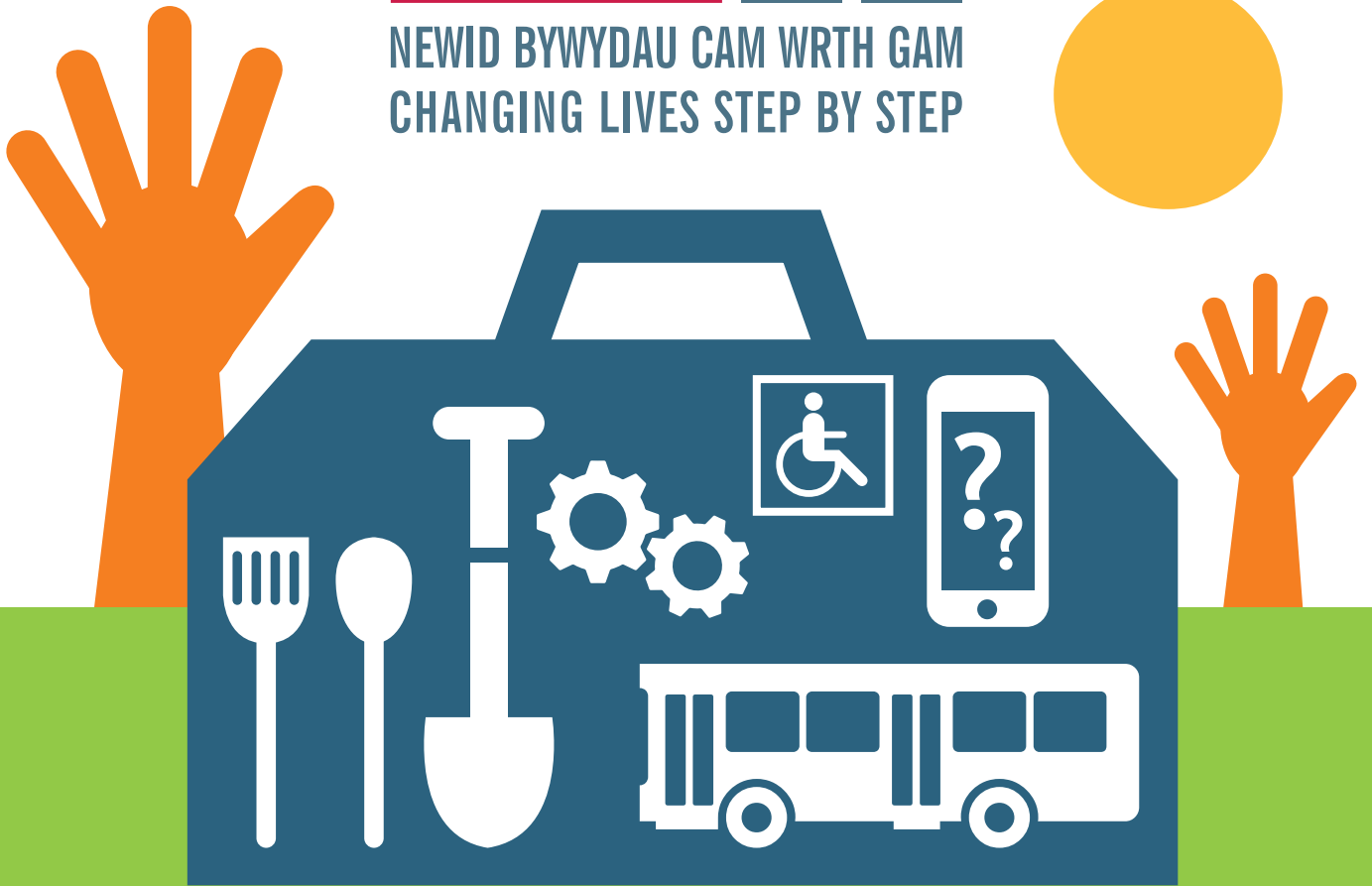


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CHANGING LIVES STEP BY STEP



# Youth Volunteering: A Toolkit for the Third-Sector

**WcVA  
CgGC**



Ariennir gan  
**Lywodraeth Cymru**  
Funded by  
**Welsh Government**



**Gwirfoddoli Cymru**  
**Volunteering Wales**

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We have on occasion used stock photographs and changed identifying details in order to protect the privacy of our beneficiaries.

