

Youth Volunteering

A Toolkit for Churches &
Faith Based Organisations



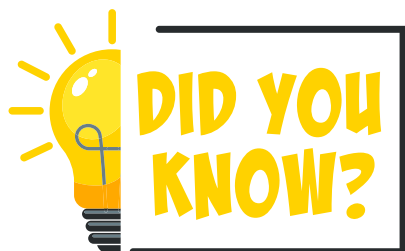
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Introduction

The creation of this toolkit was funded by The Education Authority.



- **Most Youth Work is being done by formal volunteers.**
- **The most common site for formal volunteering in Northern Ireland is churches and faith organisations.**

– so there is a need to support good volunteer recruitment management and retention to sustain good youth volunteer practice, especially for churches and faith based organisations.

EANI statistics show 95% of their Youth Work workforce are volunteers with a small percentage delivered by paid part time and full-time youth work staff (5%). This demonstrates that the sustainability of youth services in Northern Ireland is intrinsically linked to the recruitment and retention of volunteers to ensure continued delivery of services (according to the Department of Education funded 'Youth Service Volunteer Strategy 2023-2029).

Furthermore, The RAN [Youth Development Action Plan](#) clearly states that there is a need for the continued development of support for the recruitment of volunteers within the faith-based sector, and the reason for this is clear. The most recent NISRA statistics (Experience of volunteering by adults in Northern Ireland 2024/25 | Department for Communities) show that 28% of the adult population in Northern Ireland volunteer formally (and all volunteers who give their time within the youth service would be deemed as formal volunteers due to the governance structures which exist to protect them), and the most popular organisation that adults in N.I. volunteer with were church or faith-based organisations.

So, if most Youth Work in Northern Ireland is being done by formal volunteers, and most formal volunteering in N.I. is done within churches or faith-based organisations, then it is safe to assume that a great deal of the Youth Volunteering in Northern Ireland is happening within churches and faith-based institutions, and that is why this toolkit exists.

Who is this toolkit for?

To support volunteer managers and leaders within churches and faith based organisations to safely and effectively recruit manage and retain strong teams of youth volunteers, by providing the necessary information, advice, guidance and resources to help them understand and follow volunteer management best practice principles.

Why?

Not only does the Youth Development Action Plan clearly state the need to support Youth Volunteering in faith-based organisations, but many of those organisations themselves have reached out to ask for support. Youth Initiatives, Youth Link and Volunteer Now all have churches and faith-based organisations as members, and most of these have reported a drop in youth volunteer recruitment and a desire to be supported to overcome that challenge.

The key to successful volunteer recruitment and retention, no matter what the organisation, is effective and sensitive volunteer management practice. This toolkit is designed to provide volunteer leaders in faith-based organisations with best practise guidance and information for every stage of the volunteers journey within their organisation, while being mindful of some specific contexts that faith-based organisations and churches faith-based organisations and churches, or their volunteers, are working within.

Current Challenges & Barriers and the Faith-Based Context

Most churches and faith-based organisations we spoke to told us that:

- They found Youth Volunteering roles in their organisation were harder to fill than before.
- After Covid some people never returned to Youth Volunteering roles they held before, and others seem reluctant to take on the youth volunteering roles in particular.

Current Challenges and Trends

- Decline in formal volunteering
- Informal volunteering
- Re-engaging volunteers
- Involving new people
- Flexibility
- Inclusion
- Episodic volunteering
- Volunteer wellbeing
- Online/remote volunteering/digital systems

Some barriers to volunteering are common to all organisations (no time, work/study/caring duties). There are always some barriers to volunteering, and understanding what these common barriers are can help us think about how to overcome them.

Our most recent NISRA stats* on volunteering tells us people's barriers are...

36%

I have work commitments

33%

I don't have the time

21%

I have children to look after / the home

13%

I have an illness or disability that prevents me from volunteering

10%

I feel I am too old to get involved

7%

I wouldn't know how to get involved

What Churches & Faith-Based Organisations told us about their Youth Volunteering recruitment

Many of the people we interviewed reflected that volunteering roles that involved working with children were a particular problem for some people (especially older men) and that there may be some presumptions and issues putting them off. The main reasons cited included;

- Concerns and fears regarding safeguarding issues: for example, fears of being wrongly 'accused' and reputational damage, worry about the level of responsibility and reporting processes.
- Concerns about 'getting it wrong' or missing something.
- Uncertainty about the current issues facing young people: the internet and social media have made children 'grow up too fast' so they are not like children 'when I was young'. Older ways of disciplining and controlling children are frowned upon. Children are more 'tech savvy' than many adults and are often exposed to adult/challenging ideas that people feel ill-equipped to handle or help them with.

How would you reassure people with these fears?

Adopt and share strong safeguarding policy, processes and people that...

- Are clear, concise and easy
- Protect EVERYONE involved
- Maintains confidentiality
- Centres safety NOT hierarchy
- Is regularly reviewed and updated

Emphasise your training and support arrangements

- Safeguarding processes will be taught early and often
- Named people will support you
- **Everyone** is responsible for safeguarding
- There is a team - you're not alone

Advertise a blame and shame free culture

- Don't gossip about Youth Volunteers' flaws or failings
- Reward openness about mistakes
- Build team spirit and aid mutual support
- Facilitate a culture of shared effort and responsibility

Protect and promote current Youth Volunteer team

- Ensure they are (and look) happy and content, not burnt out and stressed
- Gather and share positive stories from youth and their volunteers
- Invest in volunteer wellbeing
- Publicly celebrate and praise volunteers

Offer Specialist Training

- Formal Youth Work qualifications
- Child Behaviour Management
- Active listening
- Communicating with Children
- Stages of child development
- Online behaviour and safety

Unique contexts of Church and Faith-Based Volunteering

The reason this toolkit is specifically designed for churches and faith-based organisations is a reflection, not only of the fact that this is the most popular type of formal volunteering organisation in Northern Ireland and the site of a large amount of Youth Volunteering, but also because faith-based volunteering often has unique aspects and contexts to it that will impact upon both the volunteer experience and the volunteer management experience.

Most notably – the concept and practice of faithful ‘service’.

We define Volunteering as ...

Volunteering is 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.

