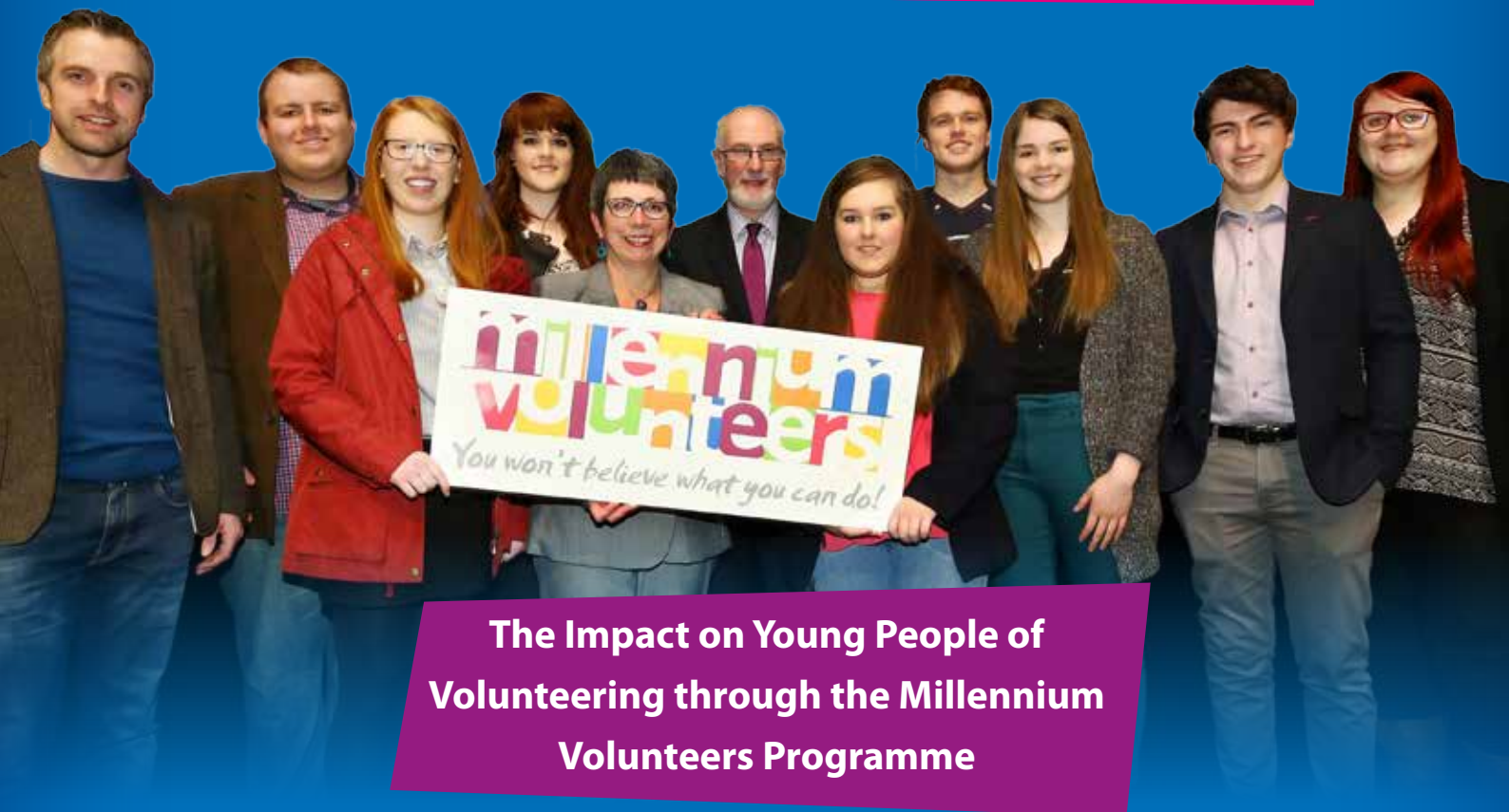


millennium volunteers

You won't believe what you can do!

Volunteering

The Next Generation



The Impact on Young People of
Volunteering through the Millennium
Volunteers Programme

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June 2016

Acknowledgements

Volunteer Now Enterprises Ltd working in partnership with 'Insight Solutions' were delighted to review the impact of volunteering on young people taking part in the **Millennium Volunteers Programme**. Since undertaking this work we have had many opportunities to engage with young volunteers, delivery partners and Volunteer Now staff.

We thank everyone who gave up their time to contribute to this review. However, we reserve a special word of thanks to all the young volunteers who completed a survey and to those who attended the focus groups held in Belfast, L'Derry, Fermanagh and Newry.

The focus groups really brought to life the experiences young people have had throughout their involvement with Millennium Volunteers. Throughout this report we have been able to include their insight and contribution to help articulate the impact of the Millennium Volunteers Programme.



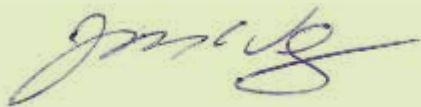
Seagoe Youth Group at the MV Awards of Excellence Ceremony along with Denise Hayward of Volunteer Now and Cllr Catherine Seeley, Deputy Lord Mayor of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

Foreword

Millennium Volunteers has been in existence in Northern Ireland since 1999 and during that time almost 35,000 young people have taken part in the programme. The programme is about enabling and recognising participation by young people between the ages of 11 and 25. The programme is built on 9 key principles – sustained personal commitment, community benefit, voluntary participation, inclusiveness, ownership by young people, variety, partnership, quality and recognition. Millennium Volunteers is funded by the Education Authority with the support of the Department of Education, it is managed by Volunteer Now. Currently over 550 organisations from across Northern Ireland work in partnership with Volunteer Now to deliver the Millennium Volunteers Programme.

This review has been undertaken by Insight Solutions on behalf of Volunteer Now and provides evidence of the positive impact the programme is having on the lives of the young people involved. It also provides evidence of the important role young people play in supporting community life through the delivery of youth work, conservation, caring for older people fundraising etc. Volunteering through the Millennium Volunteers programme is providing a worthwhile and enjoyable experience for a wide range of young people across Northern Ireland.

The report provides useful suggestions for further strengthening and developing the Millennium Volunteers Programme in Northern Ireland in the coming years. Volunteer Now would like to thank Insight Solutions for their work on this report.



Joe McVey OBE

CONTENTS

PAGE

1.0	Executive Summary	1
2.0	Key Insights	3
3.0	Millennium Volunteers - 'Measuring the Impact on Young People'	7
4.0	Volunteering – The Context	8
5.0	Research Methodology	11
Results and Findings		
6.0	The Impact of Volunteering on Young People	12
7.0	Delivery Partners' Role in Supporting Young People Volunteer	21
8.0	Recognising the Contribution of Young Volunteers	24
9.0	Management and Delivery of the Millennium Volunteers Programme	27
10.0	Summary of Key Points	29

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Millennium Volunteers Programme has been in existence for over 16 years and is available for those aged **11 to 25 years**. It is managed by Volunteer Now and is funded by the Education Authority, NI (previously the Youth Council for Northern Ireland) with the support of the Department of Education.

The Millennium Volunteers Programme aims to build awareness and encourage young people to participate in volunteering activities. Volunteer Now supports young people to volunteer which depends on there being a sufficient number of active partners to facilitate a range of good quality volunteering opportunities. At present there are **557** Delivery Partners across Northern Ireland who work with Volunteer Now to support young people volunteer.

In addition, a focus of the Millennium Volunteers Programme is to recognise and promote the volunteering efforts of young people. It is evident through this review that recognition for volunteering effort is a key strength of the programme and helps to encourage greater levels of participation.

The breadth of volunteering activities young people undertake on a regular basis is truly amazing. Primarily young people volunteer to make a difference or give something back but it is clear that volunteering helps them develop new skills and abilities such as leadership, team working and time management. In addition, volunteering also supports young people develop 'softer' skills in terms of how they relate to others and emotional intelligence. Many young volunteers also reported that volunteering helped them feel more connected to their local community, build social networks and lasting friendships.

Looking to the future many young people recognise that volunteering will help them apply for a university place or job opportunities.

Young people understand that volunteering *carries weight* with universities and potential employers. Many employers recognise the key skills that are developed through volunteering and believe it contributes to increased employability.

Across this review it is evident that there is a shared sense of value and importance placed on supporting young people to progress through the various award levels. Delivery partners are keen to ensure that young people are recognised for the time they volunteer - the Millennium Volunteers Programme provides a framework to allow this to happen in a structured and credible way. Many partners believe the programme helps build the confidence of young people. Providing ongoing recognition through 50, 100, 200 hour awards ensures that young people are supported throughout their volunteering journey.

In addition, partners benefit from the resources and support they receive which allows them to encourage local volunteering activities. It is evident that in the absence of the Millennium Volunteers Programme youth volunteering would continue to exist but this would not be as well coordinated, supported or recognised.

There is strong endorsement for the structure and framework the programme provides. Almost all young people who took part in the review intend to continue with volunteering even beyond the 200 hour certificate and would recommend the Millennium Volunteers Programme to a friend. Similarly, delivery partners recognise the support provided ensures they can support young people to volunteer. The majority of partners intend to continue to provide volunteering activities for young people and would recommend the Millennium Volunteers Programme to other organisations.

This report also suggests a number of 'Key Insights' (Section 2) emerging from the review which should be considered by Volunteer Now and other stakeholders to ensure

the contribution young people make to volunteering across Northern Ireland continues to be supported and recognised.



