

August 2010

vitalentyear

What is vtalent year?

vtalent year enables volunteers aged 16-25 to directly influence and enhance public sector services and gain skills to improve their employability. The high quality, structured full-time placements within Children & Young People's Services, Further Education Colleges and Campaigning Organisations last for 44 weeks, leads to a minimum level 2 qualification, and offers personal development grants of up to £1,500 for volunteers to support their progression.

Why vtalent year now?

The global recession is exacerbating young people's economic vulnerabilities. Youth unemployment is currently nudging one million in the UK¹. This reflects a global trend of higher levels of youth unemployment during the economic crisis². Young people who experience early spells of unemployment will encounter a long term scarring effect - reducing their skills, productivity, potential earning capacity -and increasing their vulnerability to future spells of unemployment³. There is a need to invest in schemes aimed at improving the employment prospects of specific groups affected by unemployment⁴.



1 Labour Force Survey (July 2010)

2 Global Employment Trends for Youth (2010) International Labour Office

3 David Blanchflower (2009) v/RSA Lecture Lost Generation? Recession and the Young

4 David Blanchflower (2009) What should be done about rising unemployment in the UK? University of Stirling

54% of young people

were not in education, employment, or training before starting the programme

What is unique about vtalent year?

The programme has been designed to ensure:

- A minimum of 40% of the places are given to young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET)
- Volunteers receive high quality dedicated work based and pastoral support through placements with staff experienced in interacting with and supporting young people
- Volunteers complete approximately 30 hours a week in their placements and receive training to develop a wide range of transferable skills
- For Local Authorities, bi-annual in-depth residential experiences orientate, prepare and build the cohort as a national team of full-time volunteers
- Volunteers receive careers advice and are provided with clear and navigable routes to support their transition to employment, education or further training
- The volunteering impact and social return on investment is thoroughly monitored and evaluated.

Who are involved?

843 young people volunteered on vtalent year in 2009/10 in 32 Local Authorities, 29 Further Education Colleges and 2 Campaigning Organisations across England. A further 1,000 will volunteer in 2010/2011. The programme engaged a diverse range of 16 – 25 year olds in 2009/10⁵:

- 55% were female and 45% were male
- 75% were white, 19% were from Black and Asian Minority Ethnic groups, and 6% were from an 'other ethnic group'
- Before joining the programme 54% were not in training, education, or employment; 19% were in education or learning; 13% were employed; and 5% were in training
- Before joining vtalent year: 5% were at risk of exclusion; 3% were homeless; 7% were in or leaving care; 4% were lone parents; 46% were on a low income; 9% were offenders/ex-offenders; 3% were young carers; and 2% were Refugees/Asylum Seekers



The impact of vtalent year on young people

We surveyed young people completing vtalent year in June 2010 and identified the following impacts⁶:

- **Qualifications**

94% of the young people on the programme obtained a level 2 equivalent qualification.

- **Personal development**

young people reported an: increased willingness to do new things (95%); increased confidence (93%); increased motivation (93%); increased awareness of the effects of actions on others (91%); increased feeling of having things to look forward to in life (89%); and increased self-confidence (87%).

- **Skill development:**

young people reported an: increased ability to lead or encourage others (91%); improved communication skills (90%); improved ability to work as part of a team (87%); improved decision-making (84%); improved time management skills (78%); and improved specific job related skills (77%).

- **Improving employability**

80% of young people felt the programme had increased their chances of gaining paid employment and 90% had received careers support and advice from a placement advisor.

- **Increasing friendships and networks**

many young people (92%) reported increasing their range of friendships through vtalent year and 85% were now more aware of organisations they could call on for help and support.

- **Encouraging civic engagement**

most young people were interested in doing further volunteering (84%); many reported an increased willingness to get involved in local activities (77%); and an increased feeling that they are part of their local community (59%).

Retention rates

vtalent year has a strong retention rate, 75% of young people who started in 2009 completed the 44 week programme. Of those that left the programme early, 32% went into employment, 10% went to another volunteering opportunity, and 9% went into education⁷.



Progression routes

vtalent year also provides clear progressions routes for young people. A quarter (26%) of young people completing vtalent year in 2010 have progressed to employment; half (48%) of young people have gone onto further or higher education; and 15 per cent have taken up another volunteering placement⁸.

Young people completing vtalent year are extremely positive about their experiences of the programme, and almost all (98%) would recommend it to other young people⁹. This has been reflected in year 2 applications where there has been a 40% increase in applications for the 2010/11 programme¹⁰.