# Introduction



This Toolkit has been created to help support the third-sector engage with young volunteers (11 - 18 year olds). It has been co-produced with young people who have engaged on Foothold Cymru's Volunteers: Be Heard. Be Helpful. Co-production is incredibly important as it draws upon the knowledge, skills and insights of others to help produce meaningful, real-life change. As such, this Toolkit reflects the thoughts, and work, hundreds of young people, in the Carmarthenshire area, have shared over the last 12-months.

Other work co-produced for this project includes a film and a teacher resource.

Let us know what you think by contacting: [kelly@footholdcymru.org.uk](mailto:kelly@footholdcymru.org.uk)

# Background

This Toolkit forms one of several resources created through Foothold Cymru's Volunteers: Be Heard. Be Helpful.

Volunteens was a year-long strategic project funded by Welsh Government and administered by WCVA and Volunteering Wales. The project was aimed at engaging young people of school age in conversations and activities around volunteering. In total over 200 young people took part and this toolkit reflects their views on ways in which the third sector could encourage greater number of young volunteers to support their work.



# What is ‘Volunteering’?

Many young people “Heard the word” but were really unsure what it meant and whether it was something they had done. Clarifying this term became our first task and many helpful definitions were suggested:



Although many definitions were suggested, for the purpose of this Toolkit we will use the following statement:

*“Volunteering is to put yourself forward with no motive apart from helping people without expecting anything more than a ‘Thank you’ - just doing it because you can, not because you’re being asked to or because you have to.”*

(Young Person - Volunteers)

# Why are young volunteers important?

The Welsh Government reports only 24% of young people are involved in any kind of volunteering in Wales; a number that reduces each year across all age brackets. However, young people can play an important role in volunteering. Young volunteers are important for many reasons:

- Young people can bring a fresh perspective and new ideas.
- Young volunteers can bring creativity, energy and enthusiasm.
- Young people can raise awareness and champion your work amongst their peers, teachers, parents and the wider community.
- Young volunteers can advise you how to involve and recruit other young people through word of mouth or using social media.
- Young people can advise you on how to keep your organisation up to date with new media and improve your profile with younger audiences.
- Young volunteers are often very committed.
- This opportunity could help them to decide on a vocation or pathway.

Furthermore your organisation will be pro-actively contributing to all the benefits that volunteering brings to young people. Plus it can bring positive media coverage of the work carried out by your organisation.



# Ask the experts: how can we get YOU involved?

Young people were eager to tell us what would encourage them to volunteer.



# Recruitment

Young people were very clear - they WANT to volunteer; they just aren't always sure how to get involved. The recruitment process is incredibly important both in attracting young people and matching them to suitable roles.

The recruitment process should include the following to encourage them to volunteer.

Opportunities

Specificity

Understanding

Integrity

Communication





# Opportunities

Opportunities that are local, accessible, and varied are vital for young volunteers.



## Local

Many young people struggle with transportation issues or are dependent on family or friends to help them attend volunteer placements. This can mean their time is further limited if they are relying on public transport, therefore, local volunteering opportunities are incredibly important.



## Accessible

Opportunities need to consider the uniqueness of young volunteers. Accessibility includes access to the volunteer placement; adaptations for any disability and clarity on expectations and responsibilities of both the provider and volunteer.



## Varied

Many young people desire opportunities that allow them to change tasks regularly; short, numerous tasks are more appealing than singular long-term tasks.

# Specificity



Having roles which are specific to young people was also highlighted as a need. Rather than generic volunteering roles which happen to be filled by young people, they suggested roles which are beneficial and appropriate to them.