Mr Martin Mc Guinness (Deputy First Minister), Eilisha Mc Callion (Deputy Lord Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council) and Denise Hayward (Volunteer Now) recognising young volunteers from Gortnaghey Community Association at the Awards of Excellence Ceremony.

2.0 KEY INSIGHTS

By undertaking this review and speaking with young people and delivery partners a range of key impacts, learning and experiences have been identified. This section sets out these key insights and presents a summary of the impacts volunteering has on young people.

#1 Reason for volunteering

It is clear young people are enthusiastic about the opportunities volunteering presents for them in terms of developing new skills, social benefits and the longer term impact it will have for enhancing their education and career prospects.

The contribution to society and *'making a difference to others'* are the key reasons why young people decide to volunteer. Across all focus groups and the online survey it is evident young people are fully aware of the contribution volunteering can make to local groups, organisations and the wider community.

At a personal level many young people reflected on the wide networks and contacts they have established since beginning to volunteer. At the outset many young people had hoped to build a *'wider circle of friends'* and forming new relationships appears to be a key reason for (and outcome from) volunteering. Importantly, volunteering has also provided an opportunity to build relationships with other young people beyond their immediate area or school. Many schools, youth clubs and sports clubs place an emphasis on supporting volunteers engage with other young people from different backgrounds and communities.

In addition, young people recognise the contribution volunteering can provide in terms of building experience and skills which will support university applications or applying for future job opportunities. At the focus groups it was clear young people recognised that universities and future employers will seek more than *academic excellence* in terms of wider

life experiences and skills which volunteering can help establish.

#2 Supportive networks, friends and family

It is interesting the role local networks, friends and family play in encouraging young people volunteer.

Despite the prevalence of social media and digital content most young people are asked directly by a local group or organisation to become involved in volunteering activities. This often proves successful as the young person feels more comfortable and familiar with the group or organisation.

Therefore, existing networks or relationships that have been established especially at a local level are critical to supporting young people become involved with volunteering.

Despite young people often being familiar with the group or organisation it is still quite a step to go along for the first time or to get involved. This review demonstrates the positive (reinforcing) influence friends and family have on supporting the young person to take that first step in volunteering. In many cases the young person attended for the first time with a friend or family member which helped provide reassurance and build confidence.

Indeed, many of the young people who attended the focus groups reflected on the role their family had on encouraging them to volunteer. Where parents in particular were active volunteers it follows that they were much more motivated (and encouraged) to volunteer.

It is equally true that the culture or emphasis placed upon volunteering by schools, sports clubs and local organisations plays an important role in supporting young people to volunteer. These organisations are often the first 'route' for

young people into volunteering and therefore play a critical role in supporting them have a positive and rewarding experience.

#3 Impact on young people

As discussed in further detail within this report young people describe the impact volunteering has had on them through a number of key aspects.

Firstly, these include the skills and abilities they develop through volunteering. Communication, leadership, team working and time management were all skills young people felt had increased greatly through volunteering.

Volunteering supports young people develop 'softer' skills in terms of how they relate to others and emotional intelligence. Young volunteers reported an increased ability to engage with others, build networks, be self-aware and to be more reflective because of the experiences they gained through volunteering. Around 85 per cent of young people felt that volunteering had increased their ability to be aware of their impact on others.

It was highlighted by many young people that volunteering helps provide them with a confident outlook on life, builds self-esteem and therefore can play a key role in supporting positive mental health.

Looking to the future almost all young people who volunteer through the Millennium Volunteers Programme believe they have developed transferable skills and experiences which will help them either within further study or employment.

Regardless of the path they choose to take, young people reflect that the programme has helped them develop skills and grow personally. They also recognise that their volunteering has a wider contribution and impact on society – through volunteering young people have a stronger sense of community identity and increased engagement with community activities.

The contribution young people make through volunteering is phenomenal – this is happening week in, week out through local groups, communities, schools and charities. It is evident, however, that young people often underplay the contribution they make through volunteering. Often when asked to describe the activities they undertake whilst volunteering many young people include 'I just' or 'I only' before describing their role.

Given the range of activities (and responsibilities) undertaken there is a danger that young people are failing to fully recognise (and articulate) the experience and skills they have gained. However, it may also be the case that some young people who participated in the focus groups felt reluctant to emphasise their role.

Although recognising this could be a factor, it is important that Volunteer Now considers how young people can be further supported to fully recognise (and articulate) the skills and abilities they have gained.

#4 Sustaining volunteering

It is reassuring that almost all young people intend to continue with volunteering in the future. For many young people becoming involved with the Millennium Volunteers Programme has been their first experience of volunteering and it is therefore hugely positive that most will continue to volunteer and indeed would recommend the programme to a friend.

Through the research many young people highlighted that achieving the 200 hour award was initially a key goal. However, many who had either completed the award (or were well on the way), reflected that this focus shifted over time as they gained experience of volunteering and built relationships with the organisation and people involved.

This would seem to suggest that the 200 hour award provides sufficient focus and support for the young person in terms of building confidence and an appreciation for the benefit

volunteering provides personally and to wider society. It appears to provide sufficient structure to allow the young person to build up an appreciation of the volunteering role and encourage them to continue with volunteering beyond the scope of the Millennium Volunteers Programme and into later life.

A key aspect emerging from the review is the accessibility of the Millennium Volunteers Programme. Young people felt the information was easy to use and access but also that the programme was open to everyone. It was clear from the engagement with young people that there are no perceptions of 'elitism' or that the awards are only aimed at certain young people. The Millennium Volunteers Programme is accepted as being available to everyone, open to everyone, and of benefit to everyone.

#5 Contribution to organisation

From undertaking the review, it is clear that the breadth of volunteering activities young people are involved with on a regular basis is vast. Young people volunteer with their local schools, sports clubs, youth clubs, community

groups, voluntary and charitable organisations.

It is clear organisations value and trust the role young volunteers undertake. For example, many volunteers deal with sensitive issues, provide support to people with specific care needs, are customer facing and often in positions of trust and responsibility.

The social value created through young people volunteering is significant and is important to recognise. Volunteering clearly benefits the personal and social development of young people, but it goes further to bring real benefit to a wide range of organisations, communities and individuals across Northern Ireland.

Employers, colleges and universities also acknowledge the positive impact volunteering has on young people. They highlight the contribution to personal development which goes beyond academic achievement which is equally important to potential employers. Indeed, many employers reflect that through volunteering young people develop the kinds of attributes and skills that they are looking for (and often struggle to find).



Sandra Overend MLA (Deputy Chair Education Committee), Cllr Linda Dillon (Chairman of Mid Ulster District Council) and Denise Hayward (Volunteer Now) recognise 200 Hour Awardees at Lissan House, Cookstown.

#6 Support for Volunteering

The framework and support provided through the Millennium Volunteers Programme is critical to encouraging young people to volunteer. Many delivery partners confirm that without the support, resources and recognition provided through the programme it is unlikely volunteering would remain such a focus for their organisation.

Delivery partners are also critical to ensuring successful delivery of the Millennium Volunteers Programme. Throughout the review it has been evident that partners value the support provided by Volunteer Now and the resources which help them in turn support young people volunteer.

There is a strong recognition for the role Volunteer Now undertakes in encouraging organisations support volunteering - it is clear that without this facilitative and supportive role delivery partners would find it a more difficult role to deliver. These organisations (and there are 557 of them across Northern Ireland) value young volunteers but for many it is not their sole focus - many could not maintain volunteering at current levels (if at all) if the Millennium Volunteers Programme ceased to exist.

The need to maintain an overarching framework to support these organisations provide volunteering activities is clearly evident. Having a strategic, joined up, and credible programme is a key factor in encouraging organisations to support young people volunteer.

3.0 Millennium Volunteers - 'Measuring the Impact on Young People'

'Insight Solutions' was commissioned by Volunteer Now Enterprises Ltd to undertake a review of the Millennium Volunteers Programme with a key focus on understanding the impact upon the young people involved. Additionally, the review has sought to understand the views and experiences of delivery partners who provide volunteering opportunities for young people.

The review of the Millennium Volunteers Programme provides an opportunity to assess the impact this programme has made to date, to understand the experiences of partners helping to deliver the scheme and importantly recognise the impact on young people taking part.

This report details how we undertook the review, our findings, implications for the Millennium Volunteers Programme and recommendations for future delivery.

In summary, the key aims the research team adopted to undertake this review, were:

- To identify the impact on young people involved in volunteering and the organisations seeking to support their volunteering activities;
- To engage directly with key stakeholders including staff, volunteers and delivery partner organisations;
- To apply a range of research methods (quantitative and qualitative) to understand the views and experiences of volunteers and delivery partners;
- Provide an independent assessment of the Millennium Volunteers Programme and identify key learnings to shape, inform and improve future delivery.



Clodagh entertaining MV 200 Hour Awardees at the Ballymena Ceremony

4.0 Volunteering – The Context

Volunteering is an essential part of life across Northern Ireland and it is a reality that many activities and events would simply not happen without volunteers. People of all ages and backgrounds volunteer and they do so for many reasons.

Volunteering is defined as *“the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one’s immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice.”*

It is recognised that volunteering is critical to a vibrant and inclusive society. Volunteers are important in delivering many things we take for granted such as youth activities, sports clubs, faith based activities, arts festivals, social care and many other services and activities that make a positive contribution in our society. The case for supporting volunteering is clear - it allows individuals to give back to the community and make a difference to their environment or the people around them.

