

**Discovering Talent –  
Developing Skills:  
the contribution of  
volunteering**





## About v

v is the national youth volunteering charity, established in 2006 to bring about a step-change in the quality, quantity and diversity of volunteering opportunities for 16-25 year-olds.

v was created as a result of the Russell Commission, set up in 2004 to look at the extent of youth action and engagement in the UK. Following extensive consultation with the third sector and with over 6000 young people, the Commission made a series of recommendations and proposed that a new and independent youth-led organisation, be established to develop and implement a new framework for youth volunteering in England.

Supported by the Office of the Third Sector, v is now delivering this framework, working with its youth advisory board v20, and investing in voluntary and community groups of all shapes and sizes that want to involve young volunteers in their work. v has already commissioned over 750,000 new opportunities, working both in partnership with established volunteering organisations and also with others that are completely new to youth volunteering. v is also building successful partnerships with business and, through the match fund, is able to double investment from the corporate sector in youth volunteering.

v offers support to young people who want to find out about volunteering. Through the national youth volunteering programme, vinvolved, v has established a network of teams covering every local authority area in the country, which will support smaller organisations and also broker young people into suitable volunteering opportunities that match their passions and interests. Young people who prefer to get their information on-line can also find out about what's on offer by going to [www.vinspired.com](http://www.vinspired.com), and innovative youth campaigns and events are rapidly raising awareness of the website.

Ultimately, v's mission is to inspire a new generation of volunteers, break down barriers and change the image of volunteering so that it becomes a 'must-have' for all young people.

v is supported by the Office of the Third Sector at the Cabinet Office

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# Foreword

Speak to anyone who has been involved in youth volunteering and they will tell you about the incredible benefits of involvement, both to communities and to young people themselves. Whilst volunteering activities are varied and diverse, they can nearly always create a safe environment in which young people can build new skills and take responsibility for leading positive change in their communities.

Yet the profile of volunteering and its benefits remains fairly low and its potential is still largely untapped. As v's recent survey shows, there is still more that could be done by employers to acknowledge the value of volunteering in their recruitment practices and promote volunteering as a means of personal development. This report sets out some of the steps that v will be taking to bring about the change that we want to see, including development of the new v Awards to boost recognition of volunteering and its benefits.

We hope that Discovering Talent – Developing Skills will convince you that this is an opportunity not to be missed. As the stories in this report demonstrate, volunteering has a huge amount to offer to wider discussions about education, employability and the engagement of young people.

In particular, the stories show that volunteering can:

- Build self-confidence and self-esteem, giving young people a sense of belonging and purpose;
- Help young people develop transferable skills that employers want in the work-place;
- Help engage young people outside of the classroom and provide a route back into formal learning and training;
- Prepare young people for sustainable employment; and
- Unlock the talent and creativity needed to lead communities.

In this publication, v has sought to bring all of the evidence and research together in one place and to let young people speak for themselves. These case studies demonstrate how wider support and promotion of volunteering could change the lives of young people for the better and, ultimately, transform society. Let's do ourselves a favour and work together for mutual benefit – v looks forward to hearing from you!

**Terry Ryall, Chief Executive, v**



It sounds extreme but in some ways, you could even say that volunteering saved my life...

I grew up in Moss Side in Manchester and there wasn't really much for young people to do. It was pretty easy to get into trouble and I really didn't get on with school. The curriculum just didn't engage me and at the age of 14, I'd pretty much stopped going and dropped off the radar. I eventually found out about a project run by Save the Children and started to volunteer, speaking with decision-makers and advocating on behalf of young people who were socially excluded.

Volunteering started to open up loads of doors for me and I even found myself representing the UK in Russia for an international leadership conference. This gave me an opportunity to contribute towards meaningful exchange with volunteers from around the world, which was awe-inspiring to say the least.

I'm now in my second year at university and studying for a degree in Active Citizenship and Volunteer Development. I never would have imagined I'd end up here but that's what volunteering can do for you. As a member of v20 and a trustee of v, I want to share my experience with other young people and inspire more young people to get involved. For students, volunteering should be absolutely essential and I'm currently creating a national guide book that will highlight the benefits for them. Aside from the community impact, volunteering can bridge the gap between skills development, education and employment and I'm living proof of this!

**Jared Nessa**  
age 20, v trustee



# Transferable Skills

Never before has there been such a significant investment in youth volunteering and such a priority placed on skills development. At this time, there is huge potential for these two agendas to be brought together for mutual benefit, enhancing the quality of volunteering opportunities for young people and increasing the skills of the nation, particularly in the area of transferable skills such as communication, team-work, problem solving and time-management.

There is now considerable agreement across the board about the importance of transferable skills. There is an impetus in education for schools and colleges to integrate personal, learning and thinking skills into the new curriculum and an understanding that these skills are universally important for all young people. Recent research conducted by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and in a separate study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) indicates that employers are also on board. Whilst functional skills such as literacy and numeracy are of course crucial, employers are starting to prioritise softer skills such as communication skills and work ethic when recruiting school leavers. Yet the emphasis of the Government's current policy has been placed very firmly on the development of functional skills and on the practical skills that are needed to fill certain sector skills gaps.

We should not take our eyes off the ball as far as these skills are concerned and, in some instances, volunteering can often provide the direct experience that young people need to enter certain sectors. However, it is equally important to consider how society might support young people to gain important generic, transferable skills which will complement their formal learning.

