

## Toolkit:

# How to involve young people in parks and green space community groups

## Description

This toolkit looks at the key benefits for involving young people in a green space community group, also known as a 'Friends of the Park' group. It discusses the importance of involving young people, how to get them involved and keep them motivated, key legislation when involving them and ways to evaluate progress. Along the way there will be references to key organisations to get involved with and to get further information from, as well as documented case studies from the GreenSpace events programme 'Park It!' where the team worked directly with young volunteers to plan community events in their local park.

## Why involve young people?

A local voluntary group ideally needs to reflect the community's needs and unless all sectors of the community are consulted, this may not be the case. Young people are often one of the key user groups of a park or green space. Therefore a local voluntary group working with a particular site should ideally reflect their personal needs as well as all other user groups, including young people.

Involving young people in the day-to-day activities of a 'Friends of group' can help deliver real benefits to the group, the young volunteers and the wider community.

### Benefits for a community group:

- Energy, inspiration and enthusiasm
- Young people can often offer a different set of skills to adults
- May bring new ideas
- Able to relate to other young people in the community and reflect their needs
- Provide a bridge between older and younger members of the group
- Help to ensure sustainability of the group
- May attract other young people to join the group
- Have pride in their local park – this may help to reduce anti-social behaviour
- Increased numbers of volunteers

### Benefits for young people:

- An opportunity to have fun outside the school environment
- A healthy opportunity (eg tackling obesity through getting active and involved in their park)
- Educational opportunities – learn through doing; a compliment to formal education
- Good for the CV
- Development of good citizenship skills
- Personal and social development
- A good opportunity to meet new friends

## Funding opportunities

Involving young people in your group's day-to-day activities can open many doors to potential funding. There is currently a wealth of grant-giving bodies out there keen to fund projects involving young volunteers. Here are a few examples:

### Awards for All

Awards for All is a Lottery grants scheme for local communities. It awards grants of between £300 and £10,000 for people to take part in art, sport, heritage and community activities, and projects that promote education, the environment and health in the local community. There are different schemes for each of the four countries of the UK. You will be told if you are successful or not within eight weeks.

To find out about Awards for All in your country, visit [www.awardsforall.org.uk](http://www.awardsforall.org.uk)

### The Young People's Fund

Part of the Big Lottery Fund and aims to support projects that will improve local communities and offer more opportunities to young people. The Fund wants young people to come up with ideas for projects and to be involved in making them happen. They also want to encourage the involvement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Visit [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/programmes](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/programmes) for more information

### Young Roots

Part of the Heritage Lottery Fund and offers grants of between £5,000 and £25,000 to projects that involve 13-20 year olds in finding out about their heritage, developing skills, building confidence and promoting community involvement.

For more information, visit [www.hlf.org.uk/english/howtoapply/ourgrantgivingprogrammes](http://www.hlf.org.uk/english/howtoapply/ourgrantgivingprogrammes)

### Community Champions Fund

The fund is designed to increase the skills levels of individuals, including young people, to enable them to act as inspirational figures, community entrepreneurs, and community mentors / leaders, in order to increase community involvement in regeneration and learning activity. Often, a small amount of support is given at a crucial time, for example, the fund has provided training in giving presentations, or enabled individuals to attend conferences that are relevant to what they are trying to do in their community.

For more information, visit [www.dfes.gov.uk/communitychampions](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/communitychampions)

### Local Network Fund for Children and Young People

Grants specifically for small voluntary organisations working with children and young people of between £250 and £7000.

For more information and an application pack, call the National Call Centre on 0845 113 0161 or visit [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/localnetworkfund](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/localnetworkfund)

## V

V recently announced details of funding for community organisations to create new volunteering opportunities for young people. Organisations can apply for funding to deliver full-time, part-time and taster volunteering opportunities for young people aged 16-25.

Visit [www.wearev.com](http://www.wearev.com) for more information

### **Help Yourselfs**

Help Yourselfs is a scheme set up by Save the Children and British Gas that aims to get young people involved in dynamic and lasting community projects. They give away awards of up to £1,000, as well as a small number of grants of up to £3,000 for projects and activities that help excluded and isolated children and young people.

See their website for ideas for projects, advice on planning them, and instructions on making them happen at [www.helpyourselfs.org.uk](http://www.helpyourselfs.org.uk)

### **The Princes Trust Community Cash Awards**

Community Cash Awards are grants of up to £5,000 to help young people set up a project that will benefit their community. The project needs to be one that will improve life in a local community in the UK. Maybe a new basketball court, a music studio, a youth club, sex education workshops in schools, a youth advisory board, even a local magazine.