'If it was not for the vtalent year program I would still be jobless and homeless now so I would like to say thanks to anyone and everyone who helped me to become a better man.'

(Young volunteer)

'Sticking with this course enables you to grow as a person, develop and mature, you may find obstacles that actually help you with life in general should you confront them later on in life...' *(Young volunteer)*

'Working with a wide range of people that you wouldn't normally find yourself socialising with. Making great friends. Inspiring others and being inspired by others. Improving skills in the work place as well as additional skills like campaigning, researching, training, working with and for young people etc. Increasing your employability. Being financed and personally supported. The opportunity to go to and organise a wide range of differing events.'

(Young volunteer)

'It opens your eyes to all sorts of issues and also to all sorts of different organisations. It gives you so many opportunities to expand on your knowledge, beliefs, views and experiences. It builds your confidence in talking to people and your confidence in your own ability. It opens many career paths and gets you known in your chosen field. You make loads of new friends from different backgrounds, races and cultures and from that you learn a lot.'

(Young volunteer)

'This has been the best year of my life so far. I was made redundant from a dead end job and didn't have any idea of what I wanted to do with my life. After being on vtalent, I now know exactly what career i want and how to get it. I have had offers from universities for their Youth and Community Development courses, and the vtalent experience was essential for me getting a place. I have also been offered a place on Camp America this summer which will be a fantastic experience. I wish to thank you for commissioning vtalent, it has turned my life around and opened a lot of doors for me.'

(Young volunteer)

Supporting disadvantaged young people

vtalent year has been particularly effective at supporting disadvantaged young people to enhance their skills and experience. Over half (54%) of young people were not in education, employment or training before joining vtalent year¹¹. More than a third of vtalent year volunteers in the first cohort could be described as being vulnerable in some regard, whether that was as a care leaver, as having learning disability or health disorder, caring responsibilities, criminal convictions or substance misuse difficulties¹².

The programme has had a transformational impact upon some young people, supporting their transition into employment and/or education, something which they'd previously never considered. Young people told us:

'Before I became a part of vtalent year I was a stay at home mum. All I seemed to do was wash, cook and clean. A friend passed on information about a 44 week programme called vtalent year. My placement is at the Inclusion Project. This is a service to children with disabilities. In my placement I do some office work as well as face to face work with young people. The Inclusion Project provides after school groups, fun days and summer schemes on school holidays. I started volunteering as I was finding it hard to get back into work. Through my volunteering I have gained experience, confidence and new skills, some of which I have come a long way in. I have built my confidence and self-esteem which is something I never had before. I underwent a lot of training and this gave me a sense of achievement. I have finished my NVQ at college and been awarded the level 2 introduction to youth work course. Now I have a job running an after school group for children with disabilities – a dream come true! I am really proud for sticking it through when times were difficult and really glad to have met all the nice people who have believed in me and supported me through the last 44 weeks.'
(Young volunteer)

Feedback from volunteer placement supervisors tells a similar story:

'Before vtalent year Olly had spent a year on Job Seekers Allowance doing in his words 'nothing at all'. He has worked with hundreds of children over the last year. He has learnt how to take responsibility for an entire project, people skills, communication skills, different methods of child protection. He has done a level 2 qualification in youth work and is now doing a level 3 NVQ in play work. He has just gone to Camp America working with children for 9 weeks. After that he will be coming back to his sessional job here in youth and play work.'
(vtalent placement supervisor)

'Katy was 17 years old at the start of vtalent year. She had no qualifications, did not complete secondary school, and had not had paid work before. She was referred to vtalent year by the local Youth Offending Team. Katy's main placement was at a Primary School. She had low confidence due to dyslexia but received training through vtalent year on a 1-2-1 basis to cope with the workload. This worked very well and Katy completed a Level 2 Certificate in Supporting Schools and Learning during the 44 weeks and using her PDP Grant moved on to the NVQ Level 2. Katy has used her PDP Grant to continue to volunteer at the Primary School this will enable Katy to complete her NVQ 2 in Supporting Schools and Learning. Katy hopes to go onto College to achieve her Level 3.'
(vtalent placement supervisor)

'All the volunteers benefitted from considerable personal support from supervisors within placement and vtalent year staff. Many volunteers experienced difficult and challenging life events over the period, and staff supported them through bereavements, termination, pregnancy, family disputes, alcohol and drug issues, etc. Without this individual support some would have undoubtedly left the scheme'

(vtalent placement supervisor Further Education college)



Support is crucial to volunteer's experience

Support, both work based and pastoral, provided to volunteers through their Placement Supervisor or Volunteer Support Worker, is crucial to the volunteer's experience¹³. This support involves: problem solving; information on what was available, practicalities and logistics; helping young people choose appropriate activities to match their goals; helping young people reflect on the progress they had made; identifying strategic direction and suggesting development opportunities, and personal issues.