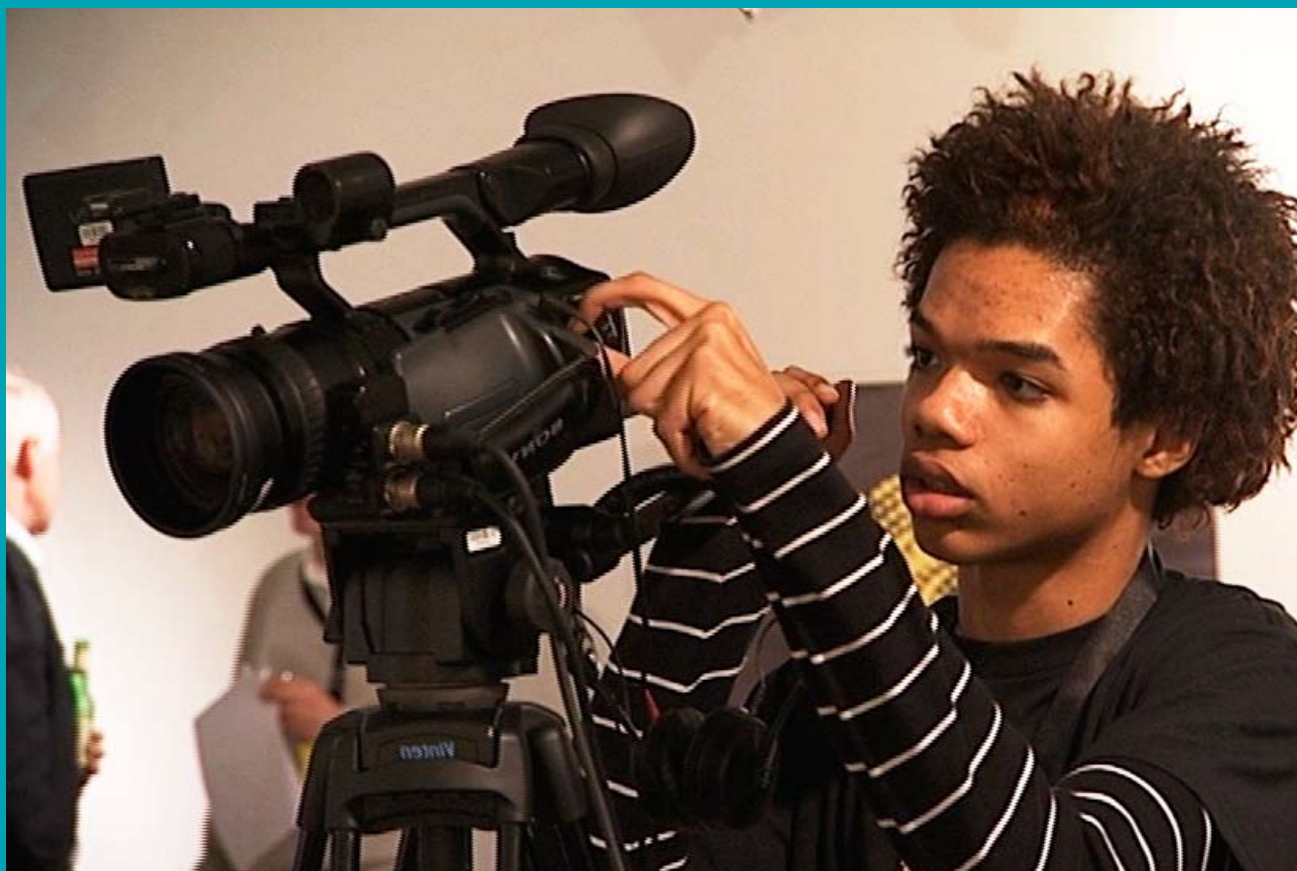
Recent research with young people, carried out by the National Youth Agency (NYA) on behalf of the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has shown that volunteering could be the answer. Speaking with young people involved with 30 projects across England, this six month study found that young people could identify a wide range of personal and social skills developed through volunteering: in some cases, volunteering had also helped young people gain practical skills or re-engage with formal learning. However, the study also found that young people needed more and better opportunities to reflect and articulate this, and that recognition of volunteering should be better integrated into other learning programmes.

It is clear that volunteering can deliver the kinds of skills that are needed by employers and as these case studies illustrate, enable young people to flourish and achieve their true potential.

## The Leitch Review on Skills

The Leitch Review was established in 2004 to consider the UK's long-term skills needs and to inform future policy. The final report was published in 2006 and called for 'radical change right across the skills spectrum'. The intention is to deliver world-class skills, increasing our productivity and employment rates, thereby resulting in a consequent decrease in poverty and inequality. Its key recommendations included:

- Increase adult skills across all levels;
- Strengthen the employer voice and create a new Commission for Employment and Skills;
- Launch a new 'pledge' for employers to commit voluntarily to train all eligible employees up to Level 2 in the workplace; and
- Create a new integrated employment and skills service.



**“The opportunity to improve skills and employability is a powerful incentive for young people to volunteer. It is important to mark the contribution made by young volunteers, and to recognise the skills they learn in the course of their activity.”**

Recommendation 11,  
Russell Commission on Youth Action and  
Engagement (2005)

## v Survey: Attitudes and Perceptions

v recently carried out a survey to get a better understanding of current attitudes towards volunteering and its benefits. As well as speaking with young people and staff within the voluntary sector, v also surveyed employers.

- 87% of employers agreed with the statement, “Volunteering is a valuable activity that could have a positive effect on career progression”
- Employers identify communication and team-work as the top two skills derived from volunteering, skills that also top their list of desirable skills for the work-place; but
- This understanding of volunteering does not always translate into action, with 32% of employers stating, “Volunteering experience is only relevant if directly linked to what our business / organisation does.”



**“We recommend that time spent in formal volunteering, should be acknowledged as a legitimate and important part of an individual’s curriculum vitae & career development path.”**

Report from the Commission on Future of Volunteering (2008)

**“Volunteering can enable students to develop the soft skills required by employers, strengthen providers’ engagement with their local communities and help foster an inclusive ethos.”**

Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances (DfES, 2006)



**The 2008 CBI/Edexcel Education and Skills Survey found the following:**

- Over half of employers (53%) are concerned that there will not be enough skilled people in the UK to meet their future recruitment needs;
- 86% of employers ranked positive attitude and 'employability' in their top three demands when recruiting graduates; and
- 62% of employers said that relevant work experience was vitally important.



**“Many of our members comment on a lack of employability skills encompassing punctuality and teamwork to work ethic and creativity. They are vital to driving forward the knowledge economy and we must harness these skills if we are to remain competitive in the world market.”**

Miles Templeman, Director General,  
Institute of Directors  
Critical Skills for Tomorrow (IOD, 2008)

# Projects and Case Studies

## JENNY

### Skills Developed: self-confidence, communication, football coaching

Jenny started volunteering on a one day a week placement at one of SRYP's own area offices. She was rather quiet, shy and reserved but as she began to learn new skills like planning and preparing work, especially for youth work sessions, she grew in confidence.

