

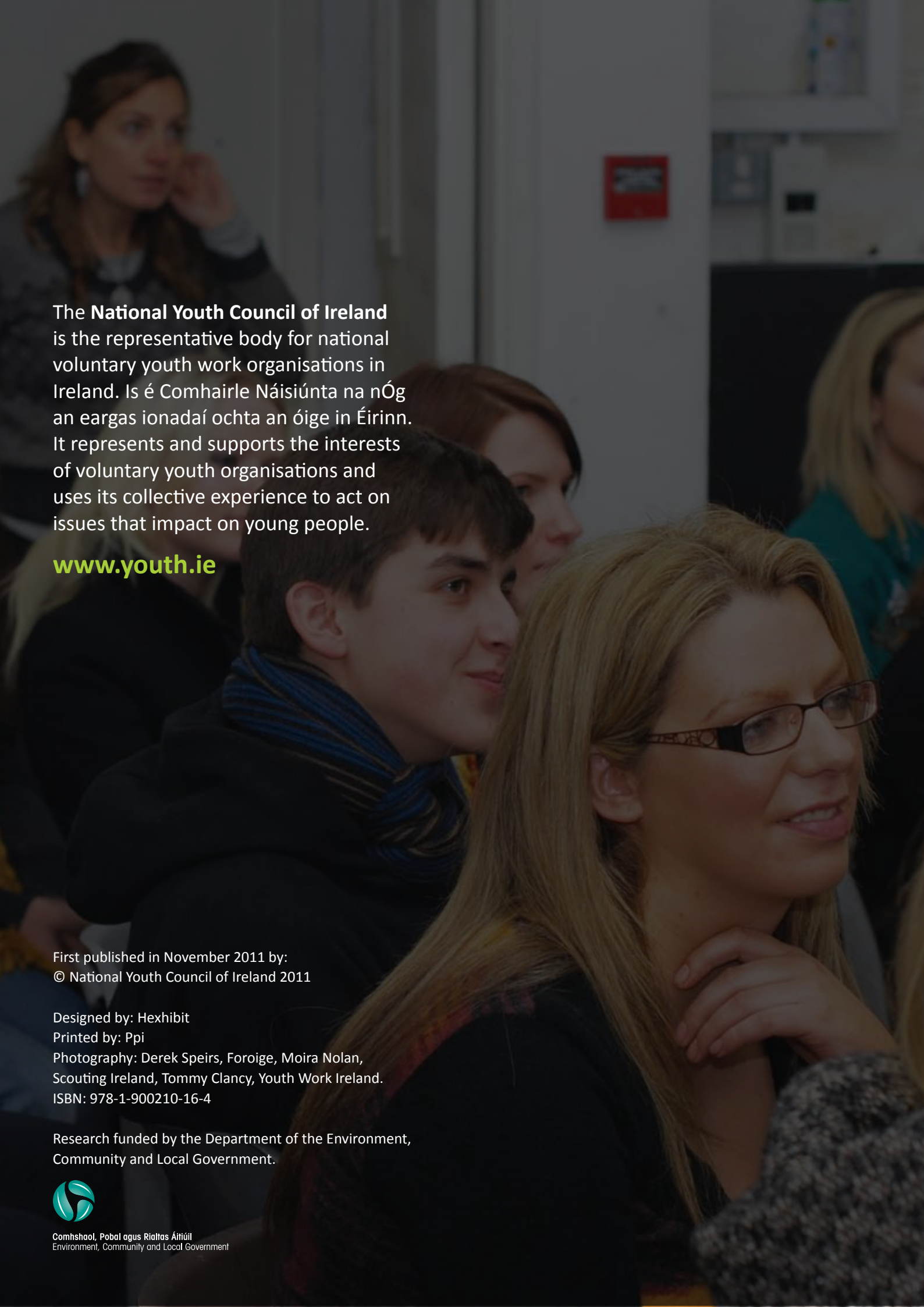
LENDING

A

A REPORT ON YOUNG PEOPLE
AND VOLUNTEERING IN IRELAND

HAND





The **National Youth Council of Ireland** is the representative body for national voluntary youth work organisations in Ireland. Is é Comhairle Náisiúnta na nÓg an eargas ionadaí ochta an óige in Éirinn. It represents and supports the interests of voluntary youth organisations and uses its collective experience to act on issues that impact on young people.

www.youth.ie

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The views expressed in this report are those of the author and the many research participants and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the sponsor.





I welcome the publication of this research on youth volunteering which highlights a number of key findings about the factors that both attract and prevent young people from volunteering in 2011. Interestingly I am struck by the fact that many of the barriers that are present today are the same barriers that existed 20 years ago.

Through the voices of young people we get an insight into the richness and diversity of the many experiences of young volunteers. The research also outlines some of the barriers experienced by those young people who have never participated in volunteering.

The research captures the commitment and enthusiasm many young people bring to their volunteering role. Young people can achieve great things if supported to do so. The support organisations provide for their volunteers is crucial and needs to be harnessed to ensure that volunteering is sustained and built upon in the future. Many of our young volunteers are wonderful ambassadors for the charities and organisations they are involved with but they require support and a high level of flexibility to ensure they can achieve their full potential as volunteers.

To fully utilise and build on the contribution of young volunteers, it is vital that the research stimulates a response and galvanises us into action. The research highlights many issues which need to be addressed if we are to ensure that we continue to attract and retain young people as volunteers.

I am sure that this research will help to inform NYCI's advocacy work and build on the strong tradition of volunteering that forms the backbone of not only the youth sector but all of civil society. It is crucial that we value the contribution our young volunteers make to volunteering and that we support them to take on meaningful and challenging volunteering opportunities. These opportunities really contribute to the organisation they have chosen and at the same time provide them with the chance to develop skills and competences that may enrich their future life experiences.

To ensure we enhance youth volunteering in Ireland and support our young volunteers, we must take note of the findings of this research and take positive action to address some of the barriers that young people themselves have told us so often stop them from volunteering.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Cunningham".

Mary Cunningham

Director

National Youth Council of Ireland

1

Executive Summary



Volunteering has long been recognised for its very significant contribution to Irish society and the influential role that it can play in the creation of social capital, a more inclusive society, a better functioning democracy, more active citizens and an improved sense of community. The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is active in promoting and supporting volunteering amongst young people and is working to promote, sustain and develop volunteering as being fundamental to society and a worthwhile activity for young people to engage in. With this in mind NYCI commissioned qualitative research to develop a clearer and more detailed understanding of young people and their experience of and attitude towards volunteering in Ireland. The research set out to explore the 'levers' that may support participation as well as the obstacles and barriers which may prevent young people from volunteering. A series of nine in-depth focus group interviews and a parallel series of 25 depth 'case study' style interviews was undertaken with young people between the ages of 15 and 25.

The research confirms that volunteering can play a very significant role in developing greater levels of community and social awareness and involvement amongst young people in Ireland. Volunteering, importantly, affords young people the opportunity to develop confidence levels, valuable personal and social skills, and a sense of responsibility both for themselves and the local, national and international communities that they live in. Engaging in volunteering at an early age would also appear to increase the likelihood of a person either continuing to volunteer for the long term or returning to it after a period of absence. This research focused on capturing the experience and attitude of young people towards volunteering and demonstrates that young people in Ireland are *most* interested in the concept of volunteering and many are clearly *very* motivated to involve themselves in volunteering activities and roles.

Factors that had prompted or could prompt young people to engage in volunteering included a range of both 'soft', intangible and 'harder,' tangible dimensions. Very often engagement in voluntary activity is prompted by a combination of altruistic and personal factors. The research facilitated the development of a four tier categorisation of 'influencing factors' or motives that can prompt young people to engage in volunteering – with Category One factors being *the* most influential in prompting young people to become involved in volunteering.

Reasons for Volunteering

1. Category One factors

Most influential in prompting young people to become involved in volunteering

- Connection to and belief in the underlying cause
- Being asked to get involved
- Social environment/peer or family connection to volunteering
- Desire to help/make a difference
- Demonstrable link between contribution and results

2. Category Two factors

Influential dimensions cited frequently by young people but thought to be slightly less influential than Category One factors

- Opportunity to socialise/have fun
- To develop skills and experience
- To challenge oneself
- Sense of responsibility
- Opportunity to give something back/personally affected by the cause
- Available time
- Recognition/awards/qualifications
- Travel opportunities

3. Category Three factors

Cited frequently but with less emphasis than either Category One or Two factors

- Chance to improve job opportunities
- Available training

4. Category Four factors

Cited very infrequently

- Religious responsibility

The research also sought to identify the barriers and obstacles that may deter young people from accessing volunteering opportunities. The influence of these various 'levers', barriers and obstacles is explored in some detail in the main body of the report.

Barriers to Volunteering

- Not having enough time
- Never thought about volunteering
- Reluctance to 'make the first move'
- Lack of information
- A sense that the young person would not like it
- Perceived absence of any independence or autonomy in the volunteering role
- Too young to volunteer
- Absence of positive volunteering role model and/or peer support
- No transport and concern about perceived costs associated with volunteering

Interestingly the research revealed that job and career development, while a significant motivational factor, is not *the* most influential lever to involvement in volunteering. Instead young people want to feel a meaningful connection to the underlying cause associated with the volunteer effort. They also want to enjoy the volunteering experience and most importantly many young people simply want, or even expect, to be asked to get involved in volunteering.

The research confirms that volunteer retention strategies will have a key role to play in the ongoing development of volunteering in Ireland. In cases where appropriate support and encouragement are not provided young volunteers can often miss out on experiencing the various benefits associated with volunteering. The provision of volunteer support that is professional, informed, and personal to the needs of young volunteers will be instrumental in securing many of the recognised and articulated benefits of volunteering – both for the young volunteer and the wider communities which they support through their volunteering effort. The research includes a range of practical recommendations for NYCI and other bodies involved in the promotion of volunteering amongst young people to guide their efforts to promote, support and enhance volunteering amongst young people in Ireland. Central among these recommendations is the call to develop, amongst young target audiences, a greater awareness of the availability of an extremely wide diversity and range of volunteering opportunities and roles across Ireland.

2 Introduction



There has been a long standing tradition of voluntary activity in Ireland. Volunteering has been recognised for the invaluable contribution it makes to society and the very significant role it can play in the creation of social capital, a more inclusive society, a better functioning democracy, more active citizens and an improved sense of community. The Report of the Commission for Social Development (e/2001/26, resolution 39/2) states that; *“Volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at poverty reduction, sustainable development and social integration, in particular over coming social exclusion and discrimination.”*¹ Volunteering involves bringing people together to share and develop skills and resources, build capabilities and capacities, promote understanding and action and, very often, to change lives. Volunteers are active in most, if not all, sectors from health to education, equality, disability, finance and banking (through the credit union movement), culture and the arts, social inclusion, justice, governance, sport, enterprise and beyond. The youth sector in Ireland, in particular, has a long and successful track record of supporting and promoting volunteering. Many youth groups and organisations rely heavily on the contribution and participation of volunteers.

A key strand of the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) vision is for all of our young people to *“have ambition for themselves, to be confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners and responsible citizens; and to be nurtured, safe, active, healthy, achieving, included, respected and responsible.”*² Volunteering and youth work has a significant role to play in realising this vision for young people. As the NYCI itself has identified *“youth work adds value to the lives of all young people, helping them develop lasting skills and attributes, and can particularly affect the lives of young people who are vulnerable or disadvantaged, or are most challenged by school. It can help to build confidence, provide role models, open up new experiences and give young people a sense of belonging.”* NYCI is therefore active in promoting and supporting volunteering amongst young people and is working to promote, sustain and develop volunteering as being fundamental to society and a worthwhile activity for young people to engage in.

It is in this context that NYCI commissioned qualitative research to develop a clearer and more detailed understanding of young people and their experience of and attitude towards volunteering in Ireland. In particular the research set out to explore the ‘levers’ that may support participation as well as the obstacles and barriers which may prevent young people from volunteering. For this research study the population of interest was defined as young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years of age. A series of nine in-depth focus group interviews with young people (representing almost twenty hours of research) and a parallel series of 25 depth ‘case study’ style interviews involving young people (representing a further nineteen hours of research) was undertaken. A range of youth based community and voluntary organisations were also invited to develop submissions relevant to the research brief. This research was commissioned to develop a clearer and more detailed understanding of youth volunteering and the role and impact of volunteering on young people. As part of the study the researchers met and spoke with an impressive cohort of young people to ascertain their perceptions on volunteering. The findings from the research and the recommendations proposed are to input to NYCI planning and policy development in this area.

¹ Source: Report of the Commission for Social Development (e/2001/26, resolution 39/2).

² Source: NYCI website <http://www.youth.ie/nyci/what-youth-work>

3 Objectives



The following key objective was developed to guide this research study;

“To provide NYCI with a clearer and more detailed understanding of youth volunteering, the impact of volunteering on young people, the benefits of volunteering for young volunteers, and the ‘levers’ and ‘barriers’ which can be involved in either promoting or discouraging an interest in volunteering, with a view to informing NYCI planning and policy development in this area.”

In pursuing this key objective the following underlying objectives were also pursued:

- To profile the current experiences, attitudes, expectations and behaviours of young people (both volunteers and ‘non volunteers’ alike aged 15 – 25 years living throughout the country in both rural and urban locations) towards volunteering.
- To identify why young people volunteer and why they remain involved in volunteering.
- To put forward research findings that will provide clear direction and advice on the supports that are required to promote, support and enhance volunteering amongst young people.
- To provide research findings which will further enhance NYCI understanding of this key issue and the organisation’s ability to influence national policy around volunteering and volunteering support.

4

Methodology – A Qualitative Research Approach



As NYCI was particularly interested in developing a more thorough understanding of the current experiences, expectations, attitudes and behaviours of young people in Ireland towards volunteering a research approach that was primarily qualitative in nature was designed. In total a series of nine in-depth focus group interviews with young people (representing almost twenty hours of research) and a parallel series of 25 depth 'case study' style interviews involving young people (representing a further nineteen hours of research) was undertaken. A workshop meeting involving representatives of a number of not-for-profit, volunteer involving organisations was also facilitated as part of the research study. Finally a range of relevant community and voluntary organisations were invited to develop submissions relevant to the research brief and in particular to provide recommendations on how volunteering as an activity could be enhanced and supported more effectively. A list of submissions received is included in the appendices.

The age parameters set for the research was between 15 and 25 years of age. NYCI was very conscious that young people in this age range are not a single, homogenous group – the members of which all have very similar experiences, attitudes, expectations and support needs. A number of 'sub-sets' within this age range were therefore identified and agreed upon. NYCI also recognised that the volunteering experience and available opportunities to engage in volunteering may be very different depending on where, in Ireland, a young person may be located. For this reason it was agreed that the various group and one to one interviews with young people would be facilitated across a number of urban, semi-urban and rural locations across Ireland. It was also agreed that the research would explore the research question from the perspective of *three* key segments namely;

- Young people that are currently engaged in volunteering;
- Young people that had previously engaged in volunteering but who no longer do so;
- Young people that have never engaged in volunteering activity.

As set out in tabular form on page 17, three focus groups were facilitated in each of these three research segments – nine focus groups in total. Although general perceptions and experiences relating to volunteering tended to be shared by participants across the three segments described above, the research participants 'age', 'educational qualifications', and 'extent of volunteering experience' did introduce some 'segment specific' research findings.

The focus groups were exploratory in nature and facilitated considerable open and creative discussion. Group members tended to be very forthcoming when reflecting on their attitudes, perceptions and individual experiences which they associated with volunteering. Collectively, the nine groups also tended to be both 'creative' and 'insightful' when putting forward often very practical suggestions and recommendations as to how volunteering as an activity could be enhanced and supported more effectively.

The conduct of each focus group and case study interview were governed by a discussion guide, a copy of which is included in Appendix One.

Focus group participants were recruited across a number of different ‘venues,’ using a number of different approaches – ‘on street’ recruitment, ‘snowball,’ peer and ‘word of mouth’ recruiting tended to generate the highest proportion of suitable research participants. On at least four occasions the scheduled focus group did not proceed as had originally been planned as the desired quorum (a minimum of 7 participants) did not present at the location at the time that they had been invited to attend. On these occasions the focus groups were rescheduled for another time and date and alternative participants were recruited to satisfy the targeted number of group members. A recruitment questionnaire which detailed specific, desired participant characteristics governed the recruitment process. A copy of this recruitment questionnaire is included in Appendix Two.

In summary, the nine focus groups were conducted on a regional basis. Each group consisted of between 7 and 9 participants with a relatively even gender balance in each of the nine groups. The profiles of the nine focus groups and the body of 25 depth interviews are provided across pages five and six.

The following definition of the term ‘volunteering’ was agreed with the NYCI Research Advisory Group for the purpose of research recruitment;

“The commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society, local communities, individuals outside the immediate family, the environment, or other causes. Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person’s own free will, without payment (except for reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses.)”³

To support and complement the focus group research the researchers also undertook a series of 25 one to one depth interviews which were conducted in parallel to the focus group research. All of the case study interviews were conducted with young people aged 15 to 25. Twelve of the case study interviews were conducted with young actively engaged volunteers while the remaining 13 were conducted with young people that had previously engaged in volunteering but who no longer do so and young people that had never engaged in volunteering activity. The one to one interviews covered general experiences, attitudes and perceptions of the young interviewees in respect of their experience as a volunteer, why they volunteered initially, why they had never engaged in volunteering activity, why they remain involved, why they are no longer involved, the benefits of volunteering and other levers, barriers and obstacles which may attract or prevent young people from volunteering. A profile of the 25 case study interviews are provided in the table below. The conduct of these depth interviews was governed by an interview guide, a copy of which is included in Appendix One.

³ Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, White Paper ‘Supporting Voluntary Activity’ 2000.

Table 1: Nine Focus Groups – Headline Profile

Group Number	Headline Profile	Location	Key Characteristics
1	Young people actively involved in volunteering – Aged between 15 and 17.	Urban; Dublin	Young people actively involved in volunteering i.e. at least 2 hours of volunteering activity per calendar month. Gender mix.
2	Young people actively involved in volunteering – Aged between 18 and 21.	Semi-Urban; Limerick County	
3	Young people actively involved in volunteering – Aged between 22 and 25.	Rural; Cork	
4	Young people who no longer volunteer – Aged between 15 and 17.	Urban; Limerick	Young people that had previously engaged in volunteering but who had not done so for a period of 6 months or more. Gender mix.
5	Young people who no longer volunteer – Aged between 18 and 21.	Semi-Urban; Carlow County	
6	Young people who no longer volunteer – Aged between 22 and 25.	Rural; Tipperary	
7	Young people who had never engaged in volunteering activity – Aged between 15 and 17.	Urban; Dublin	Young people that had never engaged in volunteering activity. Gender mix.
8	Young people who had never engaged in volunteering activity - Aged between 18 and 21.	Semi-Urban; Kilkenny	
9	Young people who had never engaged in volunteering activity - Aged between 22 and 25	Rural; South East	

Table 2: Depth Interviews – Headline Profile

Category	Headline Profile	Number of Interviews	Key Characteristics
1	Young people actively involved in volunteering – Aged between 15 and 21.	6	Young people actively involved in volunteering i.e. at least 2 hours of volunteering activity per calendar month. Gender mix. Urban – rural mix.
2	Young people actively involved in volunteering – Aged between 22 and 25.	6	
3	Young people who no longer volunteer / who had never engaged in volunteering activity – Aged between 15 and 21.	7	Young people that had previously engaged in volunteering but who had not done so for a period of 6 months or more. <i>and</i> Young people that had never engaged in volunteering activity. Gender mix. Urban – rural mix.
4	Young people who no longer volunteer / who had never engaged in volunteering activity – Aged between 22 and 25.	6	

To further inform the research process a workshop group involving representatives of a number of not-for-profit, volunteer involving organisations was also facilitated. This workshop contributed to and further informed the development of some key conclusions and recommendations on the subject of youth volunteering in Ireland in 2011. All of the various interviews and focus groups were conducted across July, August and September 2011. A range of ethical and safety considerations were built into the study design to ensure that a high quality and sensitive approach was used.

5 Research Findings



This section explores the views and perceptions of young people aged 15 to 25 on the subject of volunteering. These views are examined in some details across a series of separate sub-sections of this document as follows;

5.1 Perspectives on Volunteering

- 5.1.1 A narrow understanding and some negative perceptions
- 5.1.2 The 'value' of volunteering
- 5.1.3 Volunteering – A very personal decision

5.2 Factors that Influence Young People to Volunteer

5.3 Routes into Volunteering

5.4 Barriers to Volunteering

5.5 Drawbacks of Volunteering and Reasons for Discontinuing Involvement

- 5.5.1 Drawbacks of volunteering
- 5.5.2 Reasons for giving up volunteering

5.1 Perspectives on Volunteering

5.1.1 A narrow understanding and some negative perceptions

Interestingly many of the young research participants struggled in defining the term ‘volunteering’. Indeed many – including those recruited for the research as ‘active volunteers’ – clearly did not connect with the terms ‘volunteer’ or ‘volunteering’ and appeared to have very narrow interpretations of the concept and the wide range of activities that volunteering can encompass.

When put forward as a stand-alone concept the term ‘volunteering’ generated considerable confusion. Few of the research participants described or recognised themselves as ‘volunteers’. Instead they more readily identified with specific roles and positions that they knew to be voluntary.

“Me? A volunteer?... Well, (with cautious, uncertain tone) I am involved in the scouts as a ‘leader’ and I do some coaching for the younger kids at the weekend... but... (voice trails off to suggest a view that this activity is not immediately thought of as ‘volunteering’)...”

“No, I don’t volunteer at the moment...” (Only to find out after some subsequent probing that the young person is involved in a volunteering capacity with a local arts organisation and a global human rights organisation).

“Well I did a lot of soccer coaching down at the club...” (but research participant did not categorise this role as a volunteering one).

There was also considerable discussion on the range of activities young people considered ‘volunteering’ to be. When asked ‘who is a volunteer’ and ‘what does a volunteer do’, the discussion was initially dominated by examples of volunteering activity in the social or charitable sectors with fundraising activity most prominent amongst the initial body of responses put forward.

The conversations with young people indicated a very strong association between volunteering and fundraising or other charitable activity. Very often young people did not recognise their own involvement, or the involvement of others, in ‘helping out,’ sporting, political or cultural activities as volunteering. Only when they were prompted and encouraged to elaborate on the range of activities that they may have been involved in outside school and college did it become clear that many were indeed involved in volunteering.

“Volunteering?... The charities need them (volunteers)... If they didn’t have them (fundraisers) they wouldn’t have any money to spend...”

“What’s volunteering? The guy collecting (for donations) after mass on a Sunday... My Auntie does the meals on wheels every week...”

“Yeah I do know some ‘volunteers’... My Dad collects (donations) for the St Vincent de Paul... My Mum, I think, is on a fundraising committee down at the parish centre...”

“Some of the parents (of school children) help to organise quiz nights, raffles and dances for the school building fund.”

“... No I never volunteered... Yeah, I am involved in a few (university based) clubs and societies... I help the debating society out organising events, getting speakers, promoting it, setting up the room... that kind of thing... I guess that is volunteering after all!”

I used do bits and pieces for Age Action... their visiting programme... but I am not up to much at the moment... Well (after reflection) I am the Secretary of the local Amnesty group...”

It was particularly notable amongst the schools based research participants that there was a lack of understanding and appreciation of the wide range of activities in which young people can volunteer.

“Well it’s (volunteering) shaking a can on Grafton Street for a charity...”

“The charity (sector) relies on them (volunteers).”

“... (Volunteering is ‘about’ organisations like)... St. Vincent de Paul, Concern, Trocaire, Oxfam...”

“... I don’t really want to be rattling a box (looking for on-street donations) regularly... If there was something more interesting to do I would probably give it a go though...”

“... It’s demeaning really... (on-street fundraising and, by extension, volunteering).”

This somewhat ‘narrow’ interpretation of volunteering would appear to have led some – and particularly those young people who have never volunteered – to have a somewhat negative perception of volunteering. Indeed there was a view amongst *some* research participants that volunteering is a role that is only undertaken by members of certain social classes.

“... There is nobody I know does that (volunteering)... My family is all on the social (Social Welfare)... Sure it’s mostly the private (fee paying) schools that do that (engage in volunteering).”

... No one from my family (is involved in volunteering)... There are a couple of guys locally who run the boxing club but that’s about it (in terms of people known to the research participant that engage in volunteering).”

... It’s harder (to engage in volunteering) when you aren’t working or don’t have some qualifications... You’re too busy looking for a job and I guess you might feel you don’t have much (skill and experience) to offer (to a volunteer involving organisation).

Interestingly there was a view shared by many of the ‘older’ young research participants – mostly those young people no longer in second level education – that young people are now more likely to volunteer than would have been the case as recently as five years ago. The economic recession and challenging jobs market which now means that large

numbers of young people can have significant periods of unfilled time was put forward as one reason to support this view. More significantly however it was speculated, by many, that the challenging economic environment has introduced a greater 'social conscience' and that young people are very committed to making a positive social contribution to their local and national communities.

"... The story for years was about how much money people are making, what cars they have, how much their house is worth... But now it (the national narrative) is more about the impact this greed has had on society... I think young people have really latched on to that and want to bring about some change (through volunteering)."

"... Yes, young people have a lot of time on their hands (as a result of unemployment) but there seems to be a shift in attitudes... We (young people in Ireland) don't want to be connected with the money obsession and the greed that went before us... I can see it locally... and with a lot of my mates... They are getting involved in things (range of volunteering activities) that maybe people didn't get involved in in the past."

"Everything in the media is about the huge pensions, golden handshakes, pay-offs, company cars, early retirements... It all seems so self-centered... When I went travelling (Europe, USA and Australia) Ireland was talked of as this basket case of a nation where we were all looking to keep hold of cushy jobs, salaries and the big pensions even when the IMF rolled into town... I don't want that (impression of Ireland) to last... We should be thought of more positively... I suppose I would like us to be thought of as a little more caring than that."

"You could take the cynical view that a graduate will just get involved in volunteering until they land a job that they like or to improve their CV but I think young people are deeper than that. I know loads of really passionate young people that are involved in loads of really positive things and, needless to say, they aren't getting paid for it."

5.1.2 The 'value' of volunteering'

Many of the focus groups and one to one interviews involved considerable discussion on the 'definition' and 'boundaries' of volunteering. Only when it was established that volunteering can encompass so much more than fundraising and charitable activity – not that this activity was, in anyway, undervalued by research participants – did young people put forward their opinions on the 'value' of volunteering.

It was agreed that multiple benefits are 'available' for society when young citizens volunteer. Volunteering can and does benefit the young volunteers themselves, the youth organisations and groups that they may represent as well as the 'end-recipients' of the voluntary activity. The contribution of volunteering to combating poverty, social exclusion and discrimination was, in particular, highlighted frequently. Volunteering was also credited for its role in enhancing the personal and social development of young people and in cultivating valuable lasting skills and attributes. Volunteering was also recognised for the role that it plays in providing young people with positive role models and in helping these young people to build confidence and a sense of belonging.

"... The disadvantaged... poor, disabled... do get support from volunteers... There would be a real gap in support if they (volunteers) weren't there..."

"... Society has a responsibility to look after those who mightn't be in a position to look after themselves... Some people are very vulnerable and the State doesn't always do a great job in providing (appropriate) support... A lot of time it falls to charities and volunteers to make a difference..."

"You need another voice... to put pressure on Government to support those that can't support themselves. (Volunteer organisations were thought to fulfil this role)."

"It's a two way street... It (volunteering) isn't financially rewarding... but you (the volunteer) can get a lot out of it."

The initial discussions with young people on the theme of volunteering would suggest that a re-branding exercise, of sorts, may be required. A greater awareness of the wide range of opportunities and activities that can be involved will need to be emphasised by volunteer involving organisations. Particular attention also ought to be paid to promoting volunteering as an accessible 'activity' amongst members of more marginalised and disadvantaged communities.

5.1.3 Volunteering – A very personal decision

The research would indicate that involvement in specific volunteering roles and areas of activity is clearly a very personal decision for young people. Those that were actively involved in volunteering indicated that a very broad yet personal range of factors had influenced them to become involved. For some the key 'driver' was the area of volunteering activity, for others the opportunities to work and socialise with others stood out while others appreciated the flexibility offered by certain volunteering opportunities.

"...It's up to the individual... 'Volunteering' is a huge concept (with such a diverse set of areas and roles to engage with). It's like describing the 'jobs market' as a single proposition... Different people are interested in different things... I like art that's why I got involved in an after school kids club... working with the kids on art projects... That works for me but it wouldn't for everyone else... It's (the decision to opt for a particular 'sector' or 'cause') a personal decision really."

"... Human rights has been an important issue for me for a few years now... that's why I got involved with Amnesty... but I can see that it wouldn't appeal to everyone..."

"...I have played soccer for years down at the club and that's how I got involved in coaching..."

"... I said I would help them out with fundraising... That works well for me as I can combine it... time wise with other commitments."

Interestingly many of the research participants emphasised that it would be inappropriate for those involved in the promotion of volunteering to focus solely on the responsibility of young people 'to give something back' through volunteering. Alternatively it was suggested that a greater awareness of the wide range of volunteering opportunities and roles must be developed.

"When it (the promotion of volunteering as a 'concept') is thrust upon you or is positioned as something that you are obliged to do that can turn you off from getting involved..."

"... I can see that it is important to 'give something back'... but I don't think that 'blackmail' is the way to go."

"It (the promotion of volunteering) shouldn't rely on the guilt impulse alone... They need to be a bit more clever about it (by promoting a broader set of appeals and motives for engaging in volunteering)."

"I never thought of it like that (a wide range of volunteering opportunities available across a diverse set of sectors and involving a wide and diverse set of roles)... but when you think about it there are so many ways of getting involved (in a volunteering role)."

"They (volunteer promoters) need to get that word out there (the availability of a wide range of volunteering opportunities and roles)... It's all very personal so different people will be interested in different things. What might appeal to me probably wouldn't appeal to a lot of other people."

"It (promoting 'volunteering' without building an awareness of the wide range of volunteering opportunities and roles that exist) is like saying to a young fella that has left school early to 'go out and get a job'... You need to give them (potential volunteering candidates) information about what's out there and how to access those opportunities..."

"I think the term 'volunteering' is too vague... bland even... You think... 'Oh yeah the St. Vincent de Paul'... who are great by the way... but you don't think immediately of movements like Amnesty or campaigning work that you could do or even arts and sports organisations (that a young person could engage with)... Whoever is promoting it (volunteering) needs to get that message across."

5.2 Factors that Influence Young People to Volunteer

Although there was *some* initial cynicism of the concept of volunteering the vast majority of research participants spoke positively of the role of volunteering and its importance to Irish society. This was particularly true when the concept was explored in more detail and when research participants understood the broader definition of volunteering to include that wide range of activities that go beyond fundraising and those with a predominantly charitable focus. Of the circa 90 young people that participated in the research the vast majority were in agreement that volunteering was of benefit both to wider society and to the volunteer themselves.

“There is a saying I have heard a lot of recently... ‘We live in a society not an economy’... I would really connect with that... Society needs coaches, drivers, fundraisers (acting on a voluntary basis)... Otherwise it would be a very poor place (society) to live in.”

“... We all have a responsibility to look after each other...”

“There are a lot of things (services and supports) that the Government doesn’t provide... Similarly the schools shouldn’t be expected to do everything for children... The voluntary organisations try to plug those gaps.”

“... You (new volunteer) start off by thinking you’ll make a difference but after a while you recognise that you’re benefitting as well... It might be just meeting other people, staying active and involved or it could be picking up new skills and training... There’s lots of ways you can benefit (through volunteering).”

Factors that had prompted or could prompt young research participants to engage in volunteering included a range of ‘soft’, intangible dimensions, ‘hard’ tangible factors, and finally what might be described as the more altruistic motivations. Very often engagement in voluntary activity is prompted by a combination of altruistic and personal factors.

After analysing the various research transcripts it was possible to develop a four tier categorisation of ‘influencing factors’ or motives that can prompt young people to engage in volunteering. The Category One factors were most influential in prompting young people to become involved in volunteering. The Category Two factors, although influential and cited frequently by research participants, were slightly less influential than Category One factors while Category Three and Four factors were also cited, albeit less frequently and with considerably less emphasis during the research process.

Table 3: Reasons for Volunteering

Reasons for Volunteering	
1.	<p>Category One factors Most influential in prompting young people to become involved in volunteering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to and belief in the underlying cause • Being asked to get involved • Social environment / peer or family connection to volunteering • Desire to help / make a difference • Demonstrable link between contribution and results
2.	<p>Category Two factors Influential dimensions cited frequently by young people but thought to be slightly less influential than Category One factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to socialise / have fun • To develop skills and experience • To challenge oneself • Sense of responsibility • Opportunity to give something back / personally affected by the cause • Available time • Recognition / awards / qualifications • Travel opportunities
3.	<p>Category Three factors Cited frequently but with less emphasis than either Category One or Two factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chance to improve job opportunities • Available training
4.	<p>Category Four factors Cited very infrequently</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious responsibility

1. Category One:

The most frequently cited and, more importantly, the most strongly emphasised reasons for involving oneself in volunteering were a connection to and belief in the underlying cause, being asked to get involved, a peer or family connection to volunteering, a desire to help and experiencing results following the volunteers contribution of time and energy.

Concern for others and solidarity with a particular cause, individual or group of people had acted as a strong prompt for many young people to engage in volunteering activity. Many of those actively involved in volunteering had clearly been motivated by a very strong connection to the underlying cause associated with the volunteering activity.

Many of those actively involved in volunteering also noted that their desire to engage in volunteering had been prompted by a desire to help or simply to “*make a difference*”.

“I had seen how my uncle had suffered (with cancer) so I was very keen to get involved in fundraising for cancer research...”

“... When you don't have money to pay for fuel bills or you are too old or sick to paint the house or do running repairs... It leaves you very vulnerable... That's why I joined the St. Vincent de Paul visiting conference.”

“... I know you can't do it all on your own but at the same time you can't sit on the sidelines all your life... It's important to get involved and to try to make a difference... The after school club, I think, is a really important facility for young kids that mightn't have someone to keep an eye out for them after school finishes in the afternoon...”

It was most interesting to note that, regardless of motivation, a very considerable proportion of active volunteers suggested the reason they began to volunteer was simply because somebody had asked them to.

“My form teacher in school asked me to get involved...I hadn't thought of it before but after being asked I thought ‘why not?’”

“I had played for the club for years and had always liked the idea of getting into coaching but I had never done anything about it and when one of the older lads asked me to start coaching the under 12's I was really happy to do it.”

“It was only when I was asked by a mate to come along to a meeting (run by a human rights organisation) that I thought ‘yes this is worth doing’ and then a few weeks later they asked me to join the (organising) committee... Maybe I would have joined myself but it's nice to be asked or even to get a push.”

The schools system appeared to be a particularly successful recruiting ground for young volunteers. In particular the Transition Year programme had acted as a key lever for many of the young research participants to engage in volunteering activity. Research participants indicated that Transition Year had offered the young person the ‘time and space’ to get involved in volunteering activity. Many of the research participants also indicated that they had received information, support and encouragement during Transition Year to get involved in volunteering activity. Many suggested that they had

developed a greater social awareness through their schools and through the encouragement, information and direction provided by guest speakers facilitated within the school environment. Prompts, information and encouragement provided by teachers, formal award programmes such as 'Gaisce – The President's Award', and directly by volunteering organisations themselves had played a key role in prompting a very significant proportion of young volunteers to get involved in volunteering activity.

I knew Transition Year would give me a chance to try out something (in a volunteering capacity).

You just have a lot more time on your hands in Transition Year...There is much less formal class time and you are encouraged to get involved with charities, clubs and societies.

Our school does the Gaisce Awards....so that means you need to do so many hours of voluntary work....That's what prompted me to get involved...

You might say it's a little cynical (engaging in volunteering to receive a reward) but when you are 16 and in Transition Year you need a push and a scheme like Gaisce helps with that..

A couple of organisations (not for profit) came into talk to us during Transition Year...to tell us about the work that they do and to see if anyone wanted to help with that....That's how I got involved with St. Vincent de Paul.

*...During Transition Year there was a lot of talk about community involvement and social issues...The local volunteer centre also came in to talk to us....That showed me where I could look for more information...I ended up visiting their website and looking through all the online postings they had (for volunteer opportunities)'.
'*

A young person's social environment was also identified – by young people themselves, both volunteers and non-volunteers alike – as a key lever or enabler for young people to get involved in volunteering. A young person who has friends, classmates, family members and other 'trusted' and familiar contacts - such as neighbours and teachers – currently volunteering or who had volunteered in the past were thought to be significantly more likely to engage in volunteering than those with no personal, peer or family connection to volunteering.

Like anything it's hard to be the first...If there is a history of it (volunteering) or a relationship with an organisation I am sure you are more likely to get involved with it than if you were coming to it totally 'cold'.

If none of your family or friends volunteer it probably wouldn't strike you that you should volunteer....Well, that would be the case with a lot of teenagers...

Because I knew so many of them (in the volunteer involving organisation) it made it so much easier (to get involved)...

Where young people knew people - especially friends, family and neighbours who were volunteers – it was very often these people who encouraged and supported the young person to become involved.

“My mam was involved in the past as a cub leader and I had been a scout so I suppose that was a link in getting me back involved (as a volunteer scout leader).”

“My next door neighbour started it off by asking me to come down for one Saturday morning to help with a little coaching....I kept coming back.”

“My older brother was in the St. John’s Ambulance and I went down with him the first few times...”

“My cousin kept nagging me to get involved....It worked!”

While a young person’s initial engagement with volunteering was frequently strongly linked to their social networks of family and friends the likelihood of the young person continuing in their volunteering role was more often influenced by the relationship between the organisations work and the individuals own beliefs.

“Yeah, I really only joined to keep onside with my Mum but it (the volunteering activity) wasn’t really my thing...That’s why I didn’t stick with it...But when I got involved in Amnesty that was much more up my street...”

“I originally got involved in the youth club because of my Dad’s encouragement but I had always preferred arts and that’s why I think this after school club where I do arts and crafts with the kids is a much better fit for me...”

“I’m sure it was a big factor (family involvement in volunteering) and helped to get me involved initially but then you move onto things (volunteering opportunities) that really matter to you.”

Young research participants also stressed the importance of witnessing a tangible link between their own contribution of time and energy and a successful ‘end-result’ for the volunteering effort. It was highlighted that the absence of such a link – which could be provided through a variety of forms of feedback by the volunteer involving organisation – could act as a real deterrent to get involved in the first place and, more particularly, to stay involved with a volunteer involving organisation for the medium to long term. Many of the young research participants indicated that they had discontinued their involvement with volunteering roles in the past due to the absence of this link and an uncertainty as to the value of their contribution.

“I was keen to help out but you never heard where the money (raised through on street fundraising) went or the difference that it made... You didn’t really feel a part of it...”

“I was just working in the charity shop on a Saturday morning and a Wednesday afternoon... but that was it... You don’t hear anything about the charity...Nobody tells you anything...”

“It would have been nice to feel more involved... you know... to get a sense for the bigger picture...”

“... I left after a few weeks... I just felt like a small cog in a big machine...”

The role of 'information' and its importance to both existing and prospective young volunteers was emphasised repeatedly throughout the research. The research process included many young people who were clearly very motivated 'self-starters' – young, enthusiastic, well informed young people who were very committed to the concept of volunteering – and who had very firm ideas of the 'type' of volunteering experience that they wanted to secure. Other young research participants, however, were less well informed about the wide range of volunteering options that are available, the type of skills and commitments sought, and, most importantly, information on how to get started.

"I have always been interested in human rights... subscribed to various magazines and journals for years... There wasn't an Amnesty group in my town so I decided to set one up myself..."

"I want to study medicine... so training as a paramedic was of interest... that's why I signed up for St. John's Ambulance."

"I didn't really know there would be a call for that (demand for young volunteers in sporting organisations)... Yeah if I knew more (about those types of opportunities) I would be more likely to do it."

"I don't know what I would like to do (type of volunteering activity)... I like sports... I'm good at art but I wouldn't really know where to go... Would they (volunteer involving organisations) really want that type of help?"

Information provision was thought to play a key role in overcoming general uncertainty, apprehension and the reluctance on the part of the prospective young volunteer to 'make the first move'. Young people that are not currently involved in organisations, extra-curricular school activities or youth services were thought to be at a significant disadvantage in respect of an information deficit relating to youth volunteering opportunities.

"It's much easier (to engage in volunteering) if you are already involved in an organisation... It's not so daunting."

"I'm sure if you were to do a survey of all the volunteers in Ireland there would be a really sizeable chunk of them who would have been members of the clubs, societies, groups... whatever... beforehand (prior to becoming a volunteer)."

"I don't know if there is a socio-economic dimension to it (engaging in volunteering) but I would think it's far easier for someone from a middle-class background to get involved in volunteering... because they benefited from all the supports when growing up...than it is for someone from a disadvantaged area who didn't get to join in."

"If you don't know about it (information on volunteering opportunities)... of course you are much less likely to get involved."

2. Category Two:

A series of other reasons and motivating factors were cited frequently by research participants. These factors were in the case of many, if not all of the actively involved young volunteers, part-instrumental in motivating the young person to engage in volunteering. In the vast majority of instances these factors were however *slightly* less influential than the Category One factors described previously.

While the mostly altruistic Category One dimensions were clearly very strong and influential amongst young active volunteers the motive to get involved was very frequently aligned with a recognition that young volunteers can benefit in many different ways – either emotionally or in terms of their own personal self-development – through their engagement in volunteering activity.

- **Opportunity to socialise and have fun;** Young research participants clearly placed a value on their own time, the many competing demands on that time, and the contribution that they could make to a volunteer involving organisation. It was therefore important to the young person that they enjoy the volunteering experience and that it provides an opportunity to socialise and have fun.

“... Yeah I was keen (to engage in volunteering)... It was a good chance to meet people...”

“...If you don't enjoy it (the volunteering experience) you're not going to stick with it.”

“My friends were getting involved...so I was up for it as well...”

“I'm sure older people think we (teenage secondary school students) do nothing but between school, studying, after school sports, piano and violin I am really busy... so when I give up a Friday evening and every second Saturday (for volunteering) I want to enjoy myself as well as, inverted commas, 'do good'.”

“Yeah, your time (as a teenager/a student) is really precious... exams and study ... so if you are doing anything outside that it's important that you enjoy it.”

- **To develop skills and experience;** Research participants – both actively involved and non-volunteering young people – recognised that volunteering can provide valuable 'life' and career related skills and experiences. Developing social and communication skills and strong lasting friendships were highlighted frequently as positive outcomes from a volunteering experience.

“You might join for a particular reason... the cause, to please your Mum, to get an award, to build up your CV... but you get a lot more from it (volunteering experience) than that... the craic is great... You make great friends... You learn a lot...”

“I probably learnt a lot more through volunteering than I did through school... All my best friends are scout leaders as well... You learn about working in teams, managing people, raising money, budgeting... all real life skills that you don't get through school...”

"I was very quiet and shy at school... Getting involved in the organising committee really brought me out of my shell... helped me build up my confidence..."

- **To challenge oneself;** Young volunteers very often spoke of the sense of pride, personal achievement and enjoyment that they took from their involvement in voluntary activity. Many also highlighted the opportunity that volunteering can present to challenge oneself. The success of the volunteer involving organisation in realising a particular goal or objective had introduced a real sense of pride and personal achievement for many of the young volunteers.

"It's great to see the results of your work... to see change happening through something you and the group have done... Yeah, you do feel proud."

"I remember when we set the fundraising target for last year... 10K... I didn't think we had a chance but we worked really hard to do it and we managed to raise nearly 14 grand in six months... We felt great..."

"It was daunting going along to the after school club the first time... I was scared stiff if I'm being honest... but when you see the kids respond to you and you see how much they enjoy it... that really is rewarding..."

- **Sense of responsibility;** There was considerable discussion across the various focus groups and interviews on the current economic environment and the general 'mood' of the nation. Many of the young research participants were highly critical of the leadership shown by those in senior positions over the last decade. These young people also articulated a view that the younger generation now has a greater responsibility to engage positively and actively in what might be described as 'active citizenship.'

"Bankers, politicians, senior civil servants... They have all made a mess of it... We (young people in Ireland) are the only ones that can turn it around..."

We were brought up to respect our elders... and that's the message they promote in school... but when your elders are screwing the country for every penny it's difficult to respect them... I think this next generation (of young people) has more of a social conscience and a sense of responsibility to take action where it's required and to look after the vulnerable and less well off... not to be obsessed about the size of their pension pot!"

"... It's long over due now that we change the conversation (at a national level) ... It's been all doom and gloom for nearly four full years... I do think things might be starting to look up... If all the young people don't head off (emigrate) to Australia we (Irish society) will have chance... I think young people seem to be more socially aware (than the older generation has been over the last decade)."

- **Opportunity to give something back/personally affected by the cause;** For some volunteers the opportunity to 'give something back' had been a driver to engage in volunteering. Some volunteers had been directly affected by a particular issue and this had clearly prompted them to volunteer.

"... My younger sister had got cancer and visiting her in the hospital and seeing what she was going through really motivated me to get involved in fundraising (for cancer support/research)."

"... I have played in the club since I was five... maybe six years old... The guys who help and coach are the backbone of the club... Without them we wouldn't have been able to play... I'm still playing now but I wanted to give something back so I coach a couple of evenings a week with the underage sides..."

"... I had been in the cubs and scouts for about seven or eight years so when there was a need for leaders I thought it was a chance to put something back in..."

- **Available time;** As set out previously 'time' was frequently described by young people as a valuable commodity. However many of the young research participants suggested that there are a number of key moments in a young person's life – namely Transition Year in secondary school and the first and second years of third level education – whereby a person has the 'time and space' to consider and actively engage with volunteering opportunities.

"...Transition Year was when I got involved with a lot of that stuff (volunteering activity)...You have more time on your hands... There isn't the pressure of exams..."

"... I joined the St. John's Ambulance during Transition Year... You just have more time... There isn't the same amount of homework or study that you would have in other years..."

"... In Transition Year there is a big emphasis on community and your social environment so students get encouragement to join clubs and to volunteer..."

"After the pressure of the Leaving (Certificate) you get a chance (in first and second years of third level education) to check out different things (volunteering opportunities)... You hear of a lot of stuff in college that you wouldn't have been aware of in school... It's (the college environment) not as pressured (as the school/Leaving Certificate cycle would be)."

Interestingly there were a number of fifteen year olds that were about to enter Transition Year that had 'positioned' this academic year as their first opportunity to engage in volunteering.

"... I guess I will be old enough and will have the time to do it then."

"You don't really have the chance (to volunteer prior to Transition Year)... Either you are too young or the Junior Cert (study and exam preparation) gets in the way."

Research participants also suggested that volunteer involving organisations could usefully develop more flexible work and working times for volunteering given the very busy workloads adopted by young people and the many competing demands that are placed on their time.

"It would be a lot easier (and attractive to engage in volunteering) if it (the volunteering workload proposition) didn't always involve such a fixed commitment... You won't have every Saturday free... If it (one's volunteering commitment) involved a 'bank' of hours that you could 'give' every month depending on when and how often you were free that would be much better..."

"I don't want to sit in boring and really time consuming committee meetings... I would like to be able to email whoever is organising whatever needs to be done and to ask them... 'What do you need me to do?'... I would then do it and fit it (the volunteering effort) in with all my other commitments..."

- **Recognition/awards/qualifications;** Being appreciated and receiving recognition for the time and effort contributed through one's volunteering activity is valued by all young volunteers and indeed expected by many. Various forms of feedback and recognition provided by volunteer involving organisations had encouraged many young volunteers to remain involved in volunteering and often to aspire to volunteering roles involving greater responsibility. The offer of more tangible awards and qualifications had also acted as an important lever for young volunteers to engage initially in volunteering.

"... It's important that your effort (as a volunteer) is recognised... Otherwise you would just feel that you were taken for granted..."

"... We do appraisal style meeting every few months and that feedback does help to keep you motivated and it's a good way to find out what else you could be doing (to improve one's skills and contribution.)"

"... When you get positive feedback it does encourage you to try harder and even to take on more responsibility..."

"I'm involved in a few things (in a volunteering capacity)... The Gaisce (award scheme) probably gave me the push to check out different organisations..."

"... The certification (available through a paramedic training organisation) was onereason for getting involved... I thought it (the certification) would be nice to have..."

- **Travel opportunities;** The opportunity to travel overseas on various international volunteering schemes was particularly attractive to many of the research participants and was put forward as a realistic option by many of the young people that had left secondary school. The very significant challenge in securing paid employment in Ireland was thought to be an additional and influential lever in increasing the attractiveness of volunteering overseas.

"Getting a job (in Ireland) is going to be a big ask... So it would be good to put the qualification that I am going to get to some use... It would be nice to travel as well..."

"I am going to be a qualified engineer this time next year... The chances of me getting a paying job here in Ireland are very slim so I might as well go abroad to volunteer somewhere that I can use my training..."

"... It would be good to go to Africa where I might be able to work on some construction projects... Otherwise I would be just be hanging around here (in Ireland)."

3. Category Three:

The opportunity to improve one's job or career opportunities was cited as a specific motivating factor frequently throughout the research process. However many of the young people actively involved in volunteering noted that although they recognise their volunteering experience may enhance relevant work-place related skills and their general attractiveness to employers that this had *not* been a primary motivating factor to engage in volunteering. Interestingly the positive contribution that volunteering activity can make to a young person's CV was generally referred to as 'an added benefit' or a 'nice spin off'.

"... Yeah, it (volunteering and skill enhancement) definitely is a nice spin off... I'm sure it will help the CV but that wasn't the reason I got involved..."

"... I know employers like to see stuff like that (volunteering) on your CV... and you do learn a lot from it... but it (enhancing career prospects through volunteering) can't be the only reason that you would get involved... You just wouldn't stick it (if this were the sole motivation.)"

"...Career guidance tells us to get involved...that it would be good for your CV...This might encourage you to try different things but if it's the only thing motivating you it's unlikely that you would stay for any length of time..."

"I am really pleased that it (volunteering experience) might make me look more attractive (as a job candidate) but that wasn't why I got involved in the first place..."

"It definitely is relevant... particularly at the moment when jobs are so few and far between but if you were just looking to build up your CV I'm sure you would try other things..."

A 'reference' which a volunteer could use to validate their volunteering experience was however thought to be an attractive and appropriate 'reward' for many young people. Similarly 'available training' provided by volunteer involving organisations was put forward as a lever that may prompt a young person to become involved in volunteering. However few if any of the young research participants described it as a key motivating factor.

"I'm sure it (available training) is a nice feature to offer (to prospective volunteers)... and it would definitely help in retaining them... if they are tied into some sort of certification... but I don't think it would be a major deal breaker..."

"... I think it (availability of training) would be more likely to encourage me to stay (involved as a volunteer) rather than to 'sign up' in the first place."

4. Category Four:

A very small number of young research participants also suggested that they had a religious, rather than simply a moral or ethical responsibility to 'get involved' in a particular volunteering role or activity.

"My church gets you involved in supporting events and clubs... It's part of our (church's) responsibility to the local community..."

"... It (volunteering involvement) is expected of you (by church leaders)."

"If you are really following the teachings of the Bible then you ought to be involved in supporting others that aren't in a position to support themselves..."

In summary many young people will engage in volunteering because they believe, often passionately, in the cause. For many of those actively engaged in volunteering there appeared to be a high level of altruism. Indeed many of the young volunteers were undertaking the work without a long-term personal benefit having been identified. Although 'altruism' is a key factor for many young people that engage in volunteering the ongoing promotion of volunteering will need to be based on a broader 'set' of appeals than altruism alone. Young people demonstrated their desire to benefit from volunteering in a range of different ways – either emotionally or in terms of their own personal self-development. These various 'benefits' will need to be incorporated into the volunteering 'offer' for it to appeal to many young people.

Research participants frequently indicated that they only became involved in volunteering because they had been asked to do so. Those that had yet to get involved suggested that they would be interested *'if I was asked'*. This will have implications for volunteer involving organisations – the most effective place for these organisations to look for young volunteers could therefore be 'close to home'. Sporting organisations, for example, could find volunteer coaches and other support workers on older age group teams. Political and cultural organisations could find volunteers from online subscribers, conference attendees, and donors. Social and charitable organisations could find volunteers amongst those who have made donations or assisted with fundraising in the past. The motivation to be involved may not always be clearly thought through and is often very dependent on peer and adult support. Many of the young research participants did not know *how* to go about accessing volunteering opportunities. The provision of more accessible and prominently promoted information would help to break down this key entry barrier. The key message, however, appears to be – many young people want to get involved – they will, however, need to be asked!

Volunteer involving organisations will need to take every opportunity to let young people know that they can get involved and that their support would be welcomed. The school environment – with specific emphasis on the Transition Year programme – would appear to be a particularly appropriate and effective forum for communicating this message and building this awareness.

Volunteer involving organisations will also need to consider and be empathetic to the busy schedules led by many young people. Rather than focusing on the recruitment of volunteers for very fixed roles involving very specific time commitments volunteer involving organisations could usefully look to develop offers that 'empower' the prospective young volunteer to contribute 'in their way' and in a manner that fits with their own time schedule. This flexible approach, which would involve the organisation customising the role for the interested volunteer, would be very attractive to many prospective young volunteers.

5.3 Routes into Volunteering

The most influential dimensions which increase the likelihood of young people engaging in volunteering activity include the young person's social environment, the availability of information on volunteering opportunities and the support and encouragement they receive from a peer or respected 'influencer.'

Where family and friends act as volunteers it is more likely that a young person will volunteer. In situations where a young person's social environment is more fractured or fragmented and there is an absence of volunteering 'role models' volunteering will, understandably, be less likely. The provision of information on volunteering opportunities, and more particularly information on *how* to access those volunteering opportunities, will also increase the likelihood of young people volunteering. The various discussions impressed upon the researchers the very significant importance of encouragement and simply asking the young person to get involved. Many young people do not want or are simply not confident enough to make that all important 'first move.' The number of times young research participants suggested that it should not be up to them to make that first move was most striking.



5.4 Barriers to Volunteering

The research also sought to identify the barriers and obstacles that may deter young people from accessing volunteering opportunities. These various barriers and obstacles are set out in summary form in the table below. A more detailed exploration of the various issues is then provided.

Table 4: Barriers to Volunteering

Barriers to Volunteering
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not having enough time • Never thought about volunteering • Reluctance to 'make the first move' • Lack of information • A sense that the young person would not like it • Perceived absence of any independence or autonomy in the volunteering role • Too young to volunteer • Absence of positive volunteering role model and/or peer support • No transport and concern about perceived costs associated with volunteering

- **Not having enough time** was cited most frequently by research participants and was clearly the most significant barrier to engagement in volunteering. Interestingly many of the young people had a perception that volunteering would involve a significant fixed commitment of time – usually on a weekly basis. It will therefore be important for volunteer involving organisations to provide a range of flexible opportunities which are attractive to young people and which allow them to provide volunteering time and support that fits in with their busy schedule of activities.

Some of the young participants also suggested that early engagement with a volunteer involving organisation can often appear to be too much like applying for a job, and this can lead to fears about the levels of time and commitment that may be expected.

Young people also stressed that they are very busy immediately before and during exam times. Volunteer involving organisations were therefore called on to schedule and plan events and projects for the beginning and middle of term time so as to allow as many young volunteers as possible to take part.

“There’s no way I would be able to do anything else but study in my Leaving Cert year... It just wouldn’t be a runner... I wouldn’t have the time...”

“Even my parents tell me I should give it (volunteering) up during Sixth Year... They think it would get in the way of study...”

"I couldn't afford to give up every Saturday and if I did get involved I would feel like I was letting them (volunteer involving organisation) down when I would have to give up as the exams get closer."

- **Never thought about volunteering;** Many of the young research participants that had not yet taken part in volunteering activity suggested that they had simply not thought about it. In these cases there was no significant negative perception associated with volunteering – merely the absence of a firm link between volunteering as a concept and the take up of a volunteering opportunity in reality. As mentioned previously awareness of the extensive range of volunteering opportunities and roles will need to be developed amongst younger people.

"I didn't think they (volunteer involving organisation) would want someone like me (someone so young and 'inexperienced.')

"I never thought of it... Nobody asked me... If somebody had asked me I probably would have (got involved)."

"I suppose I would do it (volunteering) when I'm older but I hadn't really thought about it before now."

- **Reluctance to make the first move;** Lack of confidence, the fear of not knowing anyone or simply stepping into an unknown part of a city or a new social environment can all deter a young person from engaging in volunteering activity. For some the perceived bureaucracy that can be involved with the take up of formal volunteering roles was also put forward as a deterrent. In particular Garda vetting and the completion of application forms and submission of letters of reference were described, by some of the research participants, as daunting or unnecessarily time consuming.

For those in their late teens and early twenties it was suggested that the potential for volunteering may be limited by exam and extra-curricular related demands. Interestingly parents were often thought to play a role – often 'unspoken – in discouraging Leaving Certificate students from engaging in volunteering activity on the basis that it would distract the student from their studies.

It is clear that the motivation to be a volunteer often involves a significant degree of personal drive, commitment as well as peer support. Overcoming a young person's lack of confidence in their own abilities will be required in the case of some volunteers. Other less motivated young people will often need a little additional encouragement and support to get involved. It should also be noted, of course, that some young people will simply have no interest in volunteering. As so many of the research participants flagged the importance of 'being asked' this places a significant onus on the part of volunteer involving organisations.

"...None of my mates are doing it so it would mean going along on my own."

"...It would mean getting the bus into town and trying to fit in with people you have never met before..."

"...I suppose if I was asked then 'Yeah' I would certainly think about it... I would like to help...but nobody's asked me..."

- **Lack of information;** Successfully accessing an appropriate volunteering opportunity will require information on the range of opportunities and roles that do exist within the local area. Providing information on the available variation in the levels of volunteering commitment, responsibility and the types of activity will help, in turn, to attract the widest possible range of young people.

“I didn’t know you could do so many things (through volunteering) I just thought it was about collecting money (fundraising / seeking donations).”

“When you think about it it does sound a lot more interesting... coaching soccer, campaigning that kind of thing... It’s only when you think of all the different (attractive) possibilities (to get involved as a volunteer).”

- **A sense that the young person would not like it;** Some of the non-volunteering young people described a view that volunteering would not be fun, would involve *“taking orders and direction from a bunch of older people”* or simply would be *“boring.”* Volunteer recruiters and managers will have a key role to play in providing the necessary reassurances and in building acceptance amongst young people.

“I don’t think it would be for me... I prefer hanging around with mates my own age...”

“If there was something (volunteering opportunity) where you could work with people of a similar age then ‘yes’ I would be interested...”

“I always thought it was just the do gooders and the holy joes that do that kind of thing.”

- **Perceived absence of any independence or autonomy in the volunteering role;** Volunteering for many of those that had yet to take part should mean more than simply fulfilling a minor role. Many young people expressed an interest in having an input in organisational decision making. A suspicion that one’s opinions and insights would not be valued or taken into account by the volunteer involving organisation had, however, deterred some young people from getting involved.

“When you are so young I don’t think you would be given a fair crack... You would end up doing all the menial stuff... You wouldn’t be listened to...”

“I’d find it really frustrating if you came up with some great ideas on how to raise money or how to get young people on side... and then you weren’t listened to.”

- **Too young to volunteer;** Many of the schools based, non-volunteering research participants questioned whether they would be too young or too inexperienced to volunteer.

“I guess I am too young... Maybe this coming year...I will be in Transition Year...”

“There was a couple of things I looked into but they were on on a Friday evening and I think I would have been too young for them.”

"I thought they would want older people that can drive or that are over eighteen..."

- **Absence of positive volunteering role model and or peer support;** Encouragement and support were thought to be key levers involved in encouraging participation in volunteering. Young people frequently suggested that the involvement of a respected peer, relative or member of the local community in volunteering activity had encouraged their own involvement. Conversely the absence of such a role-model was thought to reduce the likelihood of involvement in volunteering. There was also a suggestion put forward, with some frequency, that a lower household income would reduce one's propensity to volunteer. Indeed there was a concern voiced by many that volunteering may not be reaching those who are unemployed and in lower socio-economic groups.

The absence of a community focal point and a community 'tradition' in volunteering was, in some cases, thought to contribute to a situation whereby the involvement of young people in community work, without pay, was perceived to be inappropriate or 'uncool' behaviour. There were also *some* examples of instances whereby negative peer pressure had dissuaded young people from volunteering. A concern was also voiced that as involvement in volunteering is so often cultivated as a younger person that many young people may 'miss the volunteering boat' as they will be more difficult to motivate as volunteers in later life.

"I don't know anyone that does it really... No, no one in my family... Maybe some of the neighbours... but it's never really come up in conversation..."

"Why should I work down in the community centre for free when there are people down there on (paid) Community Schemes..."

"The slagging would be ferocious (if I were to engage locally in volunteering)."

- **No transport and concern about perceived costs associated with volunteering;** Rural areas with dispersed populations may be lacking in offers from volunteer involving organisations forcing interested young people to travel to take up volunteering opportunities. The absence of viable and cost effective transport was put forward as a key barrier that might dissuade such young people from carrying through on their initial interest. Volunteering was also thought to be difficult in cases where there was pressure on young people through conflicts with other priorities – such as part-time jobs.

"It would take at least a half hour to get there by bus... There is nothing in my local area..."

"I work in the supermarket two evenings a week and all day Saturday... so that doesn't leave me with much spare time..."

"The bus only comes every three quarters of an hour or hour so you would be getting back home really late in the evenings..."

5.5 Drawbacks of Volunteering and Reasons for Discontinuing Involvement

5.5.1 Drawbacks of volunteering

Other factors or drawbacks of volunteering reported by young people included the required time commitment, the often high expectations of volunteer managers, the sense that one is being taken for granted and the perception of a negative or superior outlook of others within the volunteer involving organisation.

Many young volunteers – both currently active and former alike – suggested that volunteering can very often take up too much time. Young people appeared to be particularly protective of their available time during key school and college based exam phases. For many the Leaving Certificate year and final year in third level education were often described as time periods where volunteering activity would have to be reduced very considerably or eliminated entirely. The fixed time commitment associated with many volunteering activities was put forward as the key barrier in this respect. The influence and advice of parents was also reported as a factor which had prompted many to discontinue or reduce their involvement in volunteering at these times. Young volunteers also spoke of the high expectations and demands that can be placed on them by volunteer involving organisations and particularly the empathy and flexibility that may be required by volunteer involving organisations in the lead in to key exams.

“I just couldn’t afford to give up every Wednesday afternoon or Saturday morning this year... I have my Leaving Cert to worry about...”

“I was just too busy studying for the Leaving... If they (the volunteer involving organisation) were a bit more flexible in terms of when I could get involved then maybe I could have stayed involved but it did seem to be a take it or leave it... every Wednesday afternoon... I just couldn’t miss out on all that study time.”

“When I had my finals coming up I just had to give up (the involvement in volunteering).”

Being taken for granted was a drawback commonly cited by many of the young research participants. In particular volunteers suggested that there can be an “ambiguous” recognition of volunteers within organisations whereby a volunteers own personal contribution or effort is very often ‘subordinate’ to the overall impact of the organisation.

“Whenever there was a big announcement it was always about the organisation....never about the volunteers...You would get a bit xxxxxx off with that (lack of personal or collective recognition for volunteers).”

“... It sounds very ‘me, me, me’... but you don’t want to feel taken for granted... You should be recognised for all the hard work you put in... I’m not talking about money or prizes or anything like that... just a ‘thank you’ ceremony... a cup of tea and a photograph...just to know that they (volunteer involving organisation) appreciate what you have done.”

There were also some young people that reported a sense of “feeling trapped” within their volunteering roles. This was most notable when young volunteers were coping with a very significant workload and particularly where it did not appear that this could be adequately shared with other volunteers. The relationship between young volunteers and older volunteers or paid staff in managerial roles was another key area which young people suggested required careful attention and management. In particular young people were very concerned that their input and effort would be perceived to be less valuable than that provided by the older volunteers or paid staff. Some of the research participants also suggested that volunteer involving organisations must guard against any perceived inequity in terms of the roles fulfilled by young volunteers compared with those performed by older volunteers.

“At times in the charity shop you felt really ‘set up’... here was I lugging around all the big, heavy boxes, loading and unloading trucks all the time and there was nobody around to give me a dig out...”

“That’s one of the reasons I didn’t stick around... You always felt like you would get the crappy tasks just because you were the youngest...”

“Ok, they are older and more experienced... but that shouldn’t mean your opinion doesn’t count or shouldn’t be listened to.”

“It’s important that there is a sense of fairness about it (the allocation of tasks)... If there isn’t the young volunteer will just get browned off and leave... We are all volunteers and young people shouldn’t be seen as the skivvies who do all the grotty jobs.”

“The last thing you want is to feel invisible within the organisation.”

5.5.2 Reasons for giving up volunteering

This research would suggest that few young volunteers will discontinue volunteering because of a disengagement with the cause that had originally prompted them to get involved in the first place. Lack of recognition and support, a perceived inequity in task allocation and absence of autonomy and control were instead more likely to prompt young people to stop volunteering. However *the* most influential factors which had prompted young people to discontinue their involvement in volunteering were very often the introduction of new demands on their time – usually exam oriented demands – or a simple realisation that they were not well matched, in terms of required skills, experience, or aptitude for the volunteering role. Managing the workload and study commitments associated with the Leaving Certificate and the young person’s subsequent exit from the supportive, nurturing school environment were very frequently described as the two key factors which had prompted young people to cease involvement in volunteer involving organisations.

“It (discontinuing volunteering) wasn’t because I didn’t feel strongly about human rights anymore... It was just I was frustrated with the way things were run...my own lack of input... I felt I wasn’t being listened to... I had little say over how things got done or what we should prioritise... I suppose that burnt me out after a while.”

“I was annoyed with how they divvied up the different jobs to do... It seemed if you were young then you got the really menial jobs to do.”

“When I got into Sixth Year I just couldn’t keep it all up... It (volunteering) got in the way of study...”

“When you have your Leaving coming up then nothing else can get in the way...”

“It was when I left school (that volunteering stopped)... When you are in school your time is so well managed (on your behalf) that, even though you are really busy, you are able to fit in certain things at certain times of the week. When you leave school everything gets a little more disorganised and it’s more difficult to manage your time.”

Many young research participants suggested that their ‘social awareness’ had been increased through the school environment. Presentations and talks by special interest and voluntary groups had made a positive impression in many cases. However as many volunteering opportunities are often presented within a short period of time – often September to May – it was suggested that it can therefore be difficult for the young person to engage in something more meaningful and long term. Repeatedly it was also suggested that it can be difficult to engage in community activities and volunteering after completion of Transition Year due to the introduction of increased curriculum related pressures.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations



Conclusions and Recommendations

This research confirms that volunteering can play a very significant role in developing greater levels of community and social awareness and involvement amongst young people in Ireland. Volunteering, importantly, affords young people the opportunity to develop confidence levels, valuable personal and social skills, and a sense of responsibility both for themselves and the local, national and international communities that they live in. Engaging in volunteering at an early age would also appear to increase the likelihood of a person either continuing to volunteer for the long term or returning to it after a period of absence. It would appear that those young people who volunteer at an early age are more likely to join other community based groups, to volunteer in the future and indeed to develop a lifelong commitment to volunteering. This research reveals a cohort of young people who are very keen to participate in volunteering activity and to contribute to various local, national and international causes and initiatives. The research however would suggest that access to volunteering can often be, but by no means always, limited to those with more opportunities in Irish society. Those experiencing economic, personal or social difficulties *may* be more at risk of being excluded from volunteering.

The research would indicate that job and career development, while a significant motivational factor, is not *the* most influential lever to involvement in volunteering. Indeed many young research participants were clearly quite cynical of the emphasis on volunteering solely for the purpose of career development and the enhancement of job prospects. Instead young people want to feel a meaningful connection to the underlying cause associated with the volunteer effort. They also want to enjoy the volunteering experience and most importantly many young people simply want, or even expect, to be asked to get involved in volunteering. Young people that had not yet engaged with volunteering expressed a willingness to get involved but this was not always realised as these young people often felt it was not their responsibility to 'make the first move.' This places a significant onus and responsibility on volunteer involving organisations.

The contribution of young volunteers to Irish society is significant. These contributions are valuable and ought to be recognised and celebrated. Such recognition will help to retain committed young volunteers and encourage further involvement of young people in volunteering. The research would suggest that many existing young volunteers would benefit from additional support. Volunteer retention strategies will have a key role to play in the ongoing development of volunteering in Ireland. In cases where appropriate support and encouragement are not provided young volunteers can often miss out on experiencing the various benefits associated with volunteering. The provision of volunteer support that is professional, informed, and personal to the needs of young volunteers will be instrumental in securing many of the recognised and articulated benefits of volunteering – both for the young volunteer and the wider communities which they support through their volunteering effort.

This research focused on capturing the experience and attitude of young people towards volunteering. In particular the qualitative approach underpinning the research provided a valuable opportunity to both capture and reflect the young person's voice in an Irish context. The research demonstrates that young people in Ireland are most interested in the concept of volunteering and many are clearly very motivated to involve themselves in volunteering activities and roles. NYCI and other bodies involved in the promotion of volunteering amongst young people could therefore usefully consider the following key recommendations in the bid to promote, support and enhance volunteering amongst young people in Ireland;

- **Call for a rebrand and development of a national awareness campaign;** The image of volunteering plays an important role and may need to be considered further – both by NYCI and volunteering involving organisations – in order to attract an increased number of young people. While altruism is certainly a critical motivating factor it will not always be enough, on its own, to motivate all prospective young volunteers. Personal or workplace development opportunities, as well as opportunities for fun and socialising are also very important ingredients in the motivation of young volunteers and will need to be emphasised in any promotional campaigns. Importantly greater awareness of the extremely wide diversity and range of volunteering opportunities and roles will need to be developed amongst young target audiences. Information on the available diversity and choice of roles – that go beyond the fundraising and charity shop roles which young people so readily associate with the concept of volunteering – could very usefully be provided. Reassuringly the small proportion of young research participants that were familiar with the Volunteer Ireland online search facility for volunteering opportunities spoke very highly of this service. The availability and relevance of such a resource could be promoted more prominently – by the NYCI, Volunteer Ireland and volunteering involving organisations – particularly amongst schools based young people.
- **Emphasis on the relevance of 'activism', 'community contribution' and 'social conscience'** could usefully be articulated in any volunteer focused promotional campaign developed by NYCI and volunteering involving organisations. The term 'volunteering' can often prompt young people to think quite 'narrowly' and 'traditionally' with fundraising and charity shop roles most commonly associated with the term. A campaign for young volunteers which highlights concepts such as social activism and community engagement could prove to be more appealing.
- **Call for a broad based or coordinated approach to volunteer promotion that involves the entire voluntary and community sector;** For many young people there is an expectation that it is the responsibility of the volunteer involving organisations to 'make the first move' when seeking to recruit new volunteers. Young people are interested in contributing time and effort to a very diverse range of issues and causes. NYCI could therefore usefully play a lead role in encouraging the community and voluntary sector to take an active and coordinated approach to the promotion of volunteering opportunities, volunteer recruitment and the introduction of good practice volunteering quality standards.

- **Fostering volunteering through the use of peer led promotion and case studies;** Young people will very often more readily identify with volunteers of a similar age rather than significantly older volunteer managers and recruiters. NYCI and volunteer involving organisations could usefully consider strategies to include young volunteers in promotional, awareness building and recruitment campaigns. Opportunities to meet with active young volunteers, to find out about their particular experience and to discuss issues and concerns would be valued by many young people who have yet to engage in volunteering.
- **A self-assessment tool for young people interested in volunteering – Matching ‘clients’ with appropriate, available volunteering opportunities;** Volunteer involving organisations could usefully adopt the mindset that they are ‘selling an experience’. Many young people – and particularly those more motivated ‘self-starters’ – will shop around for the best and most appropriate experience available to them. It will therefore be important for the organisation to provide a quality volunteer experience. As with any paid role the recruitment and training of a suitable candidate will require a significant spend in resources. Taking time to ensure that the candidate is suited to the role being filled will be an appropriate investment for key volunteer roles. The development of a simple online screening tool which would allow prospective volunteers to ‘self assess’ their own interests and requirements as to the type of experience that they might like would increase the likelihood of an appropriate ‘fit’ between volunteer and volunteer involving organisation.
- **The launch of a national or regional series of formal or informal ‘taster’ opportunities** for young people to sample or ‘trial’ a range of volunteer roles without the requirement for any fixed or long commitment. Such an approach could help to overcome the ‘fear of commitment’ that many young people feel with respect to volunteering.
- **Volunteer involving organisations and volunteer managers clearly have a key role to play** in promoting the attractiveness of volunteering amongst young people. It will be very important for volunteer managers to understand the expectations and motivations of prospective young volunteers. As ‘we’ are all individuals different factors will motivate different people in different ways. Volunteer involving organisations will therefore need to understand their volunteers on a very personal level. When this personal understanding of why a young person might be attracted to, or indeed deterred from, accessing a particular volunteering role is developed volunteer involving organisations will become more effective at recruiting, managing and retaining young volunteers. Encouraging feedback and ongoing ‘two way’ dialogue will be important. Volunteer managers need to continually ask the volunteer about their volunteering experience and how it is meeting their needs. The inclusion of such an open dialogue will help to better understand and manage what young people expect from their volunteer experience, what would make their experience more satisfying, and will also encourage the young volunteer to take greater ‘ownership’ and responsibility for their long term involvement with the organisation.

- **Award programmes to focus on 'flexibility';** The Gaisce Awards were cited repeatedly as a lever which had prompted many young people to engage in volunteering activity. These awards schemes clearly are effective in encouraging young people to 'try' volunteering. The only criticism of this and similar awards schemes centred on their perceived lack of flexibility. Young volunteers suggested that they had had to 'discontinue' volunteering roles which they were clearly suited to in order to take up roles in other sectors and areas to meet the various award related criteria set down by the awards scheme.
- **Promotional efforts to focus on Transition Year programme;** The Transition Year programme was thought to provide a most attractive opportunity to engage with interested young people. Very frequently it was suggested that Transition Year students are the 'right age' and have the necessary 'time and space' to engage meaningfully with a volunteer role. Schools were also thought to be very supportive of their Transition Year students engaging in volunteering and community related activities. The schools system itself could be usefully 'educated' in respect of the wide and diverse range of available volunteering roles. In particular schools could be encouraged to think beyond restricting volunteer involvement to charitable fundraising activities.
- **Important to promote 'flexibility'** for the interested candidate particularly around the time and level of commitment required. Young people lead busy lives and often are involved in a myriad of curricular and extra-curricular activities. Volunteer involving organisations that are 'respectful' of this - particularly the pressures associated with exam time and school related 'priorities' – and allow the volunteer, where possible, to tailor their involvement to suit their own schedule will increase the likelihood of retaining the young volunteer over the medium to long term. Demonstrating a willingness to adapt to the changing schedules of the young volunteer and to modify the role to suit their 'growth' and 'development' will be highly valued. Maintaining good 'two-way' communication throughout the process and allowing or even encouraging the young volunteer to move on when they have had enough will serve both parties well for the long term.
- **Do not overlook the importance of feedback;** Volunteers that are provided with visible measures and information on tangible outcomes relating to their volunteering time and effort will tend to be more positively 'connected' with the volunteering effort.

Appendices





Appendices

Appendix One: Focus group and depth interview discussion guide

Exploring the role and impact of volunteering on young people/the experience, behaviours and attitudes of young people towards volunteering.

- **Brief outline ‘reminder’ of NYCI/OCS research process**
 - Assurances of confidentiality/anonymity, how data will be recorded, process for discussion
- **Round table warm up;**

Can you tell me a little bit about yourselves? (**V. brief** to ‘warm up’ discussion)

 - Age, background (‘stage of life,’ education/career experience, involvement in and exposure to volunteering)
- **Defining ‘volunteering’/‘volunteers;’**

When you think of the terms ‘volunteering’ and ‘volunteers’ what comes to mind? How is ‘volunteering’/‘acting as a volunteer’ perceived by young people in general? (positive/negative) ‘Who’ do you think of? ‘Who’ does volunteering ‘suit’? ‘Who’ gets involved? ‘Who doesn’t? (Certain ‘types’ – age, personality, attitude, family background, school etc, etc)

 - **What** is a ‘volunteer’? (a ‘description’) What do they (volunteers) do? (Types of organisations, types of activity, types of ‘outcomes’) What ‘types’ of organisations rely on volunteers?
 - **Why** do ‘they’ (you) do it? What’s ‘in it’ for them (you)? (What does the volunteer “get” out of their involvement? How do they benefit?)
- **Levers;**
 - What encourages young people to get involved in voluntary activity? Volunteering? What encourages(ed) them (you)? ‘Who’ encourages (ed) them (you)? ‘How’ did you get involved? (How did you ‘go about it’? How did you (do young people) hear about the opportunities? How did you know who to approach/where to go? Talk me through the ‘process’ involved in ‘getting involved’ as a volunteer.)
 - What were your expectations at that time (as to what the experience would be like)? What type of role were you hoping to fulfil? What type of activities were you hoping to engage in?
 - What information was (would be) most useful to you at this time? (when *considering* taking up a voluntary role)
 - How would you describe your experience as a volunteer? (Good, bad, indifferent) Why? Did it meet your expectations? Did you like being involved from the start?/ Did it take time for the experience to ‘grow on you’?
 - What helped you/encouraged you when you first started? (induction process/training provided/personal interaction with fellow volunteers/activities/skill development etc)
 - How would you rate the quality of the information/support/training/backup/encouragement you received from the organisation? What was good about it?/How could it have been improved?
 - Was your involvement as a volunteer ‘rewarding’ for you? What did you really like/dislike about it?
 - Are there organisations that are very good (or perceived to be very good) at attracting young people as volunteers? What are they doing that makes the offer to ‘get involved’ (and stay involved) so attractive?
 - Would you encourage another young person to get involved in volunteering? Why? Why not? What advice would you offer them?

- **Barriers to getting involved as a volunteer;**
 - What young people aren't volunteering? 'Who' does volunteering not 'suit'? 'Who' doesn't get involved? Why? (age, 'stage of life', other key commitments, particular attitudes, perceptions, structural barriers (where they might live, lack of available opportunities, positive influencers etc))
 - What didn't you (don't you) like about being (becoming) a volunteer?
 - Were you ever asked/encouraged/thought about becoming a volunteer? Why didn't you?
 - What were the negative or frustrating points about being involved as a volunteer? In what areas did the voluntary activity not meet your expectations? How could you have been supported (as a volunteer / prospective volunteer) more effectively?
 - What might deter a young person (you) from getting involved in volunteering? (Will only provide prompts if necessary) Why didn't you (your peers) get involved in volunteering? What 'put you off'? Was it a 'conscious decision' not to get involved? Was there anything that deterred you from getting involved? (Probe for detail here)
 - How could getting involved in voluntary activity be made more attractive to you / somebody who has never volunteered? (i.e. as a 'concept')
 - How could starting-off as a volunteer have been made easier for you? What should be in place to support new volunteers?

- **Retaining volunteers**
 - Were there times you thought you might not be able to remain involved as a volunteer?
 - Why did you / your peers not stay involved? Was 'age' / key milestone events (e.g. exams) an influencing factor? What kinds of challenges / obstacles did you experience?
 - Could anything (supports) have been done to make things easier for you to stay involved?
 - Having being involved as a volunteer in the past is it more likely that you will get involved in volunteering again in the future?
 - Are there organisations that are very good at retaining young people as volunteers? What are these organisations doing that makes it easy / attractive for the young volunteer to stay involved?

- **General / Supporting volunteers**
 - Why aren't more young people volunteering?
 - Are there 'enough' attractive opportunities available for young people to get involved in volunteering?
 - What advice would you have for an organisation that is looking to attract and retain young people as volunteers?
 - What can be done to promote volunteering as an attractive activity amongst/positive experience for young people? (at a national policy level)

Appendix Two: Focus group recruitment questionnaire

Definition of 'volunteering' for the purpose of research recruitment;

*"The commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society, local communities, **individuals outside the immediate family**, the environment, or other causes. Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person's own free will, **without payment** (except for reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses.)"*¹

Seeking to achieve a reasonable 'balance' with research participants (i.e. in the case of actively involved volunteers and 'lapsed' volunteers) drawn across 4 key areas of volunteering activity; (1) social or charitable work (2) sporting organisations (3) religious or church organisations (4) political or cultural organisations.

1 'Actively involved volunteers'; (Urban)

Young people actively involved in volunteering i.e. minimum of two hours of volunteering activity per calendar month. Gender mix. Aged between 15 and 17

2 'Actively involved volunteers'; (Semi urban)

Young people actively involved in volunteering i.e. minimum of two hours of volunteering activity per calendar month. Gender mix. Aged between 18 and 21.

3 'Actively involved volunteers'; (Rural)

Young people actively involved in volunteering i.e. minimum of two hours of volunteering activity per calendar month. Gender mix. Aged between 22 and 25.

4 No longer volunteer; (Urban)

Young people that had previously engaged in volunteering but who have not done so for a period of 6 months or more. Gender mix. Aged between 15 and 17.

5 No longer volunteer; (Semi urban)

Young people that had previously engaged in volunteering but who have not done so for a period of 6 months or more. Gender mix. Aged between 18 and 21.

6 No longer volunteer; (Rural)

Young people that had previously engaged in volunteering but who have not done so for a period of 6 months or more. Gender mix. Aged between 22 and 25.

7 'Never volunteered' (Urban)

Young people that have never engaged (or have not engaged for a period of more than 2 years) in volunteering activity. Gender mix. Aged between 15 and 17.

8 'Never volunteered' (Semi urban)

Young people that have never engaged (or have not engaged for a period of more than 2 years) in volunteering activity. Gender mix. Aged between 18 and 21.

9 'Never volunteered' (Rural)

Young people that have never engaged (or have not engaged for a period of more than 2 years) in volunteering activity. Gender mix. Aged between 22 and 25.

¹ Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, White Paper 'Supporting Voluntary Activity' 2000.

Key recruitment questions

1	Have you ever engaged in volunteering activity? (Definition on previous page with key dimensions highlighted in bold text.)	
	<p>Yes, 'Actively involved volunteer' i.e. minimum of 2 hours of volunteering activity per month</p> <p>Yes, 'No longer volunteer' i.e. previously engaged but have not done so for 6 months +</p> <p>No, 'Never volunteered' i.e. never engaged or not engaged for more than 2 years</p>	<p>Candidate for Groups 1, 2 or 3</p> <p>Candidate for Groups 4, 5 or 6</p> <p>Candidate for Groups 7, 8 or 9</p>
2	Gender Male Female	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>
3	Age 15 – 17 18 – 21 22 – 25	<p>Candidate for Groups 1, 4 or 7</p> <p>Candidate for Groups 2, 5 or 8</p> <p>Candidate for Groups 3, 6 or 9</p>
4	Place of Residence Urban Semi-urban Rural	<p>Candidate for Groups 1, 4 or 7</p> <p>Candidate for Groups 2, 5 or 8</p> <p>Candidate for Groups 3, 6 or 9</p>

Appendix Three: Information sheet – Research on youth volunteering

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) functions to represent the interests of young people and youth organisations. NYCI's role is recognised in legislation (Youth Work Act) and as a social partner. NYCI aims through its member organisations and its representative role to empower young people to participate in society as fulfilled confident individuals. The work of the Youth Council is based on principles of equality, social justice and equal participation for all. In achieving these aims NYCI seeks the emergence of a society in which young people are valued citizens who can make a meaningful contribution to their community.

Volunteering involves bringing people together to share and develop skills and resources, build capabilities and capacities, promote understanding and action and, very often, to change lives. NYCI is active in promoting and supporting volunteering amongst young people and has estimated that up to 40,000 volunteers are engaged in youth work on an ongoing basis. The issue of volunteering amongst young people is a policy priority for NYCI. To inform NYCI policy and advocacy work the Youth Council is now undertaking research with young people – volunteers and non-volunteers alike. With this in mind NYCI has appointed independent research company, OCS Consulting, to conduct a research study involving young people aged between 15 and 25.

The aim of this research is to develop a better understanding of the experience, behaviours and attitudes of young people in Ireland towards volunteering. A key objective of the research is to explore the role and impact of volunteering on young people, why young people volunteer and why they remain involved. The research will also explore the structural and attitudinal barriers and obstacles which can prevent young people from volunteering. Those targeted are being asked to participate to ensure that policy recommendations are based on the genuine needs of people aged between 15 and 25. The research report will be also be used to inform NYCI's policy and campaign work on youth volunteering.

You can help by taking part in this research;

You can give a real understanding of your experiences and perceptions of volunteering.

Taking part in the research would involve participating in a focus group discussion for about 90 minutes or a one to one interview for about 30 minutes. The discussion would be just like a conversation – telling the researcher of your experiences and perceptions of volunteering.

Your conversation with the OCS researcher will be kept **strictly confidential**. In the research report, all the information young people give will be grouped together so that no one person can be identified. All records of the discussions will be deleted 6 months after the study is completed. There is no obligation to participate. If there is a question(s) that research participants do not want to answer they will not have to. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. We simply want to hear of your own personal experiences and perceptions.

The focus group is taking place at (location) on (date) at (time) and will run for 90 minutes until approximately (time). Approximately 8 people will participate in each focus group.

If you have any questions about this research study please feel free to contact;

Hugh O'Connor at
OCS Consulting, 26/27 Upper Pembroke Street, Dublin 2,
Tel: 01 637 3928

Or

Marie-Claire McAleer
National Youth Council of Ireland, 3, Montague Street, Dublin 2
Tel: 01 478 4122

Your Consent

I have received an explanation of the research and I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary

Name _____ Date _____

Many thanks for your assistance with this important research and we look forward to meeting with you again at the focus group meeting.

Appendix Four: **List of submissions received**

- Football Association of Ireland (FAI)
- Foróige
- Gaelic Athletic Association / Cumann Lúthchleas Gael (GAA)
- Irish Girl Guides
- Léargas
- Society of St. Vincent de Paul





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