter.

Conclusion

Involving younger youth as volunteers requires considerable effort on the part of parents, staff and volunteers who work with younger youth, and the organizations that need volunteers. But the effort is well worth the return. Younger youth who volunteer:

- develop communication, problem-solving, and social skills;
- build self-confidence and self-esteem;
- become involved in their communities;
- learn the importance of helping others;
- learn how to get involved and make a difference;
- develop a volunteer ethic that encourages them to continue volunteering throughout their lives;
- develop a sense of responsibility; and
- have fun.

Organizations that involve younger youth volunteers may discover a new pool of loyal volunteers who remain with the organization for many years.

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