For more information, visit [www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk)

### **Transforming Lives**

Run by the Camelot Foundation, Transforming Lives aims to work with organisations that support young parents or those at risk of becoming young parents, young asylum seekers, young people with mental health problems and young disabled people. Projects should involve imaginative ideas for engaging young people aged between 11 and 25 in community life and must share Camelot's values and commitment to change. Funding of between £10,000 and £90,000 is available.

For more information, visit [www.camelotfoundation.org.uk](http://www.camelotfoundation.org.uk)

# Ways to involve young people

## Aspirations for volunteering

While many young people have positive views of volunteering, such as the opportunity to help people out, be a good citizen and a way to gain skills and experience, unfortunately some still regard volunteering as limited to menial jobs in charity shops or hospitals, or as boring. At the same time, many young people already give time in their community but do not regard their efforts, in sports coaching or other fields, as volunteering.

Young people are willing to volunteer if fulfilling and interesting roles are provided. More positive experiences of voluntary activity are the best way to combat negative stereotypes of volunteering, according to the national charity TimeBank. It also believes that volunteering opportunities need to present themselves as progressive, respected, relevant and beneficial both to themselves and to the community. These are all things to bear in mind when promoting voluntary opportunities within a community group.

## Recruiting young volunteers

More young people could get involved if they had a greater awareness of:

- The potential benefits of volunteering
- What they can gain from the experience
- What is available
- How to get involved

Young people say they would be motivated to volunteer by being told more about what they can gain from it themselves. So it is advisable to spell out in any advertisements or promotional material, the benefits to them as well as the benefits to the community. Highlighted benefits could be skills development, work experience, a reference and accreditation, something to put on a CV or simply free sweets and ice cream!

Community groups can promote youth volunteering opportunities in the places young people are likely to use e.g. youth/community centres, leisure centres and shopping centres, or talking to young people in youth clubs or schools. Offering young people many different ways to respond, such as phone, text, email, online, post and in person can increase access.

## Retaining young volunteers

If young volunteers have a good experience, they are much more likely to stay or at least return to your group at a later date. Retaining young volunteers is similar to retaining any volunteers, but they may be more motivated by qualifications, award schemes and having fun than older volunteers. But remember, don't expect them to stay forever, many will go to university or you will lose them while they establish their career.

Have a volunteer coordinator who has a particular responsibility to look after young people (perhaps acting as a mentor), who keeps the young people motivated and busy within the group. Don't be worried about giving young people responsibility if they want it.

A great way to keep young volunteers motivated and keen is to ensure the group recognise their achievements and make them feel valued. Here are a few ideas to help do this:

- Send letters to parents and schools
- Send articles for school papers or to local newsletters
- Nominate for community and civic awards
- Provide letters of documentation so they can include them with scholarship, apprenticeship, college and job applications
- Interject some fun! Find innovative fun ways to say thank you and lighten up the environment
- Don't wait for an annual recognition event, give recognition frequently and consistently
- Be personal – recognise their individual achievements and contributions
- Provide lots of food and treats at volunteering activities

## **Different ways to communicate**

There are many different ways of communicating. The most common forms of communication tend to be with verbal and face-to-face contact. Face to face contact can take place through workshops in schools, youth groups, after-school clubs, drama and arts clubs, faith groups and other interest groups. It can also take place through street stalls and festivals.

There are also many effective ways to get a message across to young people without actually being present. Non face-to-face communication can take place though:

- Magazines, newspapers and youth-oriented publications
- Radio (your local area may have a community-based radio project running)
- Internet (use your own community group and local authority websites or communicate your message through youth-oriented websites in the area)
- Posters and design-work
- Flyers with youth-oriented messages
- Displays in schools (schools often have themed weeks such as Arts or Fitness so try to creatively tie in your group's work with these)

## **Approaching schools, clubs and organisations**

When looking to recruit young volunteers, GreenSpace have found it to be much easier to link in with existing groups of young people, such as schools, clubs or organisations, rather trying to set up a new group from scratch. Remember to use existing links within your group.

To find contact details for local schools, contact your Local Education Authority (LEA) or visit [www.schoolswebdirectory.co.uk](http://www.schoolswebdirectory.co.uk). To find contact details for local youth clubs / organisations, search the internet or contact the local Development Education Centre (DEC) who should be able to advise you. Visit [www.dea.org.uk/dec/](http://www.dea.org.uk/dec/) for a complete list.

