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Volunteering can help boost your career, says charity survey

Volunteering can help your career by giving you highly sought skills for the workplace, according to a Dabit survey commissioned by v the independent youth volunteering charity.

The survey, *Youth Volunteering: Attitudes and Perceptions* questioned a sample group of 1,582 young volunteers, employers, Higher and Further Education colleges and voluntary sector organisations to explore the impact of volunteering and skills development on career progression.

It reveals all groups agree that volunteering can help young people gain transferable workplace skills such as communication and team-working skills that are highly sought after by employers. The survey found that:

- 87% of employers thought volunteering could have a positive effect on young people's career progression, as compared to 97% of voluntary sector organisations and 76% of young people.
- 88% of employers thought that volunteering could give young people communication and team-working skills, as compared with 96% of voluntary sector organisations and 84% of young people.

The findings from v's survey are backed by previous studies by recruitment specialist Reed Executive, the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), and Continental Research (for TimeBank) that found volunteering can boost skills and lead to a better chance of promotion and earning a higher salary.

Private sector employers say that evidence of altruism can often put job applicants to the top of the pile when sorting through C.Vs.

Peter Bull Head of HSBC in the Community says: "As an employee manager for HSBC I look for more than just academic qualifications on applicants' CVs; it's a very competitive marketplace so we look for altruistic aspects in people's personalities. It is good to have employees who are more rounded and volunteering shows an admirable altruism as well as the valuable skills they will have gained, which can be transferred to the workplace."

"Volunteering gives young people the opportunity to develop key skills, which employers look for in new recruits, such as communication, team work and problem solving. Candidates who have volunteered can demonstrate their suitability for the position in interesting and varied ways, which can set them apart from the competition. They are often more self confident and self aware, which certainly comes across in interviews," says Rachel Campbell, Head of People Management, KPMG

The same is true of public sector employers. "As a recruiter, I always considered volunteering as a real positive," says Jan Parkinson, Managing Director, Local Government Employers Organisation. "It also demonstrates an interest in their local community and gives an impression of someone who cares, is active, responsible, and interested in their community."

Gillian Hibberd, Corporate Director (People and Policy), Buckinghamshire County Council, says: "My view is that volunteering is definitely an added value activity on any CV. This is particularly the case in the public sector. People who volunteer often do it because they want to contribute something back to society or feel that they have helped improve the lives of others. These values are synonymous with those in the public sector so whenever I see volunteering on a CV it attracts my attention."

Young people from diverse backgrounds also firmly believe that volunteering has given them the foot up the ladder to help them in their careers and education.

Laura Stanley, aged 22, who volunteered at the Groundwork Food and Farming environmental project, said the experience she gained was invaluable: "I wouldn't have got my job as a local authority environmental coordinator if I hadn't had the volunteering experience under my belt. I was able to tell the interviewer about the project management, communication and organisational skills that I gained from volunteering on the project. Being able to talk to people from all walks of life – not just university students – was a big help."

Robert Wilson set up a volunteering project while at university, which annually sends thousands of old text books to help schools in Tanzania. He says the experience gave him the skills to take on his new role: "I can honestly say that the skills I need and use in my current role as Director of READ International have all come from volunteering. Through volunteering I have learned about website design, finance accounting, fundraising, project management, business planning, leadership skills and teamwork. But I think above all, volunteering has given me so much belief in what I do and provided me with the confidence I needed to extend my role into a full time paid position as Director of a national charity."

Richmond, aged 20, who moved from Ghana to Southwark in London when he was 12, dropped out of college following family problems that left him homeless and adrift. It was only after he attended the Working it Out volunteering project funded by v and run by Tomorrow's People that he began to get his life, and education, back on course: "Making the film about gun crime to show to local school children motivated me to pursue my editing talents and changed my life because I was at a really low point where I thought I was worthless - a nobody. I'm now studying at London South Bank University on a business and computing course and next year I'll do multi-media course to put my editing into practice."