Feedback from young people and volunteer placement supervisors highlights this as a critical success factor in retaining young people for the duration of the 44 week programme, as demonstrated by the strong retention rates (75%). This is particularly important from young people with additional support needs.

'My project co-ordinator has given me all the support I have needed and more and is willing to continue working with me more even though the project has finished. She is fantastic!'
(Young volunteer)

'It has not been easy for some volunteers who prior to the programme were NEET and had little to get up in the morning for, but due to the support and supervision offered have been able to overcome difficulties and motivate themselves. It is fair to say that some volunteers needed a lot of help from placement providers and project staff at first and each of them developed at different stages.'
(vtalent placement supervisor at Further Education college)

Impact upon services

'Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have definitely benefitted from the vtalent year volunteers input. It has made services more accessible.'

(Local Authority)

vtalent year volunteers have been involved in developing and delivering services in their local area. Working alongside staff in structured volunteering placements they have been involved with a wide range of activities. For example:

- Consulting with young care leavers and supporting them to advocate their needs to influence service delivery and policy developments;
- Increasing student participation in enrichment, health, arts, sports and student union activities;
- Supporting post 16 transition process including mentoring and supporting disabled young people;
- Youth advocacy and participation;
- Developing a local youth lesbian gay bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) network and council forum;
- Building links between colleges, local community centres and training providers

Feedback from local services that volunteers worked with has been very positive. This feedback highlights that volunteers have been particularly successful at demonstrating the added value of peer-led approaches and engaging a wider range of young people in local communities and local services.

'The Youth Service particularly has previously struggled to recruit young people as part-time workers. The vtalent programme has changed this dramatically.'

(vtalent placement supervisor Local Authority)

'By having three vtalent year project volunteers on board with the Play Service we have been able to expand our range. It has given us the capacity to explore new avenues which have enabled us to have a greater impact on a wider range of children and young people.'

(Local Authority)

'One of our volunteers was the first female member of staff to join the Work Based Learning team. The Manager of the Service discovered that the addition of a female member of the team, who could relate to the young people accessing the service, actually opened the door to a number of young people who hadn't previously engaged with the service. This resulted in a positive impact on the outcomes of young people accessing the service and the performance targets captured in the service's team plan. As a result, the Team Manager was able to submit a Business Case for establishing a post and securing the services of the Volunteer beyond the term of her placement. The volunteer is now employed as a junior officer in the Work Based Learning Team.'

(vtalent placement supervisor Local Authority)



v's calls to action on full time structured volunteering

Structured volunteering programmes including accredited training, support and personal development must be part of the Department for Work and Pensions solutions to youth unemployment through the Integrated Work Programme. Young people need stable, easily administered financial support throughout their placements to ensure that the opportunity is accessible to disengaged young people who have the greatest need for consolidated support and structured activities.

Structured volunteering programmes such as vtalent year must also be part of the mix of 16-19 learning provision. vtalent year featured as an example of good practice for 16-19 learning in the Government publication Raising the Participation Age: supporting local areas to deliver (2009)¹⁴, in Ofsted's Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why (2010)¹⁵, and the Local government Association/Centre for Social Justice Hidden Talents III (2009)¹⁶ report.

There is huge potential to replicate this model to other public services and within the voluntary and community sector for example in youth justice, offending and health. Some vtalent year programmes have proposed their programme is replicated in 2012/13 with Local Authority Funding. Such programmes are a win-win for services and young people. The programme enhances the capacity of local authority service providers to expand their offer to the local community, sometimes offering services which could not have been delivered without the contribution of young volunteers. The programme also improves young people's understanding and influence local on services that affect them, and gives them the necessary skills experience and support to progress into further education, training or into employment.

For more information about vtalent year contact v on (020) 7960 7009 or go to www.vinspired.com/about-us/vtalent-year

¹⁴ Available from <http://publications.education.gov.uk>

¹⁵ Available from <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>

¹⁶ Available from <http://www.lga.gov.uk>