When approaching a school, club or organisation, be clear why you are contacting them. To make initial contact, telephone them, explaining that your community group are interested in working with young volunteers in the local community and to what extent, for example hands-on environmental work, community consultation, ideas development etc. Try to obtain a relevant contact, so you can write to them directly with your ideas.

Friends of the Earth say that writing to a named contact and enclosing information about the local group with contact details, a questionnaire for the teacher/youth worker to indicate their interest, details on what you can talk about and a stamped addressed envelope can increase the response rate. Following up your letter with a phone call is essential in order to maintain regular contact and keep the organisation's attention on your group. Remember that when calling a teacher, phone at lunch time or after 3.30pm.

## **Tips when planning a session**

Talking to young people can be challenging, rewarding and enjoyable and by remembering a few key things, need not be scary.

Know your audience

- How old are they?
- Do they already know about the topic?
- Think back to when you were that age. What was most important to you?

## Be prepared

- How long is your session?
- Open your session with a bang!
- What methods are you going to use?
- Have a backup activity in case things go more quickly than expected
- How are you going to round off your session?
- What resources do you need? Who will provide them?
- Will a teacher / youth leader / parents be present in your session?

## In a school/youth club

- Be relaxed and enthusiastic
- Speak to young people as you would adults
- Answer questions, if you don't know, say so and offer to find out
- Encourage all participants to speak, and listen to their points of view
- Explain any technical points you make
- Use props or visual aids where possible
- Use a variety of techniques for short attention spans

If planning to go into a school, it is often beneficial to link the session to the National Curriculum. This will make it easier for teachers to accommodate the visit and helps to provide focus to the session.

## **Taster sessions**

Taster sessions offer a short-term, structured activity over a few hours, a day, a weekend, a week or maybe longer and are a great way to recruit new volunteers to your group. Here are a few examples:

### Taskforce

A group of young volunteers working together over the course of a day, weekend or longer to meet community needs e.g. cleaning and painting a play area for the use of local children and parents.

### Mass volunteering day

A very large group working together on a single task e.g. 150 Millennium Volunteers removing litter and debris from a local beach.

### Give it a go day

The chance to try out a variety of different activities e.g. a fun day designed to attract first time volunteers involving different games, activities and tasks.

### Shadowing

Following a qualified person or fellow volunteer to discover if a particular role would suit e.g. attending a mentoring session as an observer before deciding to become a volunteer mentor themselves.

## Methods of facilitation

Many Friends of parks groups develop their activities and projects around discussions at committee meetings. This is a good method for encouraging participation but be aware that some volunteers may be reluctant to speak out in front of more confident, mature members. Therefore, when involving a range of age groups in a voluntary group it is important to use a variety of different facilitation methods in order to keep the younger members motivated and involved.

Here are a few key things to consider before planning your methods of facilitation:

- Consider the size of the group and remember that some methods only work with smaller groups.
- What age are the volunteers? Younger volunteers have a shorter attention span and respond well to games and fun group activities.
- Don't always assume a group of 13 year-olds will have the same ability level or motivation, try and find out some background information from a teacher or parent before starting to plan activities.

## Participation methods

Once these have been considered, the methods adopted to encourage participation need to be decided upon. Here is a list and description of some of the most common of these:

### Group work

Often used for planning activities, practical or project work. It can refer to either large or small group work.

### Role-play

Act out a situation eg public meeting to discuss the planning of a new playground. Role plays are good for developing opinions and encouraging young volunteers to look at a situation through a new perspective. Great for practicing communication skills.

### Debate

When discussing a topic that has a strong argument for and against, split the group, one side presents the case for and the other side, the case against. Once both sides have presented, the group takes a vote. Debates can be incredibly thought provoking, but are often time consuming and an individual's skill is essential to facilitate the process.

### Demonstration and practical

Used to demonstrate a practical skill after which the volunteers will carry out a practical session, e.g. planting a flower bed or clearing a stream.

### Games

Games are a learning situation with an element of competition. For young children, they are used to make learning fun and keep them interested, and for older volunteers they can be used as a team building exercise.

## Examples of activities

Within these methods, there are a huge number of activities that can be used. Below are a few examples that the Park It! team at GreenSpace have used with Young Friends of Groups in the past:

### Time machine

Ask everyone to close their eyes and think about their local park or green space. What is it like? What are the visitors like? What is the weather like? What are the facilities like? How are people getting there? Etc. Then ask them to imagine the same place in 40 years time. How has it changed? – Ask the same questions as above. Get people to feedback on their vision. If it was a good vision, how can we ensure it happens; if negative, how can we prevent it from happening?