However, the v survey also reveals that while the majority of employers' human resources departments acknowledge these skills when considering job applications, 43% say it is irrelevant unless directly related to their line of work.

Terry Ryall, v Chief Executive says that more needs to be done to raise employers' awareness of the universal skills that volunteers can gain, whatever the line of work they chose: "Volunteering can give you employability skills that set you up for life; young people say they gain confidence in their own abilities as well as teamwork and communication, which employers say are essential for young people entering the workforce. But we recognise that more needs to be done to promote volunteering to employers, schools and colleges so that it is offered alongside more formal learning."

The charity is launching a new national resource to enable all young volunteers across England to keep an online record of their skills and achievements. Following the survey's results, v is calling for more employers to take volunteering into consideration when considering job applications and recommends that all schools, HE and FE colleges give students time to volunteer in their communities.

Terry Ryall adds: "v will be working to ensure that everyone fully appreciates the benefits of volunteering. Attitudes are incredibly influential and we will only be successful in our mission to inspire a new generation of volunteers if the image is a compelling one with real benefits for the young people and the communities they serve."

To find out more visit v's website www.vinspired.com which provides a portal to the national database of volunteering opportunities across England.

Ends

For more information contact v's PR manager Petra Coveney on 020 7960 7016 or email petra.coveney@wearev.com

Notes to editor

Other research:

(1)An employers' survey by Continental Research for TimeBank with 200 small and medium sized businesses in England, Scotland and Wales during July 2004. Top line national results are as follows:

- 81% of employers view voluntary work positively
- If choosing between two candidates of equal skills, but one has voluntary work on their CV, 73%, 100% and 64% of the finance, property and manufacturing sectors respectively said they would choose the candidate with voluntary experience
- 43% believed voluntary work increased an employee's chance of promotion and earning a higher salary
- 63% said young people were not prepared for entering the workforce and lacked key skills such as managing budgets (81%), prioritising/planning (68%) and communication (63%)
- 68% believed volunteering would increase the level of their employees' skills – particularly teamwork (96%), communication (95%) and time management (81%)
- http://www.timebank.org.uk/mediacentre/press_release_details.php?id=23<http://www.pontefractandcastlefordexpress.co.uk/letters/Time-for-volunteers.3683133.jp>

(2)Research by recruitment specialist Reed Executive, for TimeBank, in 2001, among over 200 of the UK's top businesses, found that almost three quarters of employers prefer to recruit candidates with volunteering experience on their CV.

The research also shows that altruism and self interest can co-exist for workers as sixty per cent of employers are more likely to promote and give pay rises to employees who have donated their time.

Over half of the companies surveyed - 58 per cent - say that voluntary work experience can actually be more valuable than experience gained in paid employment. To view the full report visit http://www.timebank.org.uk/mediacentre/press_release_details.php?id=76

(3)The Value of Volunteering January 11, 2008.

The Chartered Management Institute (CMI), in conjunction with VSO, carried out an in depth study into the effect of volunteering on professional development for managers. The resulting report, Valuing Volunteering, shows that organisations need to recognise the value of volunteering as a route to professional

development. To view the full report go to <http://www.skillstories.org/resources/detail/the-value-of-volunteering/>.

- **v** is the youth volunteering charity launched in May 2006 whose mission is to inspire a new generation of young volunteers in England aged 16-25. **v** is supported by the Office of the Third Sector in the Cabinet Office.
- The charity was set up to implement the recommendations of the Russell Commission outlining a new national framework for youth action and engagement, following a nationwide consultation which included 6000 young people.
- **v** is led by the cares, interests, passions and beliefs of young people. A Youth Advisory Board made up of twenty young people called **v20** is involved in all aspects of the charity's work. Four members of **v20** sit on **v**'s Board of Trustees.
- **v** works with and builds upon the current voluntary sector infrastructure, funds the creation of volunteering opportunities through grants rounds and implements programmes to create awareness and positive understanding of volunteering for young people. For more information on **v**, visit www.wearev.com