One suggestion was the chance to have a taster session or taster day before committing to an organisation. Taster sessions provide the chance to try out a placement, see if it is suitable and engaging and allow both the young people and the organisation to get to know each other before creating a formal plan for volunteering involvement.

## Understanding

Flexibility and understanding are vital for young people when it comes to selecting an organisation to volunteer with. This is especially important when it comes to issues like:

- Mental Health
- School Commitments
- Home Commitments
- Transportation
- Time Requirement
- Accessibility

Young people identified many barriers to accessing volunteering roles, many of which were due to a lack of understanding from placement providers. Some reported they were fearful they would be *“...made to feel like you don't belong”* or that volunteering could *“...put a strain on your emotional, mental and physical health.”* Thus, having providers who are understanding about young people's requirements is essential.



## Integrity

Integrity, or follow through, is a much needed element from volunteering providers. Countless young people reported times when promises had been reneged and the impact this had on them including:

*“People don't listen to you”*

*“People don't believe in you”*

*“You feel like you're not good enough...it holds you back”*

For many young people, a lack of integrity was a reflection of negative stereotypes and prejudices others had about them believing others seeing or perceiving them to be *“...lazy, stupid or troublemakers.”*

# Communication



Communication is key for every aspect of volunteering but young people felt this was especially true for the initial part of the volunteering process with one young person stating:

*“...decentralised guidance can be a problem, like if there’s no single person you can talk to. If you don’t know who is there or who can help then you won’t want to go...”*

A number of communication methods were suggested but the majority felt WhatsApp would be the best to use. Regardless of what method was used, the most important aspect was for communication to be clear and efficient with many fearing they might miss something or be overlooked if information wasn’t relayed in an accurate and timely manner.

# Development

Development opportunities were really important for young volunteers and they readily identified three different types of development they would like access to:



## Pre-Volunteering

For many young people their volunteer placement started before they even attended the organisation.

One young person stated *“It’s hard to start out if you don’t have the necessary skills or training yet.”* Having development opportunities prior to starting a volunteer placement helped young people to build their confidence, develop key skills and learn more about the role or organisation before starting. Many of these opportunities could be facilitated via schools and educational settings.



## Volunteering Placement

Volunteering placements offer the chance to improve practical skills as well as develop their character.

## Post-Volunteering

A range of hard and soft skills were identified as well as the provision of more formal qualifications. This provides the third-sector numerous opportunities to support the development of young people through volunteering. Some of these skills included: communication, tolerance, emotional resilience, networking, management and leadership.

Finally, young people felt their volunteering placement could offer them development opportunities afterwards, thus positively impacting their future.

For many young people the biggest development opportunity was an organisation providing a reference letter for future employment. This was both simple and impactful. Other suggestions included being mentioned or thanked via social media when the placement ended or the organisation 'Endorsing' or 'Recommending' them via accounts like LinkedIn which again would support their future employment prospects.



# Recognition

Not all young volunteers wanted recognition for the work they had done; many preferring to remain anonymous, however, those who did want recognition suggested various practical ways this could happen.



# Conclusion



Throughout the Volunteens project the response from young people has been incredible. Their enthusiasm, willingness and motivation to get involved and work hard in various ways has been highly beneficial. The key takeaway message is that young people want to volunteer and see the whole process as helpful and positive. As the third-sector we need to listen to these voices and adapt our own volunteering opportunities to make them more appealing and accessible to the young people in our communities.

Young people have lots to offer and the more volunteering opportunities we provide the greater engagement we will see and everyone will benefit. To conclude this toolkit here is one young person's response to her chance to volunteer:

***"I loved getting involved! I would love to do this or something similar again! Maybe we could get more people involved because it's a great opportunity."***



# Other resources available

This Toolkit is one of a number of resources co-produced on this project; other resources include two films and a teacher presentation. Get in touch if you would like to access these:



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