### Wishing tree

Make a paper representation of a bare tree. Cut out paper leaves and ask people to write one thing on a leaf that they would like to see happen for the benefit of the park. Then cut out paper apples and ask people to write one thing that they could do to make their wish come true. Stick the leaves and apples on the tree. Leaves on the ground could represent environmental problems/bad things that have been done to the park.

### Agree/Disagree or True/False

Use large cards with agree/disagree or true/false written on them. Place the cards at opposite ends of a room. Read out a statement, such as dogs should be banned from the park, or CCTV should be installed, and ask young people to run to the card – whether it be Agree or Disagree. Discuss. Alternatively, cut out statements and give out to groups to discuss, arrange and give feedback.

### Line of preference

Alternative approach to the activity above. On large cards write different options and place at different places around the room. Ask people to walk towards the one they prefer the most and discuss their preferences. For example, ask ‘what would you like to see more in the park?’ and all present then walk towards either ‘formal planting’ or a ‘wild flower meadow’.

### Creativity

Write a press release or a story. Make a video or a story board. Design posters and leaflets, or create a website. The materials produced can either be used for public information or could form a competition, e.g. approach a school and ask the students to design a poster / come up with title for a community event in their park – the winner wins a prize and gets publicity.

### Art in the Park

Ask a group of young people to imagine what they would like the park to look like in 10 years time – what facilities would they like to see there? How could the park be designed to reach more of the public’s needs? Use a range of art and craft materials and create an image of the park – painting / park in a shoe box / collage etc. Give feedback about individual aspirations.

### Hands-on site planning

To use when planning an event in a park or green space. After deciding with a group of young people what infrastructure and activities the event will consist of, visit the site and tape out where the key infrastructure could be located. Decide whether the event plan looks too spread out / cramped and if so, re-plan the site until a compromise is made. This helps younger people to visualise the event site without having to base the plan around a two dimensional map. It can also generate interesting discussions about how parklets work!

# Legalities

## Child protection

The whole issue of child protection is extremely important to Friends of Parks groups when more and more local group members work with young people. This is not only to ensure that the children who are coming into contact with group members are protected and that group members are working in as safe a way as possible, but also to keep group members safe from possible allegations and difficult situations.

## CRB Checks

Group members working directly with young people may need to have an appropriate security check (also known as disclosure) carried out by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). The current legislation does not allow the self-employed or individuals to apply for a CRB check on themselves; however it is likely that the local authority / school / youth group may request it.

If you have been asked to apply for a CRB check, speak to the person who asked you to apply as they will be able to provide you with the application form. The CRB has developed a guide that may answer some of your questions, called 'Applicant's Guide to the CRB's Disclosure Service' available in the Resource Library on their website ([www.crb.gov.uk](http://www.crb.gov.uk)). The form should not take more than half an hour to complete and you can always contact the local authority or CRB for advice.

In accordance with CRB recommendations, security checks from previous employers should not be accepted.

## Codes of Conduct

Child protection should be everyone's responsibility. A written code of conduct for anyone working with young people should outline good practice – all involved must agree to boundaries within which a safe professional relationship can occur. Here is an example of the types of boundaries included in a Code of Conduct when working with young people:

- Do not engage in, or allow toward them, inappropriate verbal or physical contact, suggestive remarks, gestures or touching
- Always be visible to other people when working with a young person
- Avoid spending excessive time with an individual young person
- Familiarise yourselves with and follow procedures for, what to do if they suspect a young person is being abused, if a young person discloses abuse or if an allegation of abuse is made against them

A good example of a Code of Conduct is 'Safe from Harm – Good Practice for Adults in Guiding' produced by Girlguiding UK. It is available to download online at [www.girlguiding.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk).

## Risk assessments

A risk assessment is nothing more than a careful examination of potential dangers or vulnerabilities that could cause harm to people. Potential hazards are dealt with by taking adequate precautions in order to minimise the risk of harm. Risk assessment is an important factor in keeping young people safe.

It is good practice to involve young people in the risk assessment and risk management process. Young people who are involved in the planning and organising of an activity are more likely to be well prepared, and therefore will be able to make more informed decisions, resulting in them being less at risk.

For guidance and a template sample of a risk assessment, refer to the GreenSpace publication 'Plan It!' at [www.green-space.org.uk/community](http://www.green-space.org.uk/community).