The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland

However, despite the fact that they give their time freely, for the benefit of others and without any expectation of payment, many volunteers within churches and faith organisations do not really see themselves as volunteers or engaged in formal volunteering, but instead they primarily see themselves as servants giving back to God, their faith and the church, and their volunteering as an act of service.

We can understand Service as a type of giving (of time and effort) that is directly and inherently linked to faith - a type of ‘living out’ of one’s religious and spiritual values. By participating in service people of faith can deepen their spiritual connection and contribute to the well-being of their communities and their faith community.

For many in Northern Ireland, service is a way to live out the core principles of their faith (such as love, compassion, welcome and kindness) and putting faith into action. Service is often encouraged and sometime expected by churches and it is understood as an opportunity to show God's love to others and make a positive impact in the world. Since people of faith very often grow up within that faith and within churches they frequently experience service (or volunteering) very early in life as an inherent part of their faith life, either through youth volunteering opportunities or other early acts of service such as engaging in sponsored activities, choirs, youth ministry or acts of helping within the church.

So, while most if not all acts of service count as volunteering not all volunteering counts as service, and the central role of God and personal faith is what separates the two.

We surveyed a group of over 200 young people (ages 10-21) who self-identify as Christian and 80% of them said they volunteer, and of these young volunteers 82% told us that their faith or spiritual beliefs influenced their decision to volunteer. With some telling us:

“It has helped me grow in my faith as a young person and affected my attitude towards volunteering”

“Volunteering was an inspiration to me and the people around me”

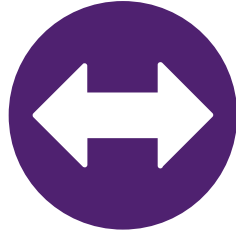
“I find that volunteering in church helps me spiritually!!! :)”



Volunteering & Service: The Similarities & Differences

Similarities

- Done for the benefit of others outside of ones own immediate circle/family
- Done without expectation of payment or reward
- Done to improve society and community
- Done in response to a need, lack or to fix problems
- Done because a passionate concern/care about a specific issue



Differences

- Done to please, serve, praise or be obedient to God
- Encouraged and even expected by the faith community
- Done as a way of manifesting and enacting personal faith
- Sacred texts & other forms of divine revelation dictate that service is expected from the faithful
- Usually done within churches and faith based organisations – not just secular settings
- Often includes expectations towards ministry and evangelism – spreading the good news/offering redemption

Implications of Faith and Service:

This different way of viewing volunteering (as a ‘calling’ or manifestation of faith) can have some notable consequences when it comes to recruiting and managing ‘formal’ volunteers who are volunteering as an act of service.

For example:

Since faithful people and church members are often accustomed to giving time and effort to their church/faith for free as a normal part of living and practicing their faith, they do not necessarily see what they do as formal volunteering at all. Taking on unpaid work within one’s church (for example, choir membership, youth ministry, taking up collections, reading, maintaining facilities) is seen as a normal and expected aspect of being a member of a faith / church community and not something done ‘in addition’ to their faith, and typically their churches / faith groups see it that way too. This means many volunteering roles within churches and faith groups (and the management arrangements that surround them) are not formalised in the sense that these volunteers do not have any clear volunteer role descriptions, nor formal training and induction, nor any formal volunteer support and supervision designed to manage their welfare and development as volunteers.

In this context, introducing the more formal structures, policies and procedures etc. that volunteer management good practice demands will require some investment of time and work, and since it also requires change in thinking and approach, it may also be met with some resistance as all change can be.

The Unique Challenges & Opportunities of Managing People who Volunteer as Service

There are some unique challenges involved in managing volunteers who choose to give their time and effort as an act of service, for example....



- They may feel like they don't 'need' an induction or training - they 'already know'
- Very strong personal commitment can make them take on too much, go beyond their skillset or overburden themselves and burn out
- The influence of faith may be so strong that service feels like an obligation – which volunteering shouldn't ideally be - breeding unconscious resentment
- Volunteers may feel like saying no, taking a break or leaving the role is like saying no to the church, or taking a break from God, so they may need to be persuaded to take rests or breaks
- Managing boundaries or performance/conduct issues with volunteers who you know on a personal level as well as a volunteer manager can be more difficult
- Desire to serve and strength of faith may not equate to having the necessary skill-set to serve or a strength of ability

However, there also many, if not more advantages & opportunities in managing those who volunteer as service. For example..

- Basic organisational/church values, beliefs and mission already understood and agreed with
- Very strong level of personal commitment to the act of volunteering/serving
- God/faith is an extremely compelling and consistent 'intrinsic' motivation
- The volunteer is likely already known to you or the church/organisation, making establishing a relationship easier
- Faith organisations and churches offer strong social networks that enhance team bonding and care
- Those who feel they are successfully serving and expressing religious beliefs through their volunteer work report higher levels of satisfaction and are more likely to volunteer again



This toolkit aims to help you rise to the challenge of managing people who volunteer as an act of service and make the most of the opportunities and advantages they present you, so that your organisation, your youth volunteers and your service users can have the best possible experience and benefit from good practice.

Volunteer Management Good Practice: The 6 Quality Areas

According to the UK's most recognized quality assurance standard for volunteering (Investing in Volunteers) There are 6 'quality areas' that need to be considered when assessing volunteer management practice, and some basics standards that need to be met under each area in order to align with best practice, thereby increasing the chance that recruitment is successful and ensuring that volunteers are safe & effective in their roles, and happy to keep volunteering in the long term.

These quality areas are...

Quality Area

1

Vision for volunteering

Volunteering is embedded within the overall vision, values, culture and aims of the organisation and its impact is recognised and communicated.