In Northern Ireland the strategic direction for volunteering is set out through the *‘Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future’* strategy which is delivered through the Department for Communities. The strategy and action plan aims to align activities across government, the voluntary and community sector and other stakeholders to increase levels of volunteering.

A key focus for the strategy is to focus on supporting young people volunteer. The strategy recognises the contribution young people can play and the personal impact volunteering can have on future education and employment opportunities. The strategy has a specific objective to *‘enable children and young people to become involved in volunteering and help them develop skills and gain experience through their voluntary activity.’*

Volunteering is also recognised by the Department of Education, ‘Priorities for Youth’ Strategy, as playing a key role in supporting young people achieve their full potential. An important principle within the strategy is to value the contribution young volunteers make and the need for this to be acknowledged, supported and celebrated.

4.1 Millennium Volunteers Programme

The Millennium Volunteers Programme has been in existence for over 16 years and is available for those aged **11 to 25 years**. It is managed by Volunteer Now and is funded by the Education Authority, NI (previously Youth Council for Northern Ireland) with the support of the Department of Education.

The Millennium Volunteers Programme is built on 9 key principles that make the programme distinctive and they are:

- Sustained personal commitment
- Community benefit
- Voluntary Participation
- Inclusiveness
- Ownership by young people
- Variety
- Partnership
- Quality
- Recognition

Volunteer Now is an organisation which works to help promote, enhance and support volunteering across Northern Ireland. Volunteer Now encourages people to volunteer and provides recognition for the contribution young volunteers make through the Millennium Volunteers scheme.

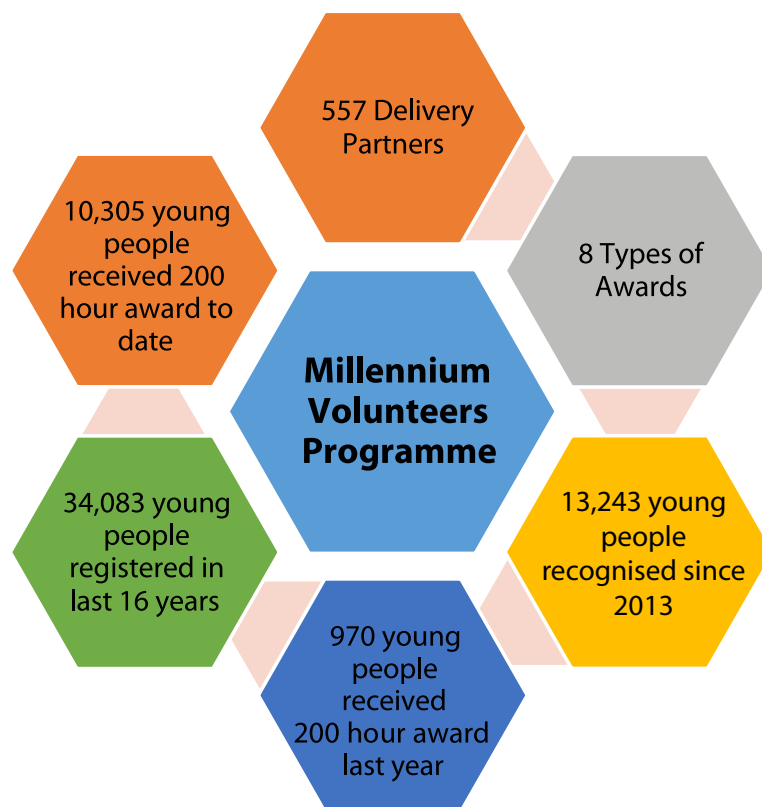


Figure 1.0 – Summary of Millennium Volunteers Programme

Millennium Volunteers is built on good practice in volunteer management enabling young people have a positive and rewarding volunteering experience which aims to sustain their enthusiasm, understanding and commitment throughout their lifetime. The programme is flexible to meet the needs of organisations so it is up to them how they record the details of young people who wish to be recognised.

All young people receive a record book, which gives them the opportunity to record their volunteering journey, ensuring that their organisation is aware of the entirety of their volunteering commitment and the hours they have given.

This scheme recognises the number of hours that an individual volunteer has dedicated to volunteering and provides them with a certificate which is recognised by employers and the educational/skills sector. There are a range of awards available:

MV Pioneer: The Pioneer Award recognises young volunteers aged between 11 and 13 years for the volunteering they undertake.

MV Challenge: If a young person takes part in a one off volunteering opportunity then this certificate recognises their involvement encourages them to become more involved.

MV 10: solely for young people (14-25 years) who face difficulties and personal challenges in becoming involved in regular activity. This Award gives young people the opportunity to gain recognition for their limited involvement and has a special record sheet.

MV Schools: This Award gives the school the opportunity to recognise the commitment that young people give within the school structure.

MV50: This Award recognises the young person's commitment for their first 50 hours of volunteering. They must be aged between 14 and 25 years. The young person receives a bronze pin with this Award.

MV100: The young person starts at 51 and gains recognition when they reach 100 hours of commitment. The young person receives a silver pin with this Award.

MV Ultimate: Organisations can nominate young people for this Award who have already gained a 200 Hour Award. It is for a demonstration of outstanding commitment and achievement.

MV200: This is the Award of Excellence and recognises young people for 200 hours of commitment. This is the highest accolade they can receive for their hourly commitment.



5.0 Research Methodology

Insight Solutions approach was based on engaging with young people who volunteer and a range of stakeholders who could offer their experience, insight and perspective of the Millennium Volunteers Programme.

Young People from across Northern Ireland were a key target group to involve within the review. In securing the involvement of young people we sought to ensure a broad geographic spread, a wide range of volunteering activities and a variety of organisations that young people volunteer with. In addition, many of the young people were at different stages of their volunteering journey with some only new to the programme whilst others had completed 200 hours.

A critical stakeholder within the Millennium Volunteers Programme is that of the 'delivery partner'. These are organisations, sports clubs

and schools who help organise, facilitate and support young people take part in volunteering activities. The delivery partners link with Volunteer Now to ensure the contribution from the young volunteers is recognised and to ensure volunteers have a rewarding and positive experience based on best practice. Therefore, they can provide a unique insight into the delivery and impact of the Millennium Volunteers Programme.

Approaches were based on gathering sufficient quantitative and qualitative analysis to determine the impact of the programme and identify recommendations for future practice. Several methods were applied to attain the best possible response from volunteers and stakeholders, including questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. Table 1 provides a summary of methods used during the review process.

Table 1 - Data Collection Methods

Young Volunteers	
Method	Engagement
Survey / Questionnaire	289 responses
Focus Groups	4 focus groups (38 participants in total)
Delivery Partners	
Survey / Questionnaire	64 responses
1-2-1 Interviews	8 interviews

6.0 Results and Findings

Given the wide scope of the review, results are provided across a range of key themes as detailed below:

- The impact of volunteering on young people;
- Why and how young people volunteer;
- Delivery partners' role in supporting young people volunteer;
- Managing the Millennium Volunteers Programme.

As the main focus is to examine the impact on young volunteers these are presented first.

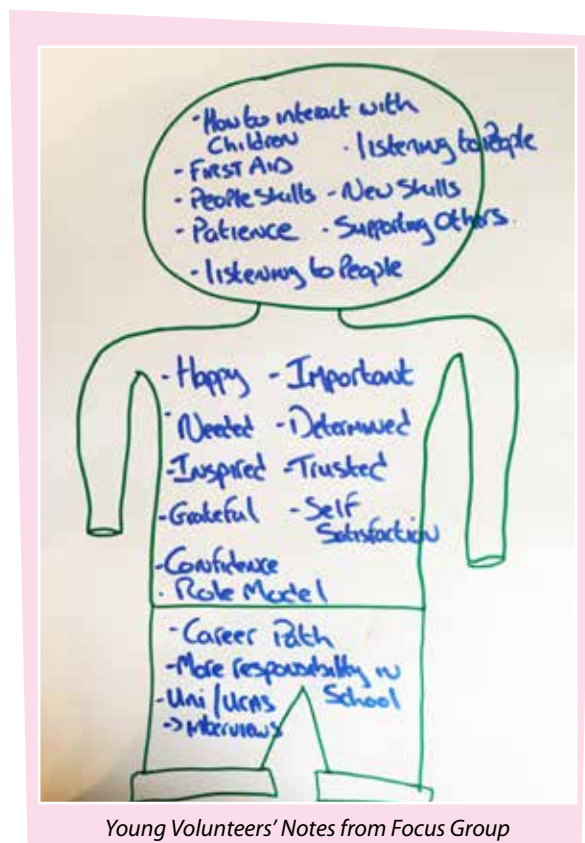
6.1 The Impact of Volunteering on Young People

The Millennium Volunteers Programme attracts a high level of positive feedback from the young people involved. It is apparent from the views provided by young people that they gain a lot as a result of their volunteering activities, in terms of, personal development, growth and experience. There also appears to be structured and meaningful volunteering opportunities created by organisations which is a key strength. It is a positive reflection of the programme that almost all young people who completed a survey confirm that they still volunteer and will continue to volunteer in the future.

For many young people the Millennium Volunteers Programme will be their first experience of volunteering and it plays a critical role in shaping their future support for and involvement with volunteering. It is therefore encouraging that almost all (99%) young people who volunteered would recommend the Millennium Volunteers Programme to a friend.