"I definitely wanted to work with young people and SRYP gave me the chance to volunteer with the peer education team as a way of building up my experience. I wanted to get involved with outdoors events and activities."

Before long, Jenny's natural talents started to shine through. As she grew in confidence and self-esteem, she began to take a leading role, organising and leading games and other physical activities. She was acquiring skills in building teamwork and in communicating with others. "I think I was learning without really noticing it. I started to feel a lot more positive about what I wanted to do in the future; what kind of work. I really enjoyed working along with other people my age and I had a lot of understanding about what they were going through."

Jenny's interest in sport saw her complete her FA level 1 Football Coaching course. She then needed to get some practical football sessions in so as to be able to move onto the next level of football coaching.

"SRYP got me onto a football project in Wiveliscombe. The kids there weren't really involved in sports so it was quite a challenge. It stretched my skills to work with young people who really didn't have any knowledge of the game. They really looked up to me so I had to meet their expectations." Jenny is still volunteering at the area office and developing her organisational and office skills. She's also still working with the football project and using her experience there towards her FA level 2 Coaching course. She has also been asked to take on the task of Team Manager for a local under eights football team.

Jenny has been awarded the SRYP volunteer of the Year Award after being nominated by her youth worker. She received her trophy, certificate and voucher from the Chairman of the SRYP Board at the Christmas party.

## SOMERSET RURAL YOUTH PROJECT (SRYP)

Somerset Rural Youth Project (SRYP) encourages its volunteers to become actively involved in shaping the communities in which they live and offers young people a wide range of opportunities to suit their passions and interests. Some of the projects include IT, web design, events planning or marketing activity. Other options involve volunteering in sports leadership, conservation or music projects with young bands. The tasks can mean taking a lead role in workshops and at conferences, or organising a local gig.

Senior Youth Worker, Julie Graham, has high hopes for the 40 v volunteers engaged in the programme, as well as the scope for further development of the project: "The main benefits have been very positive with young people able to see themselves making a positive contribution to their own community.

"Young people are meeting new people and learning skills that they would not have had the chance to pick up elsewhere, such as the skills they develop whilst doing conservation work on Exmoor. They begin to think more creatively and to discover team-work and self-management in action."

Because of the breadth and mix of different opportunities, volunteering can offer young people the chance to develop more vocational skills, for example through office work, conservation projects or sports leadership: "The practical skills are good for prospective employers, and sports courses have led to additional opportunities for paid work. The conservation and environmental skills offer good scope for job searching."

## PORTSMOUTH HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Portsmouth Housing Association (PHA) is receiving v funding to develop 24 full-time opportunities mainly for young residents living at the Portsmouth Foyer, a housing project for more than 100 young people.

Julia Munday is the community development worker responsible for managing the v project: "These are young volunteers who have already faced a raft of difficult challenges. Our volunteers need help to get a focus, a sense of motivation. Some have lived in supported accommodation for up to two years and just haven't really been motivated to do anything when they first come to us. The Foyer encourages them to learn IT and literacy skills but they can find themselves with a lot of empty hours."

Part of PHA is the Roberts Centre, a day centre for families living in temporary B&B-type accommodation. It provides company and facilities including a free summer play scheme for 7-12 year olds. This has proven popular with the young v volunteers who help professional staff with organising days out to the beach, to local facilities and on adventure trips.

An alternative opportunity comes at the Foyer's own breakfast club where most of the volunteers join the rota preparing breakfast for all of the residents. Here they must organise and buy the food, set out tables and clear up afterwards. "It's a good starting point because it gets them out of bed regularly and teaches them essential life skills."

Other activities include internal decoration work and coaching the Foyer's own football team as well as providing admin support to the project. Several volunteers have become interested in conservation work and one took part in an anti-slavery theatre production.

## NICOLAS

### Skills Developed: motivation, team-work

To young people like Nicolas, the idea of volunteering seemed absurd. Why work and not get paid? His past experience had left him de-motivated and unable to contemplate any positive future at all. He had drifted in and out of jobs for a few weeks at a time, reinforcing his own sense of failure.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had ideas about things I could do but they seemed un-realistic. I thought I didn't have what it takes to do those things."

My key worker told me about the v project. I understood what it was about but I didn't know what opportunities lay ahead, so I applied and was quickly accepted.

The first day was a bit of a kick into reality, a routine developed and before I knew it I'd finished a week already."

Nick got a lot of one-to-one guidance from staff who helped him identify achievable career paths. He started to see how volunteering could help him to move forwards. With the help of funding, he got a laptop and began doing media projects at the Foyer.

"By the end of just 13 weeks I had volunteered to do gardening, decorating, acting and singing in a community play, editing a magazine for the Portsmouth Foyer, running a breakfast club, analysing the appeal of museums in Portsmouth for the city council and other media based projects.

I feel that I have changed my complete outlook to work; I have gained certificates in first aid, health and safety and drug awareness because I have more confidence to put myself forward, putting in more effort and realising that if you want to do something all you have to do is push yourself a little more."

# A route back into education and training

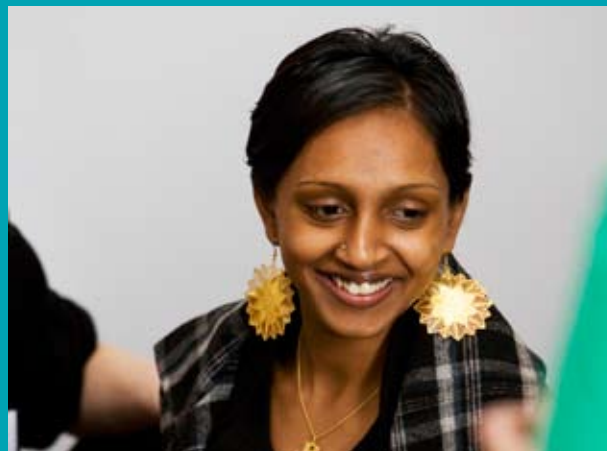
Volunteering can be a positive way of engaging young people who are not in education, employment or training, or who have other barriers to getting on in life. For young people who have found the school environment challenging and who want to learn in a different way, volunteering can be the answer and can help them prepare for apprenticeships or other training options. Currently, statistics indicate that 9.4% of young people aged 16-18 are not in education, employment or training, a figure that the Government has pledged to reduce to 8% by 2010. Closer inspection of the statistics indicates that this figure includes both young people who are volunteering on a gap year and other young people who have an identifiable barrier to participation, such as young parents or those with a disability. There are however, still around 150,000 young people each year that are not engaging and who could benefit from an expansion in volunteering opportunities, particularly those that are full-time.