Organisations understand why they involve volunteers

- Volunteering is planned and reviewed in line with the organisation's vision, strategy, and values
- Volunteering is valued as part of the culture of the organisation and the benefits of volunteering are understood and communicated
- The impact of volunteering in contributing to organisation aims is understood and communicated
- Volunteer involvement is reflected in management, financial and resource planning

Quality Area

2

Planning for volunteers

People, policies and procedures have been put in place to ensure volunteering is well-managed

- There are specific and proportionate systems and processes for volunteer involvement that are regularly reviewed
- Relevant people in the organisation are aware of systems and processes relating to volunteering and why they are important
- There are designated people responsible for volunteers and volunteering that have experiences, competencies and attributes for the role
- Systems are in place to ensure the management of risk, safeguarding, health and wellbeing and protection of volunteers, the organisation and others
- There are problem solving procedures to deal with issues raised by or about volunteers
- Records of volunteer involvement are maintained in line with data protection

Quality Area

3

Volunteer inclusion

There is a positive approach to inclusion, equity and diversity and a proactive approach to making volunteering accessible

- The organisation is inclusive and managed in a way that encourages the involvement of and is welcoming to a wide range of people
- There is a proactive approach to increasing volunteer diversity, addressing under-representation, and including targeted groups as part of the organisation's inclusion, equity and diversity aims
- Information about volunteering opportunities is made as widely available as possible using a range of methods and there is active engagement with a diverse range of people
- Where possible there is a wide range of accessible opportunities that can be adapted throughout the volunteer's journey

Quality Area

4

Recruiting and welcoming volunteers

It is easy for people to find out about opportunities, explore whether they are right for them, and get involved

- People are clear about the opportunities available and the process to become involved
- Recruitment processes and checks are timely, fair, consistent, straightforward and appropriate
- Recruitment is a two-way process for volunteers to find out more and that considers how individual and organisational needs can be met
- Volunteers are provided with any necessary information, introductions and training for their role

Quality Area

5

Supporting volunteers

Volunteers feel supported at all times, that they are a part of the organisation and that their contribution makes a difference

- Volunteers feel appropriately supported in their role and able to discuss all aspects of their volunteering
- Volunteers and everyone in the organisation who comes into contact with volunteers are clear about the scope of volunteer roles and what volunteers can expect from the organisation
- Volunteers have the opportunity to discuss how they are doing
- Volunteers have opportunities to express their views and ideas and to be involved in relevant decision making
- Volunteers feel there is good communication between themselves and the organisation
- There are systems for volunteers to have a positive and managed exit

Quality Area

6

Valuing and developing volunteers

Volunteers are valued and there are opportunities for volunteers to develop and grow through their experience


- Volunteers feel their contribution is meaningful and rewarding
- Volunteers feel valued by and a part of the organisation
- The experiences, attributes and competencies that volunteers bring are recognised and they have opportunities to develop them
- Volunteers have the opportunity for connecting with and learning from other volunteers where appropriate
- Volunteers' future aspirations are supported where appropriate

This toolkit will outline what is considered good practice under each of these headings and link to publications, information, resources, templates & even other toolkits that will support Youth Volunteer managers & leaders in faith based organisations to

- Understand what good practice is
- Check their own current practices against these standards
- Make a plan to implement any changes & improvements to that practice so that volunteers can have the best possible experience and they can retain their volunteer for as long as possible

AND REMEMBER – YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE.

Volunteer Now's Development Officer and Support Officers are here to help, advise and guide you as you begin to apply the various elements of this toolkit.

Click here to find your local Volunteer Now Development Officer or Support Officer 



Quality area 1: Vision for volunteering

Understanding the value of Youth Volunteers

Meeting the aims of this quality area means:

Volunteering is understood and valued at all levels of the organisation, it is planned and reviewed in line with the organisation's overall strategy, and this is reflected in management, financial and resource planning.

Good practice indicators at this stage include;

Volunteering is planned and reviewed in line with the organisation's vision, strategy, and values.

That Means: Volunteers are not there to 'mop up' what staff can't or won't do, but instead volunteer contributions are understood as unique, volunteer roles are specifically designed to help the organisation meet its stated mission, and people are clear how the work done by volunteers contributes to the organisations aims.

Volunteering is valued as part of the culture of the organisation and the benefits of volunteering are understood and communicated.

That Means: People at all levels of the organisation are aware of, and appreciate, the unique values and contributions that volunteers bring to their organisation – they are not staff, neither are they simply 'members' or 'cheap labour'.

Volunteer involvement is reflected in management, financial and resource planning.

That Means: The organisation includes volunteers and volunteering as part of their regular 'business' and plan for it accordingly, for example, by creating budget allowances for volunteering related expenses, including volunteer recruitment and succession plans in their planning business, and providing relevant volunteer management training and/or support to those tasked with recruiting and leading volunteers.

Resource Guide 1 can support you to fulfil best practice here.

One notable item in this guide worth reviewing is:

[Volunteers & the Law information sheet](#) - Employment law and rights do not apply to volunteers, but there are other laws we DO need to consider and reflect in our policy and practice when planning to involve volunteers and this information sheet explains what some of these are, and how to avoid accidentally turning our volunteers into employees.

Quality area 2. Planning for volunteers

Preparing the people policies & procedures necessary for Youth Volunteering

Meeting the aims of this quality area means:

There are specific and proportionate systems and processes for volunteer involvement that are regularly reviewed.

There cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach to this because what is considered proportionate depends on many variables, for example, the type and complexity of tasks being carried out by your volunteers, who is doing it and how frequently, and the size of your organisation and the resources available to you.

However, some basic principles can apply to all organisations regardless of size and volunteer role and these include;

There are specific and proportionate systems and processes for volunteer involvement that are regularly reviewed.

This means: Having at least basic policies in place that refer to and include volunteers, and ideally, having a formal Volunteering Policy (see link below), or ensuring that current policies are sufficient to guide & govern volunteers' work and are suitable for the volunteering context which is less formal than that of paid employees.

There are designated people responsible for volunteers and volunteering that have experiences, competencies and attributes for the role.

This Means: Those who recruit, lead, manage and train volunteers have necessary and specific training, experience, skills and support needed to do so. (See volunteer management role description link below)

Systems are in place to ensure the management of risk, safeguarding, health and wellbeing and protection of volunteers, the organisation, and others.

This Means: There are specific, written and regularly reviewed Health & Safety, Safeguarding, and Data Protection, etc. policies and procedures in place that help the organisation meet its legal obligations to keep people from harm, manage risk and protect personal data - and these policies and practices include and cover volunteers as well as staff.

There are problem solving procedures to deal with issues raised by or about volunteers.

This Means: The informal nature of the relationship between volunteers and the organisations they serve (as compared to employees formal relationship) is reflected in the existence of special practices and procedures just for volunteers, for example, problem solving procedures for Volunteer & Volunteer Complaint procedures – that differ from the more formal grievance & discipline procedures put in place for staff.