6.1.1 Personal Impact of Volunteering

In the focus groups young people were asked to think about the impacts of volunteering through the view of a human body. This required them to consider impacts in terms of:



Young Volunteers' Notes from Focus Group

HEAD - The skills and abilities they have developed through volunteering;

HEART - The development of softer skills, emotional intelligence and ability to relate to others.

LEGS - Their future journey - where volunteering can help take them (e.g. in terms of university or a job).

OUTSIDE WORLD - The impact their volunteering has on the local community and environment.

6.1.2. Impact on Skills and Abilities (Head)

It is clear volunteering supports young people develop skills and abilities which will prove beneficial in their future education or career path.

young people felt that their IT skills increased as a result of volunteering. This probably reflects that many young people are already skilled in terms of IT and indeed delivery partners often reflected that the organisation benefited from the support young people could provide in terms of website development and social media.

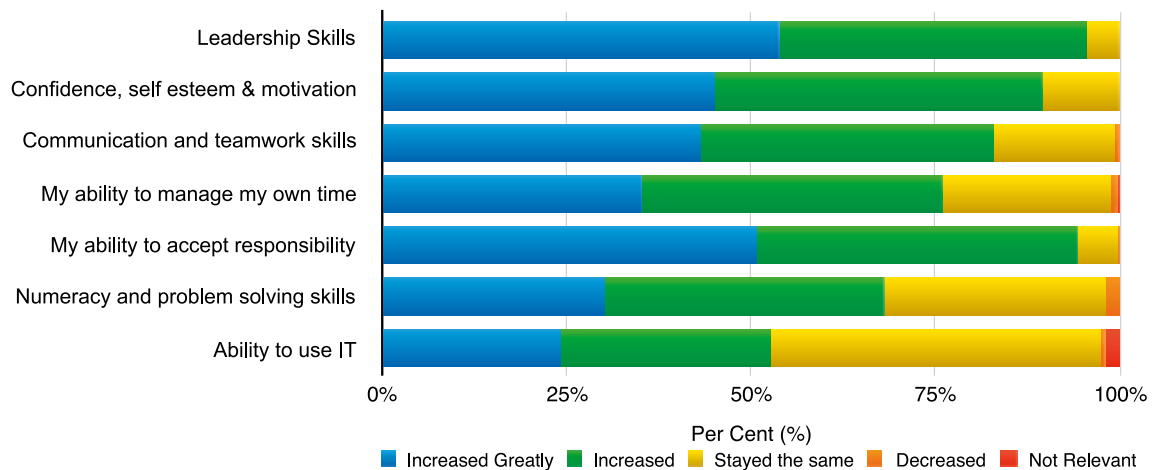


Figure 2 - Skills and Abilities developed through volunteering

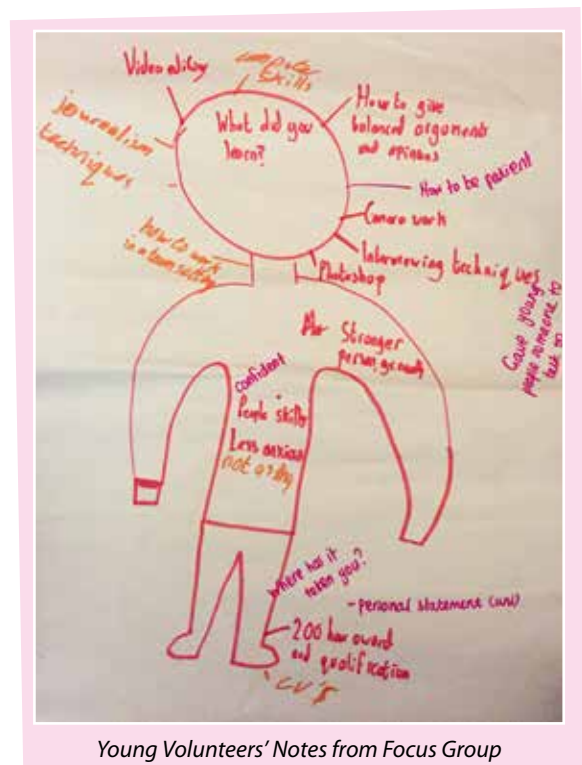
As Figure 2 confirms 'leadership' is a skill which has increased or increased greatly for over 95 per cent of young people. It is interesting (and welcome) that over three quarters of young people believe that their skills in terms of confidence, self-esteem, communication, time management and ability to accept responsibility have increased as a result of their volunteering activities.

In the focus groups many young people highlighted instances where they put themselves forward to take the initiative and lead on activities. Many felt prior to volunteering they would have been reluctant to do this but now feel confident in their skills and abilities.

'To be given the responsibility of taking something from start to finish was a welcome experience for me - we had full control and therefore ownership of the project.' (Young Person)

It is interesting, although probably not surprising, that only around 50 per cent of

In addition to specific skills such as leadership, communication and teamwork many young people highlighted other skills they developed through volunteering.



Young Volunteers' Notes from Focus Group

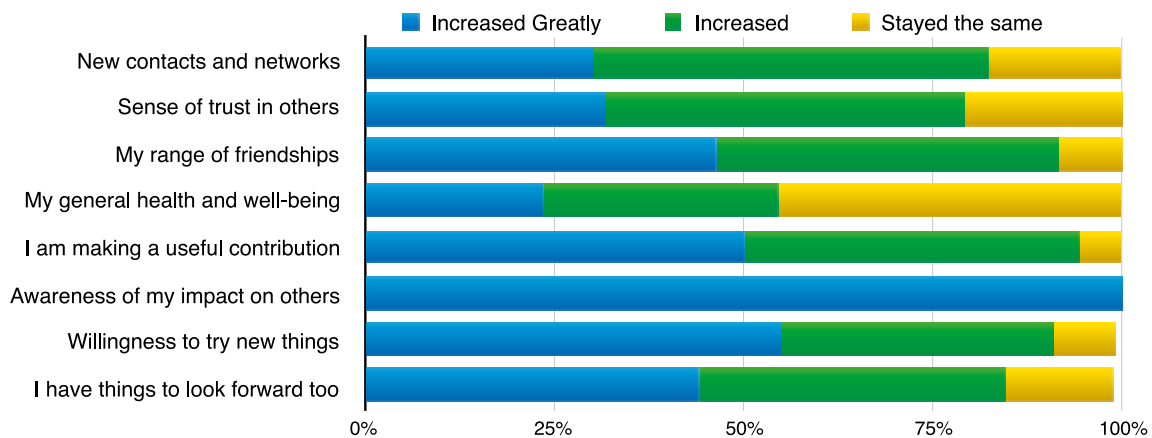


Figure 3 - Personal Development through Volunteering

'Working with young people with disabilities has taught me how to be more explicit in my communication and better understand their needs.' (Young Person)

These included skills in relation to coaching, supporting people with health care needs or, as detailed in the focus group picture in the previous page, experience in video editing, journalism, photoshop and interview techniques. Although these are quite specific skills the young volunteers benefited greatly from this experience and confirmed social media / journalism is a career path they now intend to follow.

In the survey results young people reported that many of their skills increased because of their volunteering activities. This was reflected in the focus group but there is a sense that the young people often underplay the skills and experience that they develop. It may be a case of young volunteers not wanting to fully sell themselves in front of their peers but it did appear that the extent of their personal development, growth, confidence and skills are not fully acknowledged or appreciated.

Case Study

One focus group participant stated *'that they just help out in a charity shop'..but when this was explored the young person helped out 'front of shop', dealt with customers, enquiries, and took payments. They helped cash-up, record takings and manage/ sort stock in the shop. The volunteer also supported with displays, advertising and promotions whilst also helping to train/ support other volunteers. In this example the young volunteer developed a range of skills in terms of customer service, financial management, stock control, marketing, management and training which are underplayed by saying 'I just help out in a shop'*

6.1.3 Impact on Personal Development and Soft Skills (Heart)

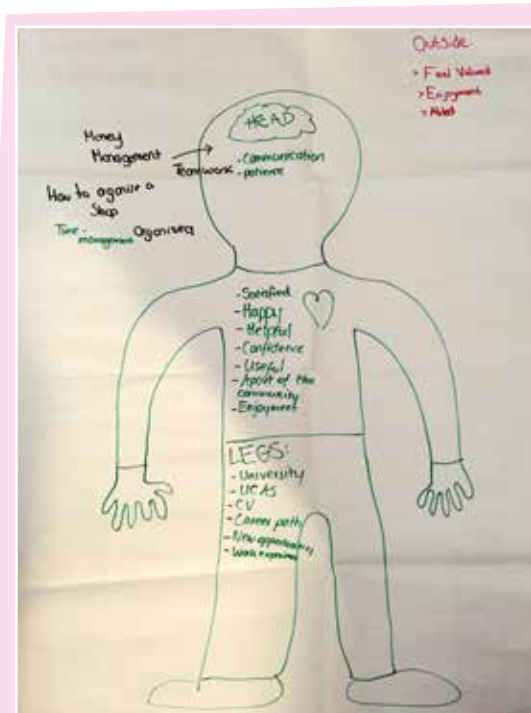
Young volunteers report that their ability to engage, build contacts, to be self-aware and to be reflective has increased through volunteering - these skills appear to develop quite quickly as young people who are relatively new to volunteering had also reported an increase in these personal development skills. Figure 3 demonstrates the overwhelmingly positive impact volunteering has on the personal development of young people.