Government proposals to increase the participation age of education and training to 18 will need to give due regard to volunteering as a way in which young people can be engaged and can learn in a more informal environment. Volunteering should be seen by all schools, colleges and training providers as an integral part of the new post-16 offer, complementing formal learning and offering all young people the chance to make a positive contribution, linking in with Every Child Matters. In some

cases, volunteering can provide an alternative to formal education that allows young people to develop the skills, resilience and self-confidence that they need to get back on track.

**“It really brought up my confidence and helped me to unearth and develop skills I didn’t have before.”**

Shaz Dookie, v volunteer at Citizens Advice, South London



In 2004, the **Every Child Matters** (ECM) White Paper was published, calling for the integration of children and young people’s services in order to improve outcomes. These five outcomes are:

- Enjoy and achieve;
- Stay safe
- Be healthy
- Achieve economic well-being; and
- Make a positive contribution.

The **Youth PSA** (Public Service Agreement) aims to increase the number of children and young people on the path to success. One key objective of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is to increase participation in positive activities, such as volunteering, as a way of improving the skills and prospects of young people. All local authorities will be measuring the take-up of positive activities, including by disadvantaged and targeted groups.

**“Ensuring that there are engaging and valuable learning options and appropriate support for all is key to ensuring that as many young people as possible benefit from the new expectation.”**

Ed Balls MP, Raising Expectations: staying in education and training post-16, DCSF (2007)

**Personal, Learning and Thinking skills** (PLTs) have been identified by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) as the skills that should complement the functional skills of English, Mathematics and ICT and can be developed in a wide-range of learning contexts from 11 to 19. The 6 identified groups of skills include:

- Independent Enquiry;
- Creative Thinking;
- Reflective Learning;
- Team-Working;
- Self-Management; and
- Effective Participation.

**“Young people not in education, employment or training have usually left school with very little in terms of formal education and can find that there is no approachable way back into learning... Small steps back into education, rather than substantial courses leading to full qualifications, can offer a less challenging prospect for someone who has not got on with the school system first time around.”**

Building Skills, Transforming Lives: a training and apprenticeships revolution, Conservative Party Green Paper (2008)

# Projects and Case Studies

## LEYLI

### Skills Developed: self-confidence, leadership, vocational qualifications

"I'd recently started studying sports at college when my tutor told me about Youth AID. At that time, my family was homeless but Youth AID helped us get into a hostel and I started to volunteer, which took my mind off the situation.

My confidence and motivation really increased and I've now completed a whole range of training courses, including sports coaching qualifications. I've volunteered at a number of events during Black History Month, the London Marathon and I also had the opportunity to take part in Camp America. I volunteered as a specialist sports counsellor, helping children and young people with disabilities, and learnt how to be a mentor. Teaching break-dancing and going camping were also great experiences – I was able to put into practice all the things I had learnt on Youth AID courses and it really brought out the leader in me. I came back a changed person – more independent, mature and excited about all I'd achieved.

Through Youth AID, I recently found out about a self-build project for young people who want to build and live in their own homes. They can only take on 15

people and it's a long project but I went for an interview and they were so impressed with all I've done that they gave me a place! I've already completed and passed my Foundation Certificate in Building Craft Occupations and I'm now doing a health & safety course that will allow me to go on-site. In September, I will start my Carpentry and Joinery NVQ1 and shortly after, we will start building our homes which will hopefully be completed in 2011 in Downham, South London.

Volunteering has helped me to accomplish the things that I couldn't do before. I didn't have the chance to do my GCSEs or A-Levels but I've now got on to an NVQ3 course and volunteered more than 200 hours of my time working with children, young people and adults with disabilities. Through my volunteering, I can show employers that I am a competent, reliable and enthusiastic person – the kind of person that they're looking for. It gives me a sense of achievement and I'm proud of myself, showing that even in the hardest of times you can overcome anything."

## LEWISHAM Youth AID

Lewisham Youth AID supports young people to participate in a wide range of full and part-time volunteering opportunities.

Caroline Ludden is the Coordinator responsible for finding young people volunteering opportunities: "Each person we handle here is treated very much as an individual and according to whatever their own situation is. We don't have a 'one size fits all' philosophy here. What we do is very much a result of what the young people themselves tell us they want."

One of the most sought-after opportunities is an after-school club which has proved very popular with the young volunteers wanting a part-time commitment. Full-time opportunities have also been accessed within the local youth service and through religious groups. Building good exchanges with Camp America and the Youth Hostel Association has created valuable opportunities internationally, especially for some previously hard-to-reach young people.

Lewisham Youth AID now has an innovative and exciting programme called Learning and Growing by Doing, which is supported by v: "Our aim is to develop the personal and social growth of young people through experiential learning, so that they can become young leaders in every aspect of their lives. Our programme offers a wide range of short courses and volunteer opportunities." Courses include youth work, public speaking, conflict resolution and first aid.

Some of the young people at Youth AID have very specific challenges: dyslexia, Asperger syndrome, depression and other mental health issues which all mean they may need substantial one-to-one support: "Many start off without any idea of how to plan a diary, how to timetable their activities or just turn up on time. These are essential social skills that need to be built and we find that our residential courses are especially good at dealing with these kinds of issues."

## GROUNDWORK EAST LONDON: LEARN GLOBAL ACT LOCAL

Through the Learn Global Act Local project, Groundwork engages young people who have experienced disadvantage to volunteer both overseas and in their local community.

Some of last year's 15 participants had never left East London, never mind the UK, points out Community Project Coordinator, Felicity Usher, "Groundwork had to ensure that the young people were fully committed to the project prior to going overseas. This involved intensive preparation and selection to ensure that the young people were ready for an exciting challenge and potentially life-changing experience."