Resource Guide 2 can support you to fulfil best practice in this quality area.

Some of the items from the guide that are particularly worthy of attention are:

- [Volunteer Policy Framework](#) and [Developing a Volunteer Policy](#) (easy to follow steps to create or formalise an effective volunteer policy for your organisation & reasons to do so)
- [Sample Job Description for a Volunteer Organiser](#) (the skills and qualifications needed for effective volunteer management)
- [Health and Safety and Volunteering](#)
- [Problem Solving Procedures for Volunteers](#)

And with regards to fulfilling our legal obligations to safeguard children and vulnerable adults – which is especially important in youth volunteering context.

Volunteer Now has produced two information guides and toolkits for both child and adult safeguarding to support volunteering organisations to understand & adhere to good practice.

The Safeguarding children standards and guidance document can be found here: [Keeping Children Safe Our Duty to Care](#)



Volunteering Policies

We know that many faith-based organisations do not have a formal volunteering policy. So, please don't worry if you don't already have one in place! You may already have a lot of the content that would be in a volunteering policy, but you simply haven't gathered it altogether under one heading.

Creating one may take a lot less time and effort than you think, and having one is considered best practice BECAUSE...

- It supports and guides you, the manager (and organisation) at all stages of the volunteer journey
- It allows the organisation to be standardised, fair and transparent in its volunteer inclusion and management
- It recognises and responds to the volunteers unique and less formal relationship to the organisation (not like staff or members)
- It informs and reassures the volunteer (clarifying everything they need to know and should expect)

If you don't have one, creating one or bringing the disparate elements you do have together under one heading of 'volunteer policy' is highly advised and easily done using the help of Volunteer Now's Support Officers along with our [Volunteering Policy Framework](#).

Quality area 3. Volunteer inclusion

Community Relations Equity & Diversity (CRED) in Youth Volunteering

Meeting the aims of this quality area means:

There is a positive approach to inclusion, equity and diversity and a proactive approach to making volunteering accessible.

Good practice indicators at this stage include things like;

The organisation is inclusive and managed in a way that encourages the involvement of and is welcoming to a wide range of people.

This Means: The organisation is aware of the value of community relations, equality, inclusivity and diversity in youth work and in volunteering and seeks to promote that within its Youth Volunteering programme. For example, by developing an Inclusivity Policy and/or applying the general principles that can be found in the [Inclusion in Volunteer Programmes](#) toolkit and Volunteer Now's [Volunteering & Good Relations Toolkit](#).

Information about volunteering opportunities is made as widely available as possible using a range of methods and there is active engagement with a diverse range of people.

This Means: Volunteering opportunities are open equally to all suitably qualified people with the skills and abilities necessary to perform the tasks effectively and safely. You try to reach as wide and diverse an audience as possible with your volunteering opportunities (for example, by advertising publicly in places all relevant people can see the opportunity, and by offering multiple ways to get more information at apply), and where certain demographics or groups are notably underrepresented in your organisation, there are specific & targeted recruitment messages that express special welcome to & interest in those groups.

Resource Guide 3 can support you to fulfil best practice in this quality area.

Some of the items from the guide that are particularly worthy of attention are:

- [Diversity in Volunteering Information Sheet](#): explains the meaning and values of diversity and listing agencies that can help you with regards to the diversity in your organisation.
- [Involving Children as Volunteers fact sheet](#): This fact sheet is especially relevant to the many churches and faith organisations whose Youth Volunteers are themselves young people (under 18), because, when involving children as volunteers, there are some special considerations which organisations should be aware of to ensure their safe and successful involvement.


Beyond this resource guide, organisations can find additional guidance about enhancing and promoting Equality & Diversity in Volunteering in Volunteer Now's & Equality Commission NI toolkit:


[Promoting Equality and Diversity volunteering.](#)


One of the reasons why being inclusive is considered valuable is that it allows you to include a broader range of people in your volunteering programme thereby helping your volunteering team better reflect the demographics of the community and people that they serve.


So, if the community and people that your Youth Volunteers serve all belong to faith or one denomination it is perfectly reasonable that your volunteering team might not have a lot of 'religious diversity'.

In fact there are a number of very legitimate reasons why volunteering organisations might have limits on the amount of diversity in their volunteering team and these can include.

- 

SAFEY / THE LAW - People with certain convictions are on a 'Barred' list are legally not allowed to be included in regulated activity. Those without convictions and who are not barred may also be excluded if reports/references indicate they are not safe to work with children or vulnerable adults
- 

NATURE OF WORK - Roles involving heavy physical labour, outdoors in rugged conditions, requiring speed or endurance, may exclude people with some disabilities
- 

SERVICE USER NEED - Women's refuges and domestic abuse shelters may exclude male volunteers from roles that come in to direct contact with vulnerable/traumatised service users.
- 

QUALIFICATION / EXPERTISE - Some volunteering roles require specific skills, special knowledge and formal qualifications (counselling, legal support, advice giving services, Youthwork Leader)

And of course, if your faith-based volunteering roles require your volunteers to share a certain religious belief or attend a certain church, then that too can be a legitimate reason why your volunteer-base has limited diversity.



HOWEVER, no matter how naturally exclusive and small your pool of potential faith-based Youth Volunteers, there is always still SOME diversity in the mix and a therefore a chance to become more inclusive.

Consider categories like:

Age | Disability Status | Gender | Political opinion | Marriage status | Dependants | Culture | Economic status.

Look at your volunteering team and ask yourself "are we as diverse as the community we sit in and serve, or are some people missing? Are we creating unconscious barriers to volunteering for some people?"

Here are some barriers to think about and some ways to overcome them...