'I volunteer with a rugby initiative with young people with learning difficulties - to see young people leave with a big smile on their face and hear the positive feedback from parents gives me great personal satisfaction.' (Young Person)

Young Volunteers' Notes from Focus Group

Volunteering is shown to have a significant impact on how young people engage and relate to others. Forming relationships, friendships, networks and trust with others is a key life skill and it is encouraging over 75 per cent of young people believe volunteering has increased their ability to form these connections.

Volunteering has supported young people build relationships and trust with other young people from different backgrounds or communities. Many delivery partners reflected a key focus is on breaking down barriers and encouraging these relationships to develop. Often these programmes are organised through schools, youth clubs or sports clubs and have a positive impact on breaking down barriers which exist between different communities.



Young Volunteers' Notes from Focus Group

The Millennium Volunteers Programme supports young people recognise and reflect on the contribution they make through volunteering. The research with young people confirms this - over 90 per cent of young people recognise the impact they have on other people and the positive contribution they make through volunteering.

Many young people reflect that volunteering helps provide them with a positive outlook on life, builds self-esteem and is something they really look forward to each week. It appears volunteering can play a significant role in reinforcing positive mental health and wellbeing. Although recognising this is self-reported (and requires further investigation) it is interesting that over 50 per cent of young people felt volunteering had increased or increased greatly their health and wellbeing.

Young Volunteers Story #1

'Colin' started volunteering around 8 hours per week with a local community association but subsequently got involved with many other activities such as the local Housing Executive forum and other local charities.

'Colin gives so much to his local community and is passionate about helping all residents achieve and get better facilities and housing in the area, always promoting the area and bringing back other opportunities for the youth and residents.' (SELB Youth Service)

Volunteering has helped Colin take on new opportunities and he became Youth leader with his local group helping run and supervise activities. Local groups and residents reflected that through volunteering Colin is now well known in the area and people recognise him as part of a team (and as a role model) helping others in the community.

Importantly young people enjoy volunteering - every focus group provided stories were young people had made friendships, had



[Young people from across Derry City who attended the focus group along with Gavin Connolly of Volunteer Now and Insight Solutions facilitators]

opportunities to try new things and had fun. At the outset many young people focused on achievement of the (various) awards or support towards a university or job application. However, perhaps reinforced by feelings of satisfaction and happiness as reflected in Figure 3, 85 per cent of young people believe volunteering provides them with something to look forward too.

6.1.4 Support for the Future (Legs)

A key focus for the review is to identify the transferable skills and expertise young people develop through their volunteering activities which will support them in their future studies or career path.

Over 90 per cent of delivery partners believe that young people benefit from being involved in the Millennium Volunteers Programme as it is widely recognised by colleges, universities and employers.

Amongst young people there was a general consensus that gaining work experience, achieving a recognised award, enhancing an application to college/university or a supporting a job application were the key

drivers for initially getting involved with volunteering activities.

'I have been able to link my MV programme to degree+ at Queens so it has worked well.' (Young Person)

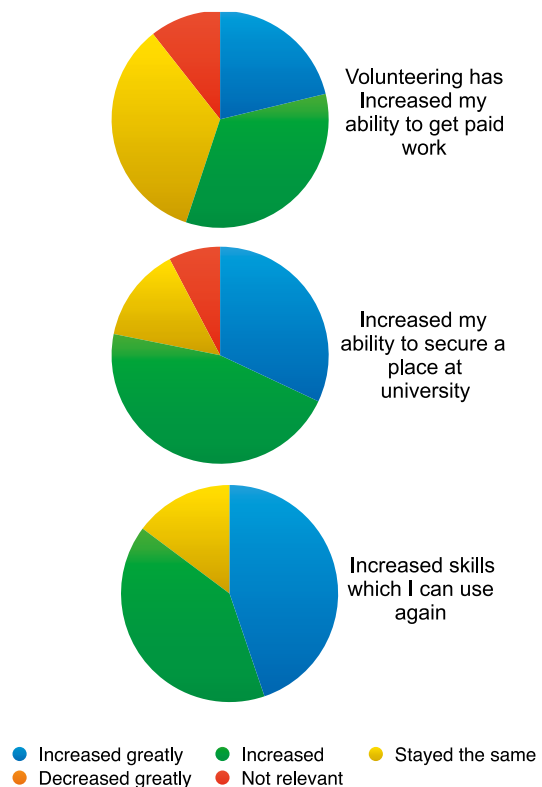


Figure 4 - Impact of Volunteering on future prospects.

On reflection, as demonstrated in Figure 4, it appears young people believe that volunteering has helped them across all these key areas in terms of their ability to secure a job, a university place and learn key transferrable skills which will help them no matter which path they take.

6.1.5 Wider Contribution and Impact (Outside World)

A key aspect of volunteering is to recognise the contribution which goes beyond the individual volunteer and organisation to the wider community and society. It is clear from the focus groups that young people provide support to a wide range of people, often with specific needs or requirements. Many people also volunteer within their local community and this helps build social cohesion, connections and a sense of identity.

'Through the Youth Council I volunteer with, we organised a big event focused on the issue of drugs and alcohol with young people. Hopefully we made some impact. Even if it was only on a few young people it was definitely worthwhile.' (Young Person)

As Figure 5 presents over 80 per cent of young people felt that volunteering had helped increase their sense of community identity and their participation in community activities.

6.2 Why Young People Volunteer

It is reassuring that most (almost 90 per cent) of young people report the reason for volunteering was *'to make a difference to others.'* As Figure 6 demonstrates this was the most common reason for young people volunteering but two thirds also stated that they wanted *'to give something back.'*

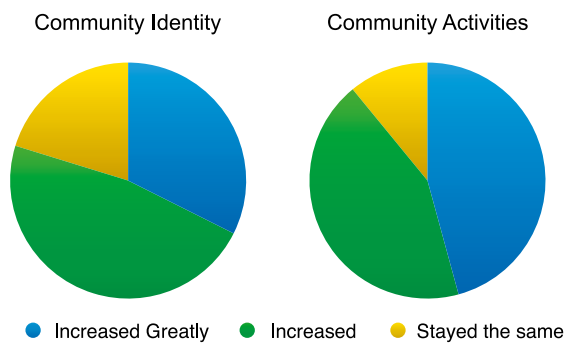


Figure 5 - Community benefit from Young People Volunteering

Young people highlighted that they felt volunteering provided a clear *'double benefit.'* In addition to helping others or giving something back, volunteering helped their personal development. For many young people there was a strong focus on gaining *'experience and skills'* to support university place applications and to help with applying for future job opportunities.

Young people were acutely aware of the emphasis that universities and employers

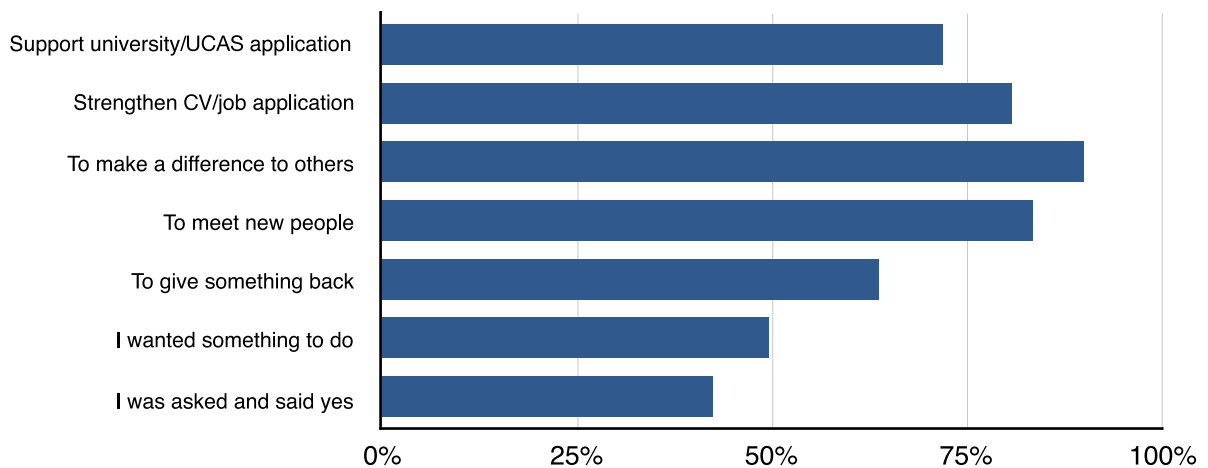


Figure 6 - Reasons why Young People Volunteer

placed on being a 'more rounded young person' with more than just 'academic excellence.'

'My grades were dismal but it was my volunteering experience that got me an offer from a top university.' (Young Person)

At the focus groups many young people explained that volunteering provided not only an opportunity to build experiences and skills but also determine if they wished to pursue a particular career path. Examples from the young people included volunteering in a local health care setting for those thinking about a career in health and social care, whilst others gained experience within a media/digital environment and decided this was a career path they wished to follow.

Young Volunteers Story #2

'James' is a full time student and gives almost all of his own free time to helping and supporting his own community and various charities and youth groups. James would volunteer on average 10-15 hours a week, sometimes many more hours.

James got started in volunteering because he realised that there was a lot of great opportunities for his local area but residents did not know about them so he joined the committee of the local community association.

James has a new found confidence in himself and over this past year has learned so many new skills and is continuing to learn and develop himself.

James also enjoys volunteering because it gives him experiences which allow him to build his confidence, gain more knowledge, meet new people and of course enjoy himself.