Five of last year's volunteers went to Malaysia and ten to Costa Rica to volunteer on community and environmental projects. The project activities help young people to build self-confidence, work in teams and take on problem-solving and leadership challenges: "The young people v is supporting here have often received little or no positive feedback in their early adult lives. This can lead to low motivation levels and a feeling that no matter what, they won't be able to achieve. This project allows them to explore their strengths and constructively work on their areas for development in a supportive, safe environment whilst building essential life skills. Residential courses and the expedition strip away pretensions and allow people to engage and bond with those whom they might not have spoken to in other circumstances."

Whilst volunteering as a team on the projects, each young person has to take a turn at being the day leader. This means that they must assess the tasks needed for completion, delegate responsibilities and evaluate progress. This helps them prepare for the third phase of the programme which requires participants to apply their new skills in their local communities through a part-time volunteering role. As a result three participants have since gone on to gain employment in their placement organisations, showing a clear link between volunteering and employability.

## SASKIA

### Skills Developed: team-work, environmental conservation

After struggling to complete A-levels and almost dropping out of her art foundation course, Saskia found out about Learn Global Act Local. She was accepted onto the project team and after three months of preparation, the volunteers headed off to remote parts of Latin America, organised by Raleigh International, with Saskia's place fully funded by Groundwork.

"I didn't know any of the others and there was only one other girl in my group", Saskia says, "But all the people were lovely. You learn to get along, and soon find out what you can tolerate and what's not acceptable. In an extreme situation like that, you learn to understand each other." The overseas element of Saskia's project consisted of three components: environmental, community and adventure. The environmental work involved helping rangers to dig a path up the side of an active volcano and during this part of the expedition the team set up camp and cooked their own food. "We had two leaders, but they tried to let us work things out for ourselves."

After Costa Rica, Saskia and her group travelled to a Nicaraguan village for the community element of their

project. "The villagers get their water from wells, and our job was to dig trenches so that pipes could be laid to enable them to get water in their houses. It was really hot, and very hard work," says Saskia, "and it really made me think about how different things are at home."

After an exhausting 280 km trek, the team returned home to spend a further 200 hours working in the community. "I worked at the recycling centre in Walthamstow", says Saskia, "where they recycle paint, paper and computers. Another girl from Groundwork went with me, and I think the older people who worked there appreciated having some younger people around."

Coming home has been difficult but Saskia is now preparing to take on the new challenge of university where she will be studying 3D design. She is keen to continue volunteering and to mentor the next group of volunteers as a member of Groundwork's youth advisory panel. "I'm helping with the programme for next year, recruiting volunteers and talking to them about what they can expect from the project. We're also discussing what changes can be made, and I'm contributing to that."

# Developing Talent: leadership, creativity and enterprise

A recent poll of 1000 young people carried out by the Talent & Enterprise Taskforce has revealed that young people often equate talent with celebrities: to be talented, you need to appear on 'The X Factor' or become a successful footballer. Yet we know that young people are talented in so many other ways and volunteering can be a way of unearthing and nurturing that talent.

v believes that when you give young people responsibility, they will ultimately rise to the challenge. Being able to develop and manage a volunteering project may be the first time that a young person has been trusted with decision-making, but this experience can help to unlock a natural talent for leadership or enterprise. Government has already set out its plans to devolve budgets for positive activities to young people themselves, extending the principle of empowerment which has already been embedded in the Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds. At a national level, v has also developed its own youth fund – vcashpoint – with the specific aim of supporting youth-led volunteering projects which are designed, planned and delivered by young people themselves. These funds are giving young people the opportunity to turn their ideas for community projects into reality and some young people are even taking things one step further and getting involved in social enterprise. This is one way for young people to build on their volunteering experiences

and can often appeal to young volunteers who are passionate about social change.

Other young volunteers may move into community leadership roles and through our flagship national youth volunteering programme, vinvolved, v hopes to encourage this through the creation of Youth Action Teams in local neighbourhoods. Young people in these teams will act as role models, inspiring their peers to take action in their communities and deliver positive change which will improve their neighbourhoods. Young people are not only future leaders: with the right support and recognition, they can also be current leaders – both in the community and in business. The talent and enterprise of young people could be just what we need.



## Youth Leadership

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) ten-year vision for youth leadership will be realised by young people:

- mentoring and supporting their peers as well as helping vulnerable adults in their communities;
- leading projects which bring together communities divided by cultural difference and prejudice, and using their leadership skills to help them find common ground;
- leading independent campaigns and engaging in fundraising;
- empowered by and working with DCSF to influence policy on a national and international stage;
- helping to tackle disadvantage by leading regeneration projects and home-grown social enterprises; and
- empowered by their local council to take a leading role in shaping the local offer of activities and services for teenagers and leading these activities themselves.



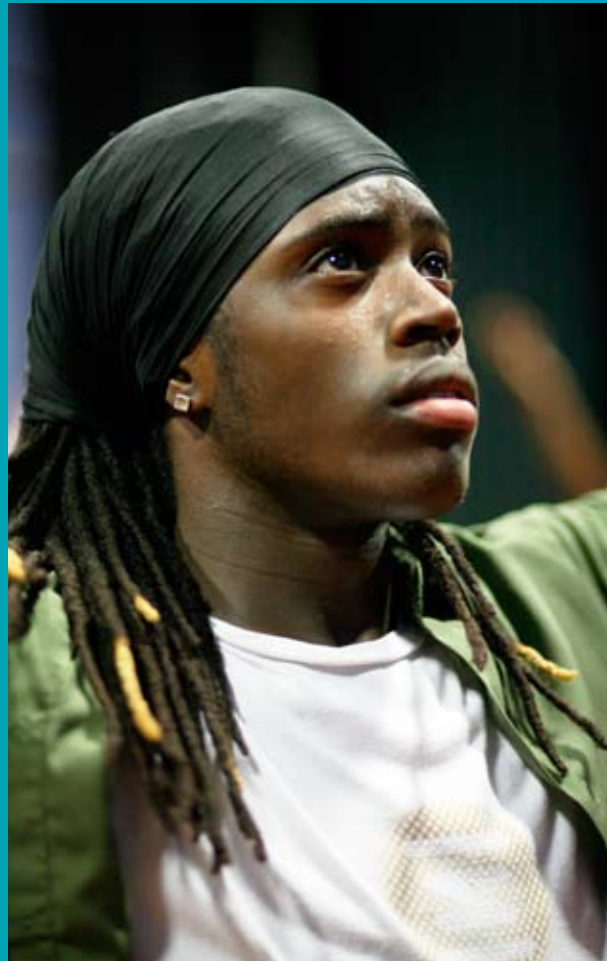
**“By 2018 more young people, particularly the most disadvantaged, will be leading action to address the problems faced by other young people and be recognised and welcomed as leaders of change for the benefit of wider society.”**