TIME & SCHEDULING

Offer wider range of times for interview, volunteering, meetings and more roles

MONEY & COSTS INVOLVED

Offer to cover expenses in cash if needed & provide uniform etc. for free

IMAGE OF THE ROLE & CURRENT VOLUNTEER TEAM

Make desire for diversity clear and specific welcome to men, older folks, underrepresented

ACCESSIBILITY OF VENUE OR RESOURCES & TRAINING

Arrange transport, provide ramps-loops, large text – get advice from advocacy groups

LACK OF INCLUSION POLICY OR PLAN

Support leaders with toolkits, training and an inclusion policy to set goals and instruct

You should also bear in mind that community relations, equality, diversity and inclusivity are not just considered valuable in volunteering, they are also considered essential in youth work more generally. So, if the volunteering roles that your Youth Volunteers occupy qualify as Youth Work roles, then it is good for you to be aware of what the relevant statutory bodies (who oversee youth work practice), and support agencies (who advise about best practice in youth work) have to say about how CRED might impact our Youth Work practice and see what guidance, resources, training, and advice they offer to support your organisation with this.

For example:

- The Dept. of Education NI's [Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Policy](#) and [Guidance note](#) re: CRED policy and Youth Work
- Guidance, training resources and key standards for equality and diversity etc. in Youth Work from the National Youth Agency (UK) [Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging \(EEDIB\) Standards](#) and [1779 NYA EEDIB Standards](#)
- Advice, training, resources and projects regarding equality and inclusivity in Youth Work on offer from the National Youth Council of Ireland (ROI): [Equality & Intercultural](#)

And for information about Enhancing the Diversity and Inclusivity of Youth Work specifically in churches and faith based organisations in Northern Ireland, more information and guidance can be found:

- Youth Link NI offer good relations training specifically for faith-based youth workers: [Training & Development](#)
- Evangelical Alliance offer seminars and information to help to make faith-based Youth Work and Youth Ministry more inclusive: [Great Commission: All Inclusive?](#)

Quality area 4. Recruiting and welcoming volunteers

Safe and effective selection and welcome of new volunteers

Meeting the aims of this quality area means:

People are clear about the opportunities available and the process to become involved.

Good practice indicators at this stage include things like;

It is easy for people to find out about opportunities, explore whether they are right for them, and get involved.

This means: Each volunteering role that you seek to fill should have its own distinct volunteer role description that lists the tasks and duties involved and the 'personnel specification' (i.e., the skills, experience, availability and characteristics) of the ideal candidate. Any volunteering role that is being recruited for should be advertised widely and openly to all suitably qualified people, and the advertising should make it clear what is involved in the role and how someone can learn more about it and apply.

Recruitment processes and checks are timely, fair, consistent, straightforward and appropriate.

This Means: That for each volunteer role you want to fill there is a coherent and well thought out 'recruitment pathway' that is appropriate to the role and equally applied to all. These recruitment pathways include: creating clear volunteer role descriptions personnel specifications and adverts, deciding on a 'recruitment campaign', the application and selection procedures you will use, and a consideration of how selected volunteers will be on boarded and managed after recruitment

Volunteers are provided with any necessary information, introductions and training for their role.

This Means: Carefully planning the onboarding or 'induction' of new volunteers ensuring time, people and resources are selected to insure the volunteer receives an induction session which clearly explains;

- Their role (the tasks and duties involved, any risks or difficulties they might encounter, any training or resources required to do it)
- The organisation and its people (its aims, values & mission, and how their role fits into it, the staff and volunteers that they will be working alongside)
- The essential policies and procedures (a review of the policy documents that will influence their role, e.g., Health & Safety, Data Protection, and Safeguarding, and any relevant standards and reporting procedures)
- The support systems (and formal support and supervision arrangements and a named person who will provide that, any initial and ongoing training that is needed and any other ways they will be supported, for example, reimbursement of expenses)

Top Tips re: Promoting Roles & Opportunities

To make our volunteering role descriptions, personnel specifications or recruitment adverts as appealing as possible, we need to think about what the volunteer might want from the role. We need to consider different types of motivations that people have for volunteering and think about if and how our role can satisfy those different motivations. We also need to think about what the volunteer stands to gain from volunteering with us - what are our 'unique selling points' and what might be the potential benefits of the role. Make sure to emphasise and highlight these benefits wherever and whenever you can.

For example...

- Satisfaction with results – the chance to help, give back and do something meaningful
- Personal enjoyment and the fun of the activities involved
- Meeting new and like-minded people
- The organisation really invests in the support and celebration of volunteers
- Full training and supervision will be there to guide any volunteers
- Any out-of-pocket expenses reimbursed
- A chance to use skills/knowledge in a positive way
- Broaden your life experience
- Learn new skills and get qualifications
- Volunteering can really benefit mental & physical health



We always need to be mindful of the volunteers perspective i.e. what they're interested in and what the benefits will be for them. Because volunteers are much more likely to apply for roles that offer them something meaningful and volunteers who are well matched to a role in terms of interests and skills are much more likely to be happy and long serving in their role.

Resource Guide 4 can support you to fulfil best practice in this quality area.

Some of the items from this guide that are particularly worthy of attention are:

- [Developing Volunteer Roles](#) - Best practice guidelines on why these matter and how to create them along with useful guidance templates
- [Recruitment Plan for Volunteers Information Sheet](#): Guidance on how to create a proportionate, structured and effective recruitment plan for your Youth Volunteer roles by asking and answering a series of simple questions, and if you are trying to recruit young people as volunteers, don't forget to consult the ['Involving Children as Volunteers' Factsheet](#).
- [Selection Procedures for Volunteers](#): Information and step by step instructions of what should be involved at the various 'stages' of your Youth Volunteer selection procedure (with an explanatory flow chart), that allows you to adapt the stages for different roles of different complexity while still adhering to good practice and delivering a safe, fair and effective selection process.
- [Volunteer Induction Checklist](#): All new volunteers should receive an 'induction' to ensure that they understand their role, the contribution they will make to the organisation's goals and to ensure that they can fulfil their tasks safely and effectively. This induction checklist template is a good way of clarifying what such an induction should cover and ensuring that the volunteer has received and understood it all BEFORE they begin volunteering.

Remember to consider the volunteers perspective on your application form and selection procedure too.

This means thinking about:

- How long your application form is and if every question is necessary. Cut down unnecessary bureaucratic steps. Can it be filled out on a mobile phone as well as a laptop and on paper? Different types of people have different preferences.
- When will you hold interviews? People who want to volunteer also have classes or jobs and busy lives - offer a flexible range of times and dates.
- How long will a volunteer need to wait after submitting an application form to get an interview and how long between selection and beginning to volunteer? People can become frustrated and give up if they don't understand what the timeline is, but they are willing to be patient when they are properly informed about expected dates and timelines in advance.



Quality area 5. Supporting volunteers

Communicating with, caring for and supervising our volunteers as they work.

Meeting the aims of this quality area means:

Volunteers feel supported at all times, that they are a part of the organisation and that their contribution makes a difference.

Good practice indicators at this stage include things like:

Volunteers feel appropriately supported in their role and able to discuss all aspects of their volunteering.

This Means: There are specific named people to whom the volunteer can turn for advice when needed and the organisation has made some arrangements (proportionate to the volunteers roles involved and the resources available) to provide adequate support and supervision to them in some form.

Volunteers have the opportunity to discuss how they are doing.

This Means: Meetings, catch-ups or other support and supervision arrangements do not focus solely on the organisation's needs or the tasks and duties of the volunteers role but takes time to be person-centred i.e. care for the whole person of the volunteer, be mindful of their wellbeing, listen to their feedback, and make them feel valued and included.

Volunteers have opportunities to express their views and ideas and to be involved in relevant decision making.

This Means: Consulting volunteers and listening to them on matters that will affect them, for example, current volunteers could be included in developing the role descriptions, recruitment pathways or selection procedures for new volunteers, and youth volunteers should be asked for their input and evaluations of youth volunteering programmes and events they are involved in.

Volunteer Support & Supervision

We know that many volunteer organisations do not have formal support and supervision arrangements in place and that some fear that creating such arrangements would require more money, time or resources than they have access to.

However, there are many different methods and ways of delivering support and supervision (each with their own pros and cons) some of which are very cheap and quick. It is very important for an organisation to have some way of supporting wellbeing of and relationship to the volunteer and supervising the safety and efficacy of the volunteers performance.

This need for connection and oversight is especially true if our youth volunteers are regularly working with children in our name and on our behalf.

If you do not currently support and supervise your Youth Volunteers, take a look at this list of supervision arrangements and think about which type your organisation might be able to offer:

One-to-one	Pros: Private, focussed and attentive Cons: A lot of work for one person, intense / intimidating
Scheduled	Pros: Builds regularity, easy to track and plan Cons: Inflexible, can become rote and 'tick-box' feeling
In Person/Online	Pros: Can read face and body language, feels personal Cons: Requires travel and/or internet access
Manager	Pros: Authority to action changes quickly, duty of care is on them Cons: Lacks empathy of first hand experience, intimidating
Group	Pros: Peer learning, team building Cons: Lack of privacy, harder to schedule
On Demand	Pros: Flexible, the need for it is clear Cons: Harder to track and plan for, not standardised for all
At a Distance	Pros: Very flexible, no travel/home comfort Cons: No body language, less personal
Peers	Pros: Solidarity, empathy, peer wisdom and teamwork Cons: No authority to make changes, not private, not good for the shy/quiet



Tips and Advice for providing feedback when things go wrong

SUPPORT INTERVENTIONS

- Reassurance re: their output or value to the organisation
- Changing volunteering days/times to facilitate life changes
- Advice and information
- Signpost to counselling, debt support, advocacy or other support services
- Arrange a short leave of absence
- Help with travel or other mutual aid
- Creating more social events for volunteer bonding and morale

SUPERVISION INTERVENTIONS

- Additional Training
- Arrange shadowing, buddying or mentoring pair-ups in weak areas
- Refresher of induction training re: essential policy & procedure
- Review/re-write of role description with adaptations for special needs & circumstances
- Creation of a skills development plan/provision of CPD
- Move to different role or location
- Develop new roles to match skills & interest

A Quick note on Spiritual/Pastoral Support

Many churches and faith-based institutions offer their volunteers 'pastoral' or 'spiritual' support that focuses on their overall well-being and the spiritual aspects of their life. While this can be a fantastic addition to the support and supervision offer that we provide our Youth Volunteers, it is not designed to perform the functions of volunteer support and supervision and therefore it should not be used to replace formal volunteer supervision and support.

Because...

- People usually have to ask for this - it's not something proactively provided or scheduled for them
- The volunteer's issue may not be a spiritual problem or related to faith - it may be more practical than personal
- Spiritual/pastoral support is linked to the person's role as a member of the faith or church it is not specifically related to their role as a Youth Volunteer
- Those who offer pastoral and spiritual support may not have the knowledge necessary to support a volunteering query nor the authority to make necessary changes to the volunteer's role or programme as needed
- Spiritual/pastoral support does not allow for volunteer feedback and input regarding the youth projects or volunteering to be formally gathered and actioned/responded to.

Resource Guide 5 can support you to fulfil best practice in this quality area.

Some of the items from this guide that are particularly worthy of attention are:

- [Developing a Volunteer Agreement](#)

For volunteering roles that carry some personal responsibility and a need for regularity and dedication (as many Youth Volunteering roles are) a volunteer agreement can be a very useful tool to clarify the tasks and duties that you expect the volunteer to perform, the policies and procedure you expect them to adhere to, and the resources, training and support that you will provide them with to allow them to do perform their role well.

- [Support and Supervision of Volunteers](#)

There is no one system for supporting and supervising volunteers in every organisation. A really effective support and supervision system can only be developed over time by testing out what works and what doesn't work for particular volunteers and particular volunteer roles. This document will explain the basic principles and functions of support and supervision and help you decide which approach best suits your organisation and your Youth Volunteers.

Quality area 6: Valuing and developing volunteers

Recognising and rewarding volunteer effort and investing in their growth

Meeting the aims of this quality area means

Volunteers are valued and there are opportunities for volunteers to develop and grow through their experience.

Good practice indicators at this stage include things like:

Volunteers feel their contribution is meaningful and rewarding.

This Means: The organisation is in the habit of checking in on their Youth Volunteers (through general communications, meetings, support and supervision arrangements, and questionnaires) to ensure that they are enjoying their role, and taking steps to correct things if that is not the case. It also means that the organisation should be feeding back to volunteers, individually and as a group, about the impact and importance of the work they do.

Volunteers feel valued by and a part of the organisation.

This Means: The organisation makes a habit of acknowledging, thanking, recognising and rewarding its volunteer base (on a personal one to one basis and publicly to the wider organisation and world). This can include a range of activities from formal and planned volunteer thanking events with certificates and awards, to simply fostering a culture of providing regular thanks and feedback to volunteers about their work and value to the organisation.

Volunteers have the opportunity for connecting with and learning from other volunteers where appropriate.

This Means: The organisation creates opportunities for their Youth Volunteers to gather together, formally and informally, for example, by planning and facilitating regular meetings, away-days, peer support groups, training sessions, social get-togethers or other events, so that they can enjoy a sense of belonging, build team spirit, offer mutual support and learn from one another. Arranging these is especially important for volunteers who don't frequently work alongside other members of the volunteer team.

The experiences, attributes and competencies that volunteers bring are recognised and they have opportunities to develop them.

This Means: Those leading and supervising volunteers should get to know them well, understand their wider skill sets and allow them to deploy these, where appropriate, in their volunteering work. It also means the organisation should provide a range of volunteering roles, the flexibility to allow volunteers to move between roles, and provide pathways of development to allow volunteers to progress into key and leadership positions.

Volunteer Recognition & Reward

Alongside support and supervision, recognising, celebrating and rewarding your volunteers is a significant part of volunteer management and one of the primary drivers of volunteer satisfaction and retention. These acts of recognition and reward can be done individually or as a group. Many can be done ‘as you go along’ (for example, regular thanks and positive feedback) but there should also be annual plans in place for the whole organisation to join in with the recognition and rewards of the volunteer team – for example, Volunteers’ Week (1-7 June), UN International Volunteers’ Day (5 December).

For some ideas see [supporting & thanking volunteers](#).

Recognition & Reward	Individual Rewards	Group Rewards & Planned Events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun social events • Thanks and praise (for individual and group efforts) • Acknowledgement of their hours or volume of work • Seeing and hearing about the difference their work has made to the children / community / organisation/ faith • Certificates or small gifts, for example, team branded goods • Special prayers or services for those who volunteer and serve • Positive feedback from service users and parents • Fun, happy atmosphere - a good team spirit – new friendships and connections • Promotions, development opportunities, CPD training and qualifications • Special ‘shout-outs’ or profiles on your social media, website, parish newsletter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer character/experience references for work or courses • Volunteer of the month awards • Nominate for external awards • Add volunteer profiles to websites/social media • Seek out and include volunteer feedback / opinions when planning anything that involves them • Ask about benefits and motivations during check-ins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide refreshments and fun atmosphere for group volunteering • Manage event logistics and planning for social events (or pay) • Ask VIPs / service users to speak or record a message for volunteers • Arrange special services or prayers for volunteer teams



Succession Planning & Pathways for Development

One really good way to provide pathways for development (and also to avoid overburdening or burning out longer serving and leadership volunteers) is to get into the practice of succession planning for your youth volunteer programmes. Succession planning is a strategic planning process that protects the long-term efficacy and safety of volunteering programmes by helping organisations to identify their key/leadership roles and ensure they maintain and develop the necessary skills and abilities within the wider team to be able to keep going long term, even when key/lead volunteers decide to step down. They do this by creating detailed pathways of training and development for newer volunteers that allows them to slowly train, practice and develop the skills needed to take on more responsibility.

Volunteer Now occasionally offer training to support volunteer managers to do this – visit our [Scheduled Training Calendar](#) or speak to your local [Volunteering Support Officer](#).

You can also find information guidance and templates to support volunteer succession planning for free on the Internet from various sources

e.g. [Volunteer Succession Planning Checklist & Transition Plan](#)

[Resource Guide 6](#) can support you to fulfil best practice in this quality area.

Some of the items from this guide that are particularly worthy of attention are:

- [Supporting and Thanking Volunteers](#): A list of 101 ideas to show your Youth Volunteers how much you value you them, ranging from formal thanks and reward events to small every-day actions that can be entirely free of charge.
- [Volunteer Satisfaction Survey](#): A template of a basic volunteer satisfaction check-in questionnaire to help you ‘take the temperature’ of your current team and identify areas for improvement and development.



A final Note on Peer Learning & Networks of Support for Faith-Based Youth Volunteering

As noted in the final ‘quality area’, providing opportunities for volunteers to meet, connect with and learn from their peers is very important.

Peer connection and networks of support are especially important for Youth Volunteering, both for individual Youth Volunteers and whole Youth Volunteering programmes.

Peer learning and networks of support are considered essential because they help to:

- Improve practice
- Enhance emotional resilience
- Support innovation
- Strengthen the collective capacity of youth workers to advocate for young people

AND

- In environments where resources are limited and challenges are complex (as they often can be in churches and faith-based organisations) these networks serve as the backbone that supports both practitioners and the communities they serve.

Faith-based Youth Volunteering flourishes when practitioners are connected, supported, and held within a healthy community of practice.



Some **examples of peer support groups and networks of support** that are appropriate for those involved in Youth Volunteering within faith based organisations in Northern Ireland include:

Youth Initiatives	Evangelical Alliance	NICVA 's faith based engagement groups	Online Youthwork communities (NYA & NYCI) and/or faith communities
Your own Youth Volunteer peer support groups	Wider church / organisation Youth Ministry or Youth Work support teams	Other local churches & faith groups of different denominations	Other local youth clubs, schools, Youth Groups, Youth Ministry and safeguarding specialists

There are many benefits to peer learning (both to the individual Youth Volunteer and to organisations with Youth Volunteering programmes), such as:

Learn from others' wisdom (and mistakes)

Don't re-invent the wheel - lean on the resources and knowledge that is already out there. This will save you time and money AND it is an important source of continuous training, development and support for Youth Volunteers in organisations with little to no budget for formal training and regular support sessions.

Shared insights and resources

When you run into tricky situations with young people or if you have run out of fresh ideas, a peer support group can share learning, experiences, resources and ideas. If your network is geographically close you could even pool resources and share facilities, building and admin support.

Broadening horizons

By including different churches, organisations or denominations in your network of support you get to experience different perspectives and new insights. You can even use these contacts to arrange cross community / interdenominational learning opportunities for the young people in your care as a hands-on experience of CRED.