Many young people reflected that at the outset much of their focus was gaining a certificate to support university applications. However, this has shifted over time as they gain experience volunteering and build relationships with the organisation and people involved. Indeed, most young people confirm they will continue to volunteer after they receive their 200 hour award.

'I went at the start because I'm doing Health and Social Care and was told it would help with my UCAS - but now I really enjoy working with the group and look forward to it each week.' (Young Person)

Figure 6 demonstrates that young people who take part in volunteering activities are clear about the personal benefit and positive impact volunteering has on their development. However, they recognise the wider contribution their volunteering makes to local groups, organisations and the wider community. This was often referred to as a 'win-win' situation where the young person benefits but also makes a real difference to the organisation they volunteer with.

'I volunteer with a dog shelter, walking dogs every Friday. It is just something I love doing and it never feels like a chore. If I didn't do it I just know that many dogs wouldn't get out for a walk and I couldn't have that.' (Young Person)

Volunteering supports strong social contacts and networks. All the young people recognised meeting new people and having something (positive) to do were key factors in helping them decide volunteering was an activity they wished to get involved with. Young people referred to volunteering as 'broadening their horizons and giving them 'new experiences' that they otherwise would not have had. Many young people also referred to the extended network of young people they engaged with through volunteering, often young people from different schools, communities and backgrounds.

'If it wasn't for me volunteering I would never have had the broad circle of friends I now have.' (Young Person)

6.2.1 How Young People Get Involved with Volunteering

The view of young volunteers reinforces the important role local networks and existing relationships play in promoting volunteering.

As Figure 7 highlights most young people are personally asked to consider volunteering and this is often through local groups and organisations. The positive influence of friends in encouraging young people to volunteer also comes through strongly. Many of the young people stated that they went along with a friend the first time they volunteered which helped provide reassurance and build confidence.

'My dad was involved in setting up and running the youth club so it just seems fair that I can help out there as a volunteer.' (Young Person)

It also appears that a history of volunteering within families is also a significant factor in the extent to which some young people volunteered. Where parents in particular were active volunteers it followed that young people were more likely to be motivated (and encouraged) to volunteer.

Young people reflect that they may still have volunteered but the Millennium Volunteers Programme provides a good format and

strong recognition. For one young person they reflected the impact of the Millennium Volunteers Programme on their level of volunteering when they stated *'I don't think I wouldn't do it (volunteer), I just probably wouldn't do it as much if the award wasn't available.'*

Some schools continue to play a key role in encouraging young people volunteer both within school activities and facilitating engagement with external organisations and groups. An emphasis is often placed on the benefit that volunteering can provide in terms of university applications but also on 'wider' personal development and character building. The culture of a school appears an important factor in determining the level of focus placed on encouraging volunteering activities with some being more proactive than others.

'My mum has always been involved in the local community, helping out with various groups. I was always there with her at meetings and events so I suppose I got a feel for what was going on.' (Young Person)

6.2.2 Types of Volunteering Activities

It is clear young people are involved in a wide range of volunteering activities on a regular basis. During the focus groups they highlighted involvement with youth groups, summer schemes, sports clubs, groups supporting (young and old) people with disabilities, churches, charitable organisations, support groups, schools and health care facilities. It is impressive the ongoing commitment young

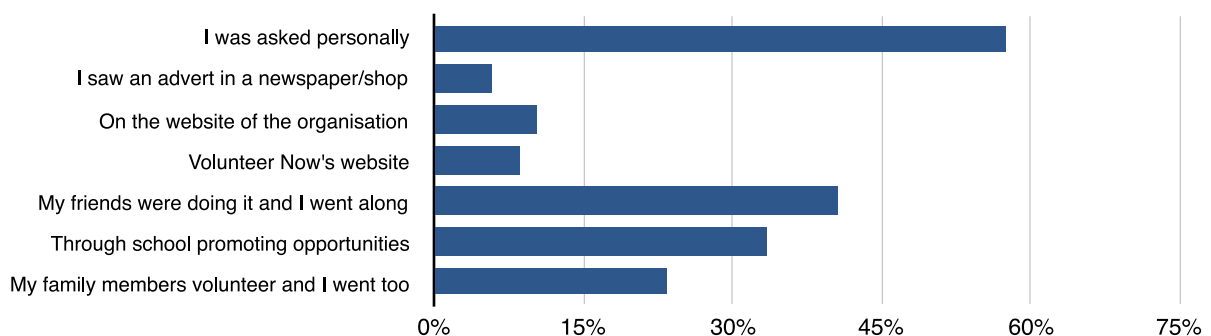


Figure 7 – How Young People Get Involved in Volunteering

7.0 Delivery Partners' Role in Supporting Young People Volunteer

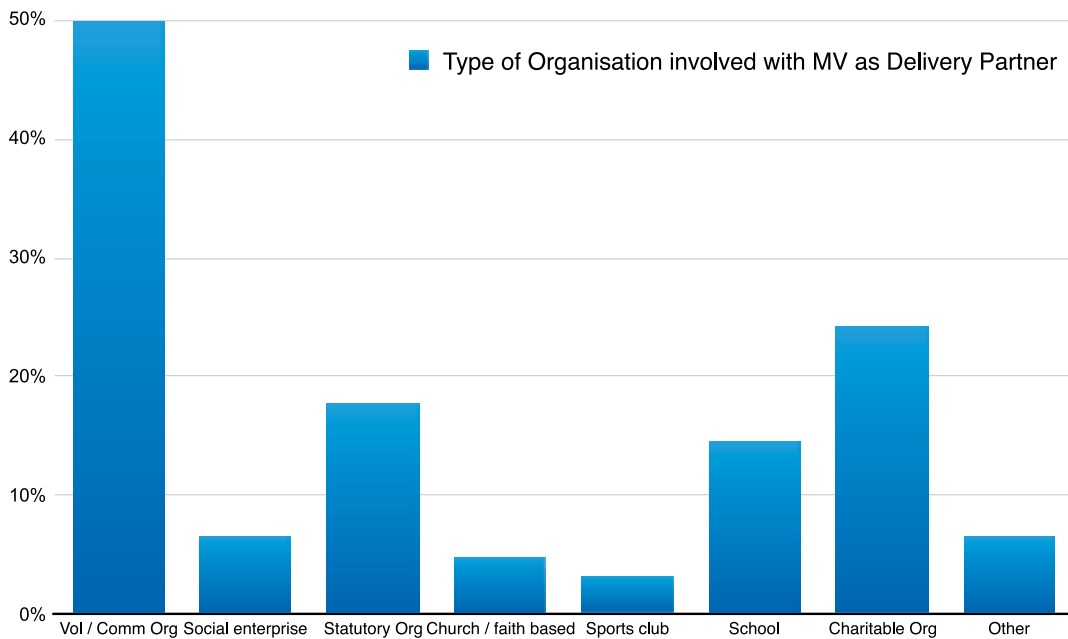


Figure 9 - Types of Organisations involved with Millennium Volunteers

One of the key strengths of the Millennium Volunteers Programme over the last 16 years has been the diversity of organisations involved and range of volunteering activities supported. As can be seen from Figure 9 the majority of young people volunteer with a community group or voluntary organisation but there is still significant engagement across schools, churches, statutory organisations and social enterprises. 'Other' organisations that young

people volunteer with included a sports governing body, environmental groups and colleges.

There is no clear pattern across delivery partners in relation to the proportion of volunteers who are young people. A sizeable number of organisations (almost 30 per cent) report that all their volunteers are made up of young people, with between 10 - 20 per cent stating

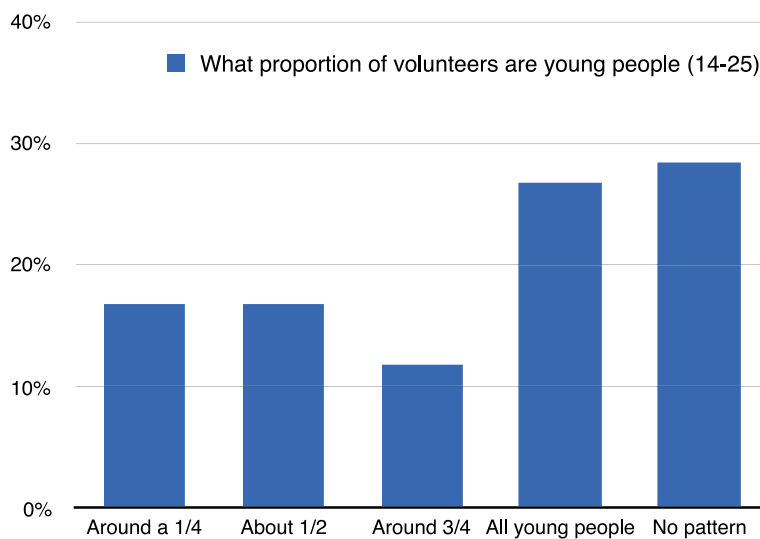


Figure 10 - Proportion of Young People who are Volunteers

young people make up either a quarter, half or three-quarters of their overall volunteering support.

Delivery partners adopt a range of approaches to engage and encourage young people in relation to volunteering. In many instances partners use multiple methods to engage for example through local ads, social media and Volunteer Now's website. However, as delivery partners are often based in (or linked to) local

community organisations or clubs they make use of existing networks or relationships that have been established with young people.

It is clear delivery partners value the contribution and benefit that volunteering brings to their organisation. In relation to the Millennium Volunteers Programme partners highlight that the framework the programme provides and the attractiveness to young people in terms of recognition and reward are key strengths. It is a reality, especially with increasing pressure on time and resources, many organisations would not be able to support volunteering activities without the support provided through the Millennium Volunteers Programme.