Young People: Leading Change  
(Department for Children, Schools  
and Families, 2008)

## The Talent Challenge 2008

Business in the Community (BITC) is currently implementing a work programme aimed at increasing our capacity as a nation, through school, the work-place and in the community, to recognise, nurture and apply people's talent so they can realise their full potential. Among other things, the Talent Challenge will:

- Develop and deliver an effective high profile call to business action;
- Promote and enable further business action to support schools, colleges and universities as centres of excellence in equipping students for the world of work;
- Enable more businesses to support those out of the labour market in acquiring the relevant skills to secure and retain employment and to support effective routes into employment; and
- Encourage all employees to upgrade their skills continuously, ranging from new employees to top talent.



**“Many young people simply don’t realise their own potential. By exposing them to teamwork and creativity or skills such as financial planning you can give them the confidence and self belief they need to make their ideas happen.”**

Brent Hoberman, co-founder  
of lastminute.com

## Social Enterprise

The Government's Social Enterprise Action Plan was published in 2006. One of its key aims is foster a culture of social enterprise, particularly amongst young people, harnessing the energy and ideas of social enterprise ambassadors to inspire a new generation. The most recent Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) estimates that 4.4% of 18-24 year-olds are social entrepreneurs and attitudinal research carried out by Make Your Mark shows that social enterprise offers an ideal way to unlock young people's growing desire to inspire social change.

**“Young volunteers form the lifeblood of many organisations, and their energy, enthusiasm, commitment and leadership can create positive change in their local communities and environments.”**

Russell Commission Report on Youth Action and Engagement (2005)



**“In many places, people from certain communities feel they lack pathways to power. That is why it is important to help young people from diverse backgrounds to become effective leaders whether in the public, private or the third sector.”**

Communities in Control – Empowerment White Paper (Communities and Local Government, 2008)

# Projects and Case Studies

## SARAH

### Skills Developed: enterprise, events management

For the University students who volunteer on Voltage – 50 of them over the last two years – the rewards are substantial. There is a real ‘feel good’ factor about helping to build skills among local sixth formers and college students. These are genuine life skills that will enable these teenagers to really engage in making a positive contribution to both their own futures and the future of the communities in which they live.

Sarah discovered Voltage while she was doing a business-related degree: “I found it especially interesting because it encourages students to set up social enterprises. It is varied in its nature, with lots of different roles from event management to working within a school. That makes it accessible to everyone and you meet a wide range of people.”

Sarah’s role has been with the events management team: “I’ve been involved in organising all the events and conference days that Voltage holds. I find this kind of work really enjoyable as at the end of the event you get a real sense of achievement watching your hard work pay off. You also get quite a lot of responsibility with the

project and get to make decisions regarding events which really make you feel like you’re making an impact.”

“You see the students in the project improve and gain skills and I’ve gained invaluable skills for myself that I hope to use in my future career. My own confidence has improved because I’ve been talking to such a variety of different people and I’m also more motivated to help others to do well. My organisational skills have got better because I’ve had to juggle LUVU and the demands of my degree course.”

## LANCASTER UNIVERSITY: VOLTAGE

Universities can play a valuable role in bridging the gap between education and the world of work. At Lancaster University, the v funded Voltage project aims to encourage young people to set up their own social enterprises.

Student volunteers at LUVU (Lancaster University Volunteering Unit) have led conference days for 194 people from 8 local sixth forms and colleges. LUVU Director, Ben Matthews explains: “The aim is to give school pupils a solid understanding of what social enterprise means: to bond the participants as a team and to get them to think creatively about what sort of business they might run.”

Young people are challenged to brain-storm potential ideas, compose a business plan, ‘sell’ it to a Dragon’s Den style panel, and promote the concept to the community, all before they run the project for six weeks.

In the process, they learn a great deal about what it means to run a social enterprise and have developed an incredible range of projects: the North-West Air Ambulance benefited from initiatives that raised £850 and another group sold healthy living smoothies in school.

“At the end of it all, they each had to give a five minute presentation at a gala event. They used PowerPoint, raps, video, even drama to present their achievements to the panel. They had to talk about their finances as well as outlining the positive impact that their initiative had on the local community,” says Ben Matthews. “The excitement, the buzz there was fantastic. By extending the concept of volunteering into a business context, young people respond more readily.”

A new and longer training programme is now opening up. “The longer term Youth Leadership course took on its first 33 people last year. I have great hopes that with the right support, it will prove to be hugely beneficial to those young volunteers who are ready to move forward more confidently and run a social enterprise as a career choice.”

## vcashpoint

v's youth advisory board v20 has designed a fund that puts up to £2500 directly in the hands of young people who want to run volunteering projects. Young people are in charge from start to finish, completing the initial application form for funding, recruiting volunteers from their local area and overseeing the project management. v'cashpoint has allowed young people to be creative, coming up with their own solutions to some of society's most serious problems, including racism, anti-social behaviour, environmental damage and inter-generational conflict. It has also allowed young people to develop their leadership skills, as they bring together a team of their peers who will volunteer in order to achieve the project aims and objectives.

vcashpoint is match-funded by HSBC and, to date, it has enabled over 200 young people to lead out projects in their local communities.

## MONELLE

### Skills Developed: project management, communication, creativity

Monelle planned and delivered an arts festival, the City Youth Art Awards, which culminated in an event at the prestigious Dorchester Hotel in London with art, live music, fashion and dance. The aim of the project was to celebrate and motivate creative young people. "I saw so many creative children and young people who were producing art in the classroom and not taking it any further. I wanted to give them a platform, to celebrate their achievements and take their art to a wider audience..."

