

## ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE 'SELDOM HEARD' – APPENDIX TO YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TOOLKIT

Seldom heard young people are those “who are often left out of, or excluded from social action” and include young people who are from black and minority ethnic groups, who are disabled, have long term health conditions or special education needs; looked after, or care leavers; those who are, or have been excluded from school, those who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) and those living in poverty or deprivation.<sup>1</sup>

When thinking about engaging young people from these groups, a useful starting point is to consider your organisation: How ‘hard to reach’ is your organisation for young people? Does your organisation provide an inviting environment, and offer opportunities that are attractive and inclusive? Do workers have the knowledge, skills and confidence to reach out to a diverse range of young people?

Volunteering Matters youth-led [Positive Futures](#) programme has been engaging disadvantaged and ‘seldom heard’ young people in youth social action in Hackney since 2009, expanding to Haringey and Tower Hamlets in 2016. This has encompassed a number of social action projects in health and social care, working with the local hospice, care homes and day care centres.

All young volunteers have an induction into volunteering and receive appropriate training, which includes project planning, health and safety, first aid, safeguarding, risk assