

Management of Volunteers

Working with Younger Volunteers

Introduction

Children and young people under 16 years of age can and do make a responsible and active contribution to society through volunteering and community involvement. They already participate in the organisation and development of voluntary and community activity, sometimes in partnership with adults and on other occasions not. Peer education, where young people educate other young people, is a good example of self-help volunteering by children and young people under 16.

Under 16 volunteers bring to volunteering and community involvement expert knowledge of the behaviour of children and young people, and what this implies - at school, on the streets, in youth clubs, in the leisure centre, in the family and so on. They also have views on what could be done to improve the environment, make the streets safe, and make schools better places to study and learn.

The participation and involvement of children and young people under 16 in volunteer-involving organisations and community groups and in shared decision making can bring benefits to them and to community life. The challenge to organisations and groups is to involve them as volunteers in a sustainable way which ensures their safety and protection from harm.

Employment Legislation and Under 16 Volunteering

Employment legislation does not apply to volunteering as volunteers do not have the legal status of employees. So there is no minimum or maximum legal age that people can give their time as volunteers. The minimum age for admission to employment (paid work) is generally linked to the age for compulsory education. However, in the UK the minimum age is set at 13 with limitations and conditions up to the age of 16. Exceptions to the minimum age for employment allow young people over 13 to work for payment during school holidays, to carry out light work of limited duration while still undergoing compulsory education, to take part in cultural and artistic events, or to be involved in alternating work/school schemes towards the end of their compulsory school career.

However, these age limits do not legally apply to volunteering by children and young people under 16. What does apply is the general law of duty to care which all members of the public are obliged to observe. All adults need to observe this duty when appointing children and young people under 16 to voluntary positions in the community and in volunteer-involving organisations.

Health and Safety

Basic health and safety considerations should be applied to the situations in which children and young people under 16 will be volunteering. Volunteer-involving organisations should assess in advance the risks to the health

and safety of the young volunteers, taking account of their specific ability and suitability to carry out the voluntary work planned for them. Risk here is the chance, big or small, of harm actually being done.

This risk assessment is nothing more than a careful examination of what could cause harm to the young people, those who work with them and to third parties e.g. customers, clients, and the public at large. The risk assessment, once complete, helps organisations to decide

whether they have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recommends a 5 step approach to risk assessment:

- Step 1 - Look for the hazards
- Step 2 - Decide who might be harmed
- Step 3 - For each hazard, evaluate the chance, big or small, of harm actually being done and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done
- Step 4 - Record the significant findings of the risk assessment e.g. the main risks and the measures taken to deal with them
- Step 5 - Review your assessment from time to time, and revise if necessary.

Following the above steps risk assessments can be done in respect of children and young people under 16 by people unqualified in health and safety e.g. people in community groups and smaller organisations. In larger organisations the safety officer, safety representative or responsible employee could be asked to help. In addition, the local environmental health officer or local HSE Inspector can be approached for advice. The main thing is that the risk assessment is done in advance of the young people starting their voluntary work, and that it is adequate. The organisation should also devise its own Health and Safety Policy and ensure that it covers volunteers.

Child Protection

In order to safeguard the welfare of volunteers who are under 16 years of age it is important that organisations apply the statements of principle laid down in Volunteer Development Scotland's publication, Protecting Children. Just because people who are under 16 become involved as volunteers does not change the fact that they are children and young people with whom adults have contact. Organisations should take the appropriate action as detailed in the above publication to ensure that children and young people under 16, even though they are working as volunteers, are protected and that the situations where the abuse of children might take place are minimised. It is crucial that a robust child protection policy is put in place and that steps are taken to implement it throughout all the activities of the organisation.

Insurance

Adequate and appropriate insurance cover should be put in place for under 16 volunteers. This is the main financial provision for the young volunteer and the placement organisation in the event of accidents caused by them in the course of their voluntary work. Under 16 volunteers should be made aware of the type of insurance in place e.g, public liability, professional indemnity, and personal accident, the total amounts of cover provided, and any restrictions that apply. It should not be assumed either that under 16 volunteers are covered under existing policies or that insurance cover for them is unobtainable or excessively expensive.

Ever thought of young people & volunteering?

- ✓ Target more information about volunteering opportunities at young people to help them make better choices
- ✓ Use positive images of volunteering (and less stereotyping) to attract younger people to your organisation
- ✓ Make volunteering opportunities attractive and appealing to young people. Variety and the fun element are both important
- ✓ Create clear, progressive and varying volunteer roles for young people. Flexibility of volunteering (time and commitment) is important to reflect the diverse range of things which may be happening in a young person's life.
- ✓ Make sure volunteering provides benefits to young people in terms of skills, new challenges, work experience, and so on...
- ✓ Ensure that young people feel valued and respected by others they may be volunteering with or for
- ✓ Make your volunteers feel empowered, consult and involve them in the development of their volunteering
- ✓ Provide a friendly and relaxed environment for young volunteers to work in, with support from an identified person when they need it
- ✓ Ensure recognition of what young volunteers do, either by providing accreditation in the form of a qualification, or simply providing a reference or record of achievement, stating skills and experience gained while they were volunteering
- ✓ Make sure young volunteers are never out of pocket
- ✓ Follow good practice in the management of volunteers in all instances, e.g. volunteer policy, recruitment and selection, induction, training, support and supervision
- ✓ Be creative and consider if there are tasks within the