The idea for the City Youth Art Awards started small and ended up much bigger than I had ever expected. Some of the adults I spoke to were initially a bit sceptical and said I was being a bit too ambitious. But this only motivated me more! I found out about v'cashpoint funding through the radio and this enabled me to turn my ideas into reality.

Right from the start I had to plan and manage the project, filling in the application form, budgeting and recruiting other young people to volunteer. In the end there were 40 volunteers at the event, recruited from schools and colleges across London and doing a whole range of things – writing for the magazine, doing the photography,

curating the exhibition. There were a lot of people involved so we had to break things down into smaller meetings, communicating in different ways to make sure everyone could contribute effectively. The project really helped with my negotiation and communication skills – I spoke to so many people at so many different levels and that will definitely help me in the future.

In total there were about 150 children and young people involved as participants and another 150 people attending as guests. I enjoyed it so much that I am organizing another event this year called 'Inspiring Youth' which will connect creative young people with employers and potential investors. I am also thinking about how I can develop my writing and communication skills and thinking about future work in events and PR.

Working on this project confirmed to me, that with hard work and dedication, and when you really put your mind to something, you can achieve whatever you want."

# A stepping stone into employment

For too long, volunteering has been treated with suspicion by those responsible for getting people into work. Instead of being seen as a stepping stone into sustainable employment, it has often been regarded as a 'soft option' or as a way of avoiding 'real work'. However, the case-studies here show that volunteers can often gain valuable qualifications and skills, as well as developing the self-confidence and practical experience that is required to move into paid employment.

v believes that as long as a young person is available for work, they should be able to volunteer full-time and claim expenses without any negative impact on their Job-Seeker's Allowance and other passported benefits. Despite this, some young volunteers continue to experience difficulties with their benefits and v therefore welcomes the decision by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to review current rules to ensure that they do not discourage people who are unemployed from volunteering.

There is still anecdotal evidence to suggest that some young people have been required to leave full-time volunteering placements in order to move onto the New Deal for Young People. This scenario, whilst rare,

should be avoided at all costs and v would like to see the Flexible New Deal contain an exemption for all those young people engaging in full-time but time-limited volunteering.

On completion of an opportunity, more could be done to link those young people graduating from full-time volunteering into other training or employment initiatives such as Local Employment Partnerships. In some cases, young people are able to move into apprenticeships with local companies but v is keen to see further partnership between employers and volunteering organisations – young volunteers often have the dedication, passion and commitment that employers are looking for.

**“In some cases volunteering is the most effective way of re-engaging long term unemployed and vulnerable people with the world of work.”**

Breakthrough Britain,  
Policy Recommendations  
to the Conservative Party (2007)

The **New Deal for Young People** was introduced in 1998 with the aim of helping more young people aged 18-24 into work. If a young person has been out of work and claiming Job-Seeker's Allowance (JSA) for six months, they are automatically moved onto the New Deal where they receive intensive support and after a further four months, must undertake one of the following four options in order to qualify for continuing benefits:

- Employment;
- Education and Training;
- Work in the voluntary sector; or
- Work with the Environment Taskforce.

Throughout this time, young people must also ensure that they are available for interview and to take up a position if they are successful in a job application. The New Deal for Young People will be integrated into the new Flexible New Deal, which will be introduced from 2009.

**“Voluntary activity can have many advantages for unemployed people as well as the wider community. It can help keep them in touch with the labour market. It can offer opportunities to obtain the skills and experience that can make moving into work easier.”**

No-one Written Off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility, DWP Green Paper (2008)

**Local Employment Partnerships** exist to bring Government and business together in order to tackle skills shortages and encourage more people into sustainable employment. By 2010, Local Employment Partnerships will help more than 250,000 people into jobs and more than 4000 UK employers have already signed up to take part.



**“Volunteering should be actively encouraged and acknowledged as a pathway to employment.”**

Morgan Inquiry into Young Adult Volunteering (2008)

**“Volunteering is a great way to help young people understand what work is really about. That doesn’t happen in the regular classroom environment but outside it.”**

Chris Humphries, CEO UK Commission on Employment and Skills



# Projects and Case Studies

## JAMES and DANIELLE

### Skills Developed: self-confidence, team-work, communication

Through volunteering, both James and Danielle have uncovered abilities that neither knew they possessed. Danielle is now learning to sail, and James has just been taken on as a modern apprenticeship mechanic. The employer who interviewed him was so impressed by his enthusiasm and commitment, that he has predicted James will complete his training ahead of schedule.

James first came to Working it Out when he was referred by Connexions: “I wasn’t good at communicating with people. I wouldn’t ask them for help... I like working in a team now because people will say ‘if you help me do this, I’ll help you with that.’”

James got involved with a gardening challenge at the nearby Halcyon Community Centre. “We got together in teams to discuss how we’d help. We organised who’d be the team leader, who’d do the different tasks like clearing away the dirt and digging trenches. We really had to work together and that was good. I got a bit of a buzz out of it all. I’ve also been on a 17 mile sponsored walk and raised money from a car boot sale for the centre. Then I’ve done some decorating work for Plymouth and District Mind.”

Danielle was experiencing family problems and living in supported housing when she first joined the project: “I’d just finished an apprenticeship and I’d been looking for a job for ages. I wasn’t very confident and my self-esteem was pretty low but the people were really nice. I got some new skills doing the garden challenge at the community centre. Then I got the chance to learn to sail and was at the helm for a while. I’m not so shy now and communicate better with people. I even had a go at karaoke and I’d never have done that before”

Danielle is now looking for a temporary job to take her up to the start of a college course in forensic science: “I really like the idea of volunteer work. You learn new things, you’re helping other people and it’s good for your CV. I feel a lot more confident about the skills I have now.”

## WORKING IT OUT: TOMORROW’S PEOPLE

With bases in Plymouth, London, Brighton and Liverpool, the Working it Out project has been developed by national charity, Tomorrow’s People. Its challenge is to break the cycle of unemployment and it has been partnering with them on this match-fund project.

Young volunteers sign up to a 16-week programme during which they work in teams of 12 on community challenges that they themselves identify. They must not only deliver the challenge but organise the approach, agree team responsibilities and deliver a final presentation detailing their work.

Task Manager in Plymouth, Jane Porter, explains: “When our volunteers arrive, many have low confidence and lack self-esteem. They have often faced homelessness and exclusion and many are in supported accommodation. Quite often, the young people aren’t able to apply themselves to problem-solving and so before we start the challenges, we run workshops on basics like communication and listening skills, time management and the importance of actually turning up regularly.”

Job-seeking is built into the programme from the beginning with intensive one-to-one support that recognises the uniqueness of every individual’s needs and aspirations.

“The groups then start to look at some potential challenges, often generated by going out into the neighbourhood, linking up with community centres, and finding out what could be done. As well as transferable skills such as team-work and communication, the young volunteers will often learn some very specific, practical skills and several of them have moved on to apprenticeships with a local scaffolding company. Others have enjoyed their volunteering so much that they want to go and do further voluntary work overseas.”

## CITIZENS ADVICE: GET INVOLVED

The Citizens Advice Get Involved programme is delivered through local bureaux in South London and Stoke-on-Trent. There is a strong emphasis on building confidence and self-worth among vulnerable members of society including young single mothers, asylum-seekers and those with long term disabilities.

In South London, young people who have faced a number of personal challenges are now working in administrative roles, and receiving training in skills like word processing and customer care. They can acquire qualifications in letter-writing and research and learn how to compose an appealing CV and present themselves well at interview. Those who wish to are also given the chance to train in CAB's core skill of offering advice through its bureaux. They can have a voice on CAB's own Youth Forum where they act to influence policy.

Jodi Manning is the v project manager: "Peer support and group interaction are key to the success of our programme, so we concentrate on that for the first month. The young people form friendships, feel secure in their environment and start to participate fully and to learn. The more confident and able volunteers provide support and guidance to the less able members, which emphasises the need for team working."

While CAB is keen to encourage volunteers to join its own organisation, it is equally enthusiastic about helping them take up new opportunities: "We are very good at training in essential skills that will develop employability and help young people facing serious life challenges. Some will find paid work while others volunteer full-time with us or elsewhere.

One young man has severe epilepsy while others have learning difficulties," explains Jodi Manning. "Another of our young volunteers needs the support of a full-time carer to enable him to participate. What each young person gains from the experience is highly significant. They are able to acquire accredited skills and have the opportunity to develop a much stronger sense of self-confidence and self-worth."

## LOUISE

### Skills Developed: communication, IT skills, administration

Louise's introduction to volunteering is not unusual: "I wanted to volunteer because I needed to do something useful with my time. The v project was suggested to me by the tutor at the job-search centre."

As someone with a disability, she was worried that she might be ignored or not taken seriously: "I found out that it was totally the opposite. I thought people would think less of me and that I couldn't achieve all the things that I have achieved during my time here. I have actually surprised myself and done more than I thought I could in work and socially as well."

Louise has learned valuable IT skills through training sessions on data inputting of the CAB CASE programme through which the agency manages all its client files. She has also participated in role play sessions so that she is trained in how people may present their information and evidence. She has learned essential administration skills too.

"I feel the volunteering has been very beneficial in a lot of ways. It lessens the workload of other volunteers and provides a better service for the CAB clients, as it makes their cases get completed quicker. I've made friends better than I thought I would. Practically, it has taught me more on the computer system as I didn't know how the CASE system worked before, but now I can find my way around the system.

My attitude has changed towards volunteering, for the better. It has made me realise that by giving my time, I can make other people's lives better. The people that have benefited from my voluntary work include the local public and other friends who I volunteer with at the CAB. I have made a difference to the local community as it speeds up the time that it takes for a CASE study to be completed."

# Next Steps

It is widely known that volunteering can give young people the work experience that they need to progress in certain sectors. Medicine, social care, childcare, journalism, education – all of these sectors require young people to get hands-on experience in order to progress. But as the case-studies show, volunteering is about much more than work experience. A good quality volunteering opportunity can help a young person build their self-confidence, develop transferable skills and grow into a talented leader. For those young people who have struggled with formal learning, it can also provide a gateway back into education and training and a stepping stone into employment.

This is why **v** has asked all the organisations funded through the national youth volunteering programme, **vinvolved**, to prioritise skills development and maximise the impact that volunteering can have on the lives of young people. **v**'s new national marketing campaign, **Favours**, will also take volunteering to a wider audience and inspire young people who have never thought about volunteering, to get involved in their local communities.

**v** wants to open up more opportunities for young people to benefit from good quality volunteering opportunities, particularly those young people who would not normally be able to volunteer full-time on a gap year. In order to address this issue, **v** has recently announced a new full-time volunteering programme

which will provide young people with exciting voluntary placements within local authority Children & Young People's services across the country. The programme is open to all young people, but retains a specific focus on engaging young people who are not in education, employment or training. Drawing on the experience of existing full-time volunteering projects, this programme will provide residentials to support young people's personal and skills development, as well as enabling them to undertake a Level 2 qualification linked to their placement. Young people who complete the programme will also be entitled to apply for a personal development grant to support their progression into further training and employment. The programme intends to inspire and motivate young people, helping them onto a career path by providing valuable experience, vocational skills and qualifications.

Above all, **v** wants to see wider recognition in society for the skills that young people can develop through volunteering – If volunteering is properly acknowledged and celebrated, it will both incentivise voluntary action and encourage more young people to get involved.

In 2009, **v** will be launching the **v Awards**. These will ensure that volunteers receive recognition: not only for the hours that they have contributed to community work, but also for the impact that they have had on their local communities and their own skills development.

The **v Awards** will become the 'gold standard for volunteering', recognised and valued across society by employers, education professionals, parents, carers and young people themselves. In a society where volunteering flourishes, communities will not only be more cohesive but they will also be more skilled, as the talent, creativity and energy of young people is unleashed.

## v is calling on:

- **Employers** – to value volunteering in their recruitment practices and promote volunteering as an effective tool for staff development;
- **Providers of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to young people** – to promote volunteering actively as a way of developing skills and broadening horizons;
- **Schools, Colleges and Universities** – to take pro-active steps to embed an ethos of voluntary action within their institutions, and provide practical opportunities during term-time for students to volunteer;
- **JobCentre Plus** – to support full-time volunteering programmes and signpost young adults to volunteering as a stepping stone into sustainable employment; and
- **Government** – to champion volunteering and continue to address policy and bureaucracy that can prevent young people from participating.



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