Many partners highlighted the pressure their staff (and core volunteers) are under and it would be difficult to provide adequate time and focus to support young volunteers. It is felt the Millennium Volunteers Programme does much of the 'heavy lifting' by providing a structure, a recording framework and supporting recognition through the awards.

'It is great to have Volunteer Now to help other organisations who don't have the resources to do it themselves with the recognition of young volunteers.'
(Delivery Partner)

Delivery Partner

'For young people it (the booklet) provides a framework/target to work towards and is a marker of progress. The information and booklets are targeted in the right way and not off-putting. However, a lot of young men don't like paperwork - reminds them of school.'

It is encouraging, as shown in Figure 11, that almost 60 per cent of delivery partners agree

that the Millennium Volunteers Programme helped attract more young people to volunteer with their organisation. This reflects the fact that for many young people achieving the various awards is a key ambition and an organisation that facilitates them to achieve this will be an attractive opportunity.

It is reassuring that a large number of partners (almost 75 per cent) believe that young people will continue to contribute to a volunteering role - this certainly mirrors the view of young people themselves. This points to the legacy of the Millennium Volunteers Programme in encouraging young people to continue on with volunteering.

'Good to show the hours that volunteers are contributing to our work.'
(Delivery Partner)

It is also the case that organisations want to see young people rewarded and recognised for the volunteering activities. The fact that Millennium Volunteers is *well recognised*, is *credible* and has '*currency*' are highlighted as key reasons for being involved and supporting people through the various awards.

'We want to see them rewarded for their hours of volunteering.' **(Delivery Partner)**

'When young people are Millennium Volunteers they appear to value the recognition.' **(Delivery Partner)**

Across this review it is evident that there is a shared sense of value and importance placed on supporting young people progress through the various award levels. Delivery partners are keen to ensure that young people are recognised for the time they volunteer - the Millennium Volunteers Programme provides

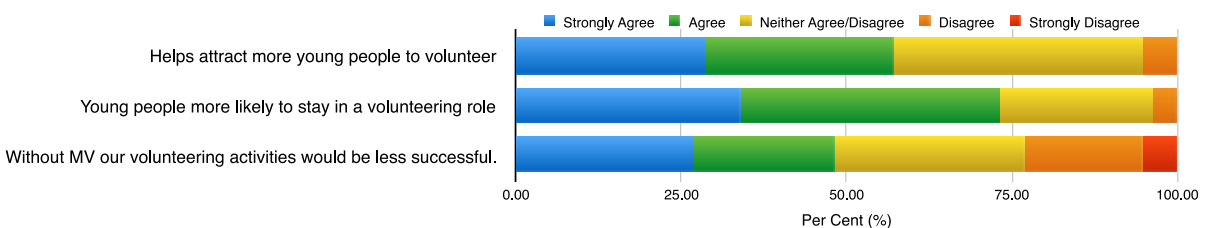


Figure 11 - The Impact of the Millennium Volunteer Programme for Delivery Partners

a framework to allow this to happen in a structured way. In addition, partners benefit from the resources and support they receive which allows them to encourage local volunteering activities. It is evident that in the absence of the Millennium Volunteers Programme a level of volunteering would still continue to exist but this would not be as well coordinated, supported or recognised.

'The young people who register are very committed to their volunteering, Millennium Volunteer is a bonus for them.'
(Delivery Partner)

7.1 Experience of Delivery Partners

It is reassuring to note that all delivery partners (100%) would encourage other organisations to involve young volunteers within their activities. This reflects the overwhelmingly positive experience which has been shared across all sectors - many partners reflect on the 'energy of young volunteers', 'their spirit and commitment' but are also rightly proud in helping build the confidence and capacity of these young people.

Again it is positive to note that almost all (96%) of delivery partners will continue to support young people with volunteering opportunities. Many partners highlight an increased interest in volunteering especially amongst young people and wish to provide suitable opportunities.

Throughout this review it is evident that the Millennium Volunteers Programme is critical in facilitating local organisations provide volunteering activities and to support young people in their volunteering activities. Partners highlighted that without the focus of Volunteer Now in terms of the support, guidance and recognition it is unlikely that they would be able to support volunteering activities to the same level if at all. A clear endorsement for the Millennium Volunteers Programme is that almost all (98%) of delivery partners would recommend the scheme to other organisations.

'Millennium Volunteers Programme has real currency...simple and provides a structure and framework.' **(Delivery Partner)**

8.0 Recognising the Contribution of Young Volunteers.

Organisations which support young people to volunteer recognise the valuable contribution they make to supporting the organisation deliver its activities. It is a testament to the young volunteers that they make such a difference to the lives of so many people and are often essential to ensuring local groups and organisations continue to deliver.

As can be seen from the case studies below young people enrich the organisations they volunteer with, provide energy, commitment and a focus on helping others.

The Education Authority is a delivery partner with the Millennium Volunteers Programme and plays a key role in supporting young people volunteer right across Northern Ireland. The Education Authority confirms that young volunteers play an important role in their groups - from a youth participation point of view they are seen as excellent role models, they are visible and give other young people something to aspire towards.

The Education Authority also reflects on the legacy and ongoing contribution made through volunteering. Young volunteers will often continue to be involved with local organisations and progress through different roles – *'today's young volunteers are tomorrows experienced leaders.'* In terms of key benefits to the organisation from volunteering the Education Authority believes that young volunteers bring *'new skills, enthusiasm, energy, fresh perspectives and a wide range of life experiences.'*

Belfast High School is a delivery partner with the Millennium Volunteers Programme. They have a large group of students who are keen to expand their skills and talents and volunteering enables their pupils to try something new and make meaningful connections. The school also highlights that volunteering helps build partnerships with the local community and pupils have been able to gain many positive experiences.

The school understands that volunteering helps students complete UCAS application but highlight the personal development, skills and growth that young people develop through volunteering. An example of this was provided in terms of the school supporting their pupils volunteer with Jordanstown Special School (as part of 'Angel Eyes' – a group working with blind and visually impaired children). The special school along with parents of the blind and visually impaired children were delighted with the support and enthusiasm of the pupils who volunteered and really valued their contribution.

Case Study – Ulster Hockey

Each year Ulster Hockey actively recruits 60 young volunteers to support the delivery of the NI Primary School Regional Qualifiers and Finals. 18 regional qualifying tournaments are held across Ulster in March with the winners at these tournaments earning a place at the overall finals in April. Approximately 200 school teams take part throughout.

Volunteers are recruited to assist with umpiring, setting up of pitches and general administration of the tournaments. Volunteers have proved to be invaluable at these days and the overall programme would not be possible without them working together as a team.

Often it will be the first time a school team has attended a competitive tournament. Many of the volunteers will take the time to explain the rules to the children throughout the game as the children play. They show true empathy to help children improve their hockey and also create a positive experience that can only help to make children want to play hockey again. They are true ambassadors for Ulster Hockey and help to spread the message of hockey much wider than we could do alone as staff.

Young Volunteers significantly contribute to sports activities at a local level and many sporting bodies act as delivery partners for the Millennium Volunteers Programme. For example, Ulster Hockey are a small organisation (8 staff members) and rely heavily on young volunteers to support programme delivery across Ulster. All hockey clubs in the province also depend on volunteers in order to ensure hockey is available at local community level on a weekly basis. Without volunteers Ulster Hockey confirm that it would not be able to function on the scale that it currently does. However, Ulster Hockey states that young volunteers provide much more benefit than simply supporting local clubs to run their activities. They believe young volunteers bring *'passion and dedication for the sport; vibrancy and enthusiasm; creativity, are technologically aware, willing to learn and adaptable.'* (Ulster Hockey)

The impact of volunteering goes far beyond the immediate benefit to local groups and organisations. As highlighted in this report young people identify the personal impact volunteering has on developing their skills, experience and confidence. It is positive they reflect on this development and growth but it is equally important that education establishments, such as universities and colleges, as well as employers value the impact of volunteering.

Further Education

Across local colleges and universities there is a strong ethos of support for volunteering and recognition for the positive impact it has on students. They highlight the contribution this makes to personal development which goes beyond academic achievement which is equally important to potential employers. Colleges and universities appreciate that volunteering helps young people develop employability skills, make new friends, learn new skills and build their experiences.

'At Queens University we believe strongly in supporting our students to participate in volunteering activities. Volunteering has a real

impact...those that are involved enhance their student experience and are part of something special.' (Queens University, Belfast)

'We actively promote and support volunteering among students as a way to gain vital skills, gain exposure to a workplace culture, make valuable connections and put their learning into practice outside of the classroom.' (Stranmillis College, Belfast)

Skills gained from involvement and experience in the broader learning environment often prove vital in enabling students to complete the transition into higher education. Millennium Volunteers incorporates many of these important elements and helps students put their learning, through volunteering, to best use in the real world.' (Ulster University)

Young people recognise that universities and colleges will often seek experience and skills beyond solely academic achievement. It is accepted that volunteering provides an important pathway to develop skills and demonstrate a positive, well-rounded character.