## **Insurance**

If young volunteers are involved in your organisation, it is important to ensure your insurance policy covers them. This can be done by:

- Ensuring that your policy mentions volunteers explicitly; they may not be covered automatically
- Check that your policy covers volunteers as young as 14, some have a minimum age of 16 or 18
- Check your policy periodically; Volunteering England recommends that every organisation should check its insurance cover at least once a year
- Your public liability insurance should cover volunteers. You may also want to provide professional liability or personal accident insurance, depending on the type of work volunteers are doing

## **Evaluating your progress**

As with any volunteering activity, it is important to evaluate throughout, recognising lessons learnt to ensure that your group learns from the experience and develops its skills. However, asking young volunteers to attend an evaluation meeting or a de-brief session may not inspire them to take part. As an alternative, think of ways your group could use some of the participation methods mentioned earlier with the young members to achieve constructive feedback. For example, form a debate, splitting the group in two where one side states how the project was successful, and the other how it wasn't.

## **Where to get further information**

On the GreenSpace website ([www.green-space.org.uk](http://www.green-space.org.uk)) there are over 30 case studies from previous Park It! events that took place between 2005 and 2007. Many of the groups involved either worked closely with young people or were led by young people throughout the planning and delivery of the day.

In particular, in 2006 Park It! worked with the Young Friends of Southwark Park, aged between 8 and 12 to plan and host an event for young people in Southwark Park, London. Also, in 2007 Park It! worked alongside the Young Friends of Ponciau Banks Park in Wrexham, North Wales, to deliver a live music event for all the community, which was coordinated by a 17 year old young man.

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## Useful organisations

### Community Service Volunteers (CSV)

Tel: 0207 278 6601

Website: [www.csv.org.uk](http://www.csv.org.uk)

### Connexions

Tel: 080 8001 3219

Website: [www.connexions.gov.uk](http://www.connexions.gov.uk)

### Criminal Records Bureau

Tel: 0870 9090 811

Website: [www.crb.gov.uk](http://www.crb.gov.uk)

### Development Education Association

Tel: 0207 812 1282

Website: [www.dea.org.uk](http://www.dea.org.uk)

### Department for Education and Skills

Tel: 0870 000 2288

Website: [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk)

### Eco Schools

Tel: 01942 612 621

Website: [www.ecoschools.org.uk](http://www.ecoschools.org.uk)

### Friends of the Earth

Tel: 020 7490 1555

Website: [www.foe.co.uk](http://www.foe.co.uk)

### Girlguiding UK

Tel: 020 7834 6242

Website: [www.girlguiding.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk)

### Local Government Association

Tel: 020 7664 3131

Website: [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

### National Curriculum

Website: [www.nc.uk.net](http://www.nc.uk.net)

### National Youth Agency

Tel: 0116 242 7350

Website: [www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk)

### Prince's Trust

Tel: 0800 842 842

Website: [www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk)

### ProHelp

Tel: 0870 600 2482

Website: [www.prohelp.org.uk](http://www.prohelp.org.uk)

### Russell Commission

Tel: 020 7084 8131

Email: [info@russellcommission.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:info@russellcommission.gsi.gov.uk)

Website: <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/russellcommission/index.html>

### Scout Association Information Centre

Tel: 0845 300 11818

Website: [www.scouts.org.uk](http://www.scouts.org.uk)

### Student Volunteering England

Tel: 0845 305 6979

Email: [info@studentvolunteering.org.uk](mailto:info@studentvolunteering.org.uk)

Website: [www.studentvolunteering.org.uk](http://www.studentvolunteering.org.uk)

### The Duke of Edinburgh's Award

Tel: 01753 727400

Website: [www.theaward.org](http://www.theaward.org)

### TimeBank

Tel: 0845 456 1668

Website: [www.timebank.org.uk](http://www.timebank.org.uk)

### UK Youth

Tel: 0207 242 4045

Website: [www.ukyouth.org](http://www.ukyouth.org)

### V

Tel: 0207 960 7000

Website: [www.wearev.com](http://www.wearev.com)

### Volunteering England

Tel: 0845 305 6979

Email: [volunteering@volunteeringengland.org](mailto:volunteering@volunteeringengland.org)

Website: [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)

### Wildlife Trusts UK

Tel: 0870 036 7711

Website: [www.wildlifewatch.org.uk](http://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk)

### Young People's Trust for the Environment and Nature Conservation

Tel: 01460 249 163

Website: [www.yptenc.org.uk](http://www.yptenc.org.uk)

### Youth Active

Tel: 020 78436455

Email: [admin@youthactive.org](mailto:admin@youthactive.org)

Website: [www.youthactive.org](http://www.youthactive.org)