And while networks of support and peer support groups have their own limitations e.g,

- Networks require time, organisational support and sometimes money – all scarce!,
- More experienced workers may dominate discussions or intimidate others
- Not all Youth Volunteer practices shared are equally evidence-based or standardised to be suitable for all ages and groups.

They certainly preferable to the pitfalls and problems that can arise when Youth Volunteers and Youth Volunteering programmes attempt to 'go it alone' for example,

Burnout, Compassion Fatigue & Spiritual Exhaustion

Faith-based Youth Volunteering can involve:

- Strong emotional topics, spiritual mentoring, crisis support, limited funding and staffing

When working alone or without a network of support to call on:

- There is no or limited chance to debrief with someone after difficult conversations.
- Pastoral burdens accumulate - often unseen - and volunteers feel they must carry all they're given as no one can help
- Volunteers feel spiritually responsible for young people's wellbeing, leading to unhealthy overextension, sub par service to young people
- Creating a poor impression of what service / volunteering is like, putting others off or leaving ministry/service altogether

Weak Integration into Wider Community Support Systems

Youth Volunteering is more effective when it is connected to; schools - social services - other churches or faith groups - community organizations
Choosing to work in isolation, cut-off from wider community groups means that:

- We cut off access to partnerships
- The support systems available to the young people we work with are limited.
- Making referrals for external support becomes a harder or slower process
- The organisation's visibility and credibility is reduced
- The organisation's youth volunteer have fewer sources of support & training

Theological 'Drift' or 'Rigidity'

Peer learning helps keep theology/faith grounded, balanced, and contextual. Without this a Youth Volunteer may develop:

- Drift: for example, narrow interpretations, personal belief frameworks that lack accountability, mix personal beliefs with pastoral direction in unhelpful ways, unchecked spiritual assumptions, practices that diverge from church or organizational values
- Rigidity: for example, becoming dogmatic or inflexible, inability to adapt faith teaching to young people's real lives, overemphasis on doctrine rather than pastoral care.

Both extremes can hinder healthy faith formation in young people.

Safeguarding Vulnerabilities

When Youth Volunteers are working in isolation;

- Risks of boundary breaches increase (not necessarily intentionally).
- No second adult is present to ensure safe practice.
- Acting beyond the limits of role/competence.
- Poor safeguarding decisions or failure to escalate issues correctly will go unchallenged and concerns about a young person may be missed or mishandled because there is no peer to consult.

Weakening of Accountability

Developing/missing ethical blind-spots. Without peers, we may be more likely to:

- Rely on personal judgment rather than best practice
- Normalise/entrench risky behaviour ("I've always done it this way")
- Miss red flags in their own conduct – like bias, poor boundary maintenance, or unrealistic expectations
- Fail to notice power imbalances and prefer 'obedience' to 'participation' to maintain control.

Useful Organisations and Resources

[**NSPCC**](#) - Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Voluntary and Community Groups

[**The National Youth Agency \(NYA\)**](#)

[**National Youth Council of Ireland**](#)

[**NICVA**](#) - support for Faith-Based Engagement

[**Department for Communities**](#) - support for Faith-Based Organisations

[**NISRA**](#) - latest Statistics re: Experience of Volunteering in NI (Adults) 2024-2025

[**Volunteer Ireland**](#) - A Best Practice Guide to Offering More Flexibility in Volunteering

[**NYCI**](#) - A National Induction Training Framework for Volunteers Engaged in Youth Work Practice

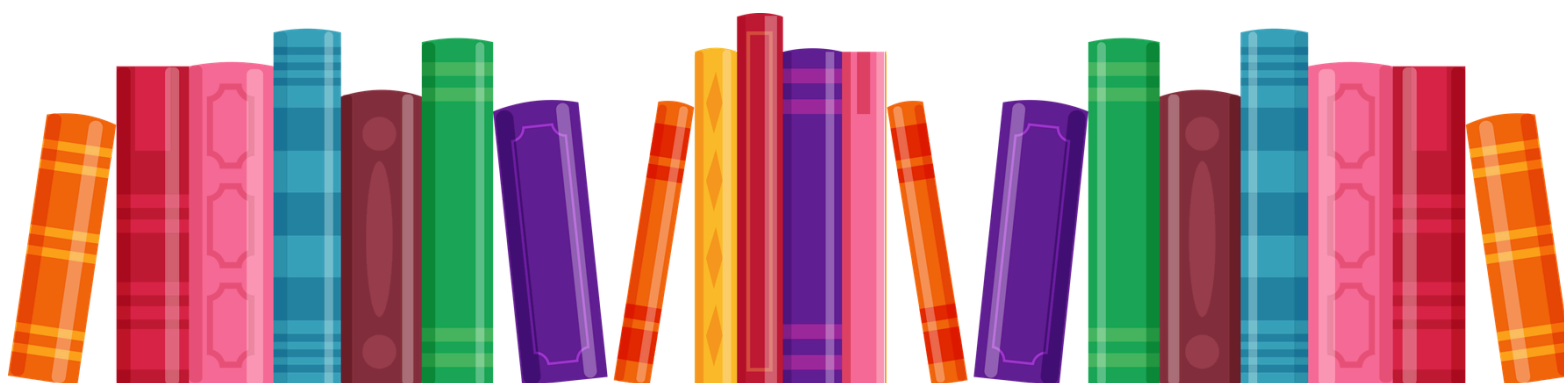
[**Mercy**](#) - is an organisation dedicated to Christian mental health and wellbeing, and they offer advice on understanding and embracing neurodiversity from a Christian perspective

[**Theology and Neurodiversity Project**](#) - provides information and resources for Christian churches and organisations on neurodivergence, autism and ADHD from a faith-based perspective

[**Association of Certified Biblical Counsellors**](#) - has an online website that offers essays and resources to help build a biblical understanding of neurodivergence

[**Scripture Union**](#) - offers mental health and well-being training, workshops, and resources for Christian organisations and churches, and it is accredited by the secular mental health charity MIND

[**Headstrong**](#) - offers information, a free youth work plan, a specially designed App, and faith-led mental well-being resources. The Headstrong project and service are provided by the Christian organisation 'Youth Scape' and the 'Mind and Soul Foundation'



VOLUNTEER NOW

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The creation of this toolkit was funded by
The Education Authority and its content supported by
Youth Link NI and Youth Initiatives



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