At a policy level, through 'Priorities for Youth' the Department of Education recognises the positive impact volunteering has on supporting young people reach their full potential. The strategy acknowledges that young people will have opportunities to gain additional skills, accreditation and training whilst also benefiting from experiences which complement what they learn in school. However, the strategy also highlights the wider personal growth and development which young people benefit from in term of gaining confidence and self-esteem whilst also participating *'positively and effectively in society.'*

Employers

Many employers reflect that through volunteering young people develop the kinds of attributes and skills that they are looking for. Indeed a recent CIPD¹ survey reported that 67%

1 Unlock new talent: How can you integrate social action in recruitment? CIPD, July 2015

of employers felt that entry-level candidates who had voluntary experience demonstrated greater employability skills.

'At Coca-Cola we believe in the power of volunteering in giving people from all walks of life the opportunity to learn new skills, meet new people, gain new experience and grow their self-confidence.' (Coca-Cola)

Businesses highlight that volunteering provides young people with an opportunity to gain useful experience which will stand them in good stead when applying for work. With the difficulties that many young people face in terms of securing good-quality work experience, it is clear that volunteering has a key role to play. In addition, many employers believe that as volunteering is often undertaken over a longer time period it can be more beneficial in terms of developing employability skills than a short stint of traditional work experience

'Millennium Volunteers provides the stepping stones for personal development and diversity which will improve the prospects of young

people. The knowledge and skills acquired will be a great benefit to the future and subsequently a benefit to their future employers' (Associated Pipeline Products APP)

It is clear many employers recognise that through volunteering young people will not only help their local communities but at the same time develop the skills and experience which will help them when they enter the workplace and ensure they make a valuable contribution.

'Business in the Community recognises the value that volunteering brings through the development of experience, personal skills and knowledge of the workplace.' (Business In the Community)

It is essential employers value and seek to uncover the experience young people have of volunteering during recruitment. By failing to uncover this experience employers could be missing out on individuals who actually have the type of skills and experiences they are seeking.

9.0 Management and Delivery of the Millennium Volunteers Programme

For delivery partners the Millennium Volunteers Programme provides a framework to register, support, certify and reward volunteering activities. 'Volunteer Now' leads the programme ensuring it is effectively coordinated, delivery partners are supported, voluntary effort is recognised and the contribution of young people is fully acknowledged.

Delivery Partner was easy and straightforward. Many also commented that they had met with Volunteer Now or received a presentation which helped explain the process and what to expect.

'We've found the services offered by the MV programme to be outstanding in every way.'
(Delivery Partner)

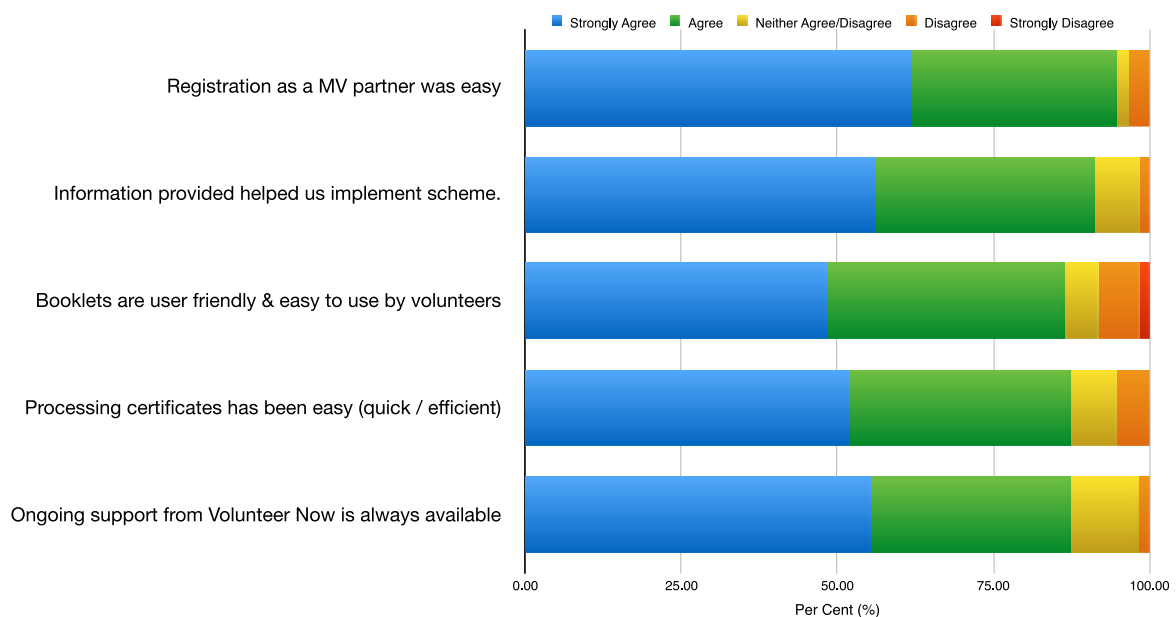


Figure 12 - Delivery Partner experiences of working with the Millennium Volunteers Programme

9.1 Registration as a Delivery Partner

New organisations must register with the Millennium Volunteers programme through a simple registration of interest process. Once received a team member meets with the organisation and talks them through the programme including the different strands (Schools, Pure and GoldMark) to ensure that they are meeting the standards of good practice and their roles are suitable.

Overall partners reflect a positive experience of engaging with Volunteer Now and the Millennium Volunteers Programme. As Figure 12 shows almost 95 per cent felt registering as a

9.2 Promotion and Awareness

It is recognised that there is significant effort placed on raising awareness of the programme, encouraging uptake and securing endorsements from employers and universities. Many partners reflected on the positive impact of this and highlighted the continuing need to ensure the programme is promoted in the press, media and to employers.

Given the Millennium Programme has been running for 16 years it was highlighted that with so many organisations and young people involved there should be a rich source of case studies, examples of success and human

impact stories which could help inspire more young people to volunteer and organisations to get involved.

Case Study - Delivery Partner

'The youth clubs experience of the programme is that it's good for young people - there is a simple application process and support from Volunteer Now is 100%. The 'Youth Club' also ensures the volunteering activities and programmes link into other activities that the young people participate in - for example they link with the Education Authority to provide more activities.'

'The process is well structured and encourages progress from the young people e.g. 200 hours may be too big of a leap for young people but providing recognition for 50 / 100 hours helps guide them on that path.'

9.3 Resources and Information

Most partners and volunteers currently use the paper based booklets and generally find them easy to use and complete. Many partners have become familiar with using the paper based booklets and therefore feel comfortable supporting young people record their volunteering activities. Young people specifically felt that recording volunteering activities (through the booklets) worked well and getting them signed-off was relatively straightforward.

Delivery partners stated that generally young people have no problem working with the information provided, the booklets are clear and easy to use. A range of partners felt the approach supported young people to be *'self-reflective which is not an easy skill to undertake.'*

As with many other services there is an increasing demand for elements of the Millennium Volunteers Programme to be provided online. This is not only from young people who wish to record activities but also from delivery partners who would prefer to register online, submit booklets and download resources.

9.4 Recognition and Awards

It is clear that partners value how the Millennium Volunteers Programme recognises and certifies various levels of volunteering. For many young people it is the key reason for getting involved in volunteering activities and delivery partners are happy to support them in these efforts. Almost 9 in 10 delivery partners reported that processing certificates is usually quick and efficient.

Some partners reflected that delays that can be experienced in processing the 200 hour awards - they are sympathetic to fact that these are signed by the Education Minister but do reflect this delay can cause some anxiety for the young volunteers who are often keen to get their hands on the certificate.

'Getting the Bronze and Silver certificates has been very efficient. There has more difficulty with Gold certificates.' **(Delivery Partner)**

Partners commented that recognising the contribution of young volunteers is essential and being able to achieve this through Volunteer Now ensures recognition is reputable, credible and of a high standard.

10.0 Summary of Key Points

It is clear from the research findings that young people and delivery partners view the Millennium Volunteers Programme as positive and key to supporting volunteering activities.

For young people the personal impact of volunteering is critical - there is an overwhelming consensus that volunteering has supported their personal development, networks, contacts, skills and experiences. Whatever the future holds for these young people it is clear volunteering has left them in a stronger, more confident position and will support them within further education or employment.

In most instances volunteering has provided additional benefits to the young person helping them build contacts, social networks and friendships. It is clear especially for those volunteering at a local level that they feel a greater stake in the local community and that they are supported in becoming involved in local activities and events. This is a strong positive outcome as encouraging young people to become active citizens and more involved in social action is a key outcome of the programme.

The majority of young people registered with the Millennium Volunteers Programme report that the process works well. As intended the young person has ongoing and direct

contact with the delivery partner (rather than Volunteer Now) who provides support with the volunteering activities, recording hours and signing these off. The young volunteers feel this works well and helps build a good relationship with the organisation as they sign off on the hours.

For delivery partners the role of Volunteer Now in providing an overarching framework and support is critical to encouraging young people to volunteer. The majority of partners reflect that without this volunteering would not be as widespread or successful. For the majority of partners volunteering is not their key focus and therefore the support, resources and information provided through Volunteer Now is essential. The recognition, credibility and profile that the awards have, as they are administered at a regional level through Volunteer Now, is a key attraction of the programme for many organisations.

It is clear that as the programme continues to mature there are opportunities to refine and improve delivery. The ability to manage the programme, access, resources and support online is highlighted as an area where there is increasing demand. Partners also reflect on the need to continually profile the programme (and the benefit to young people and organisations) to ensure it continues to grow.



www.volunteernow.co.uk



028 9023 2020



youth@volunteernow.co.uk



34 Shaftesbury Square,
Belfast, BT2 7DB



@VolNowYouth



VolunteerNowYouth

VOLUNTEER NOW
34 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast, BT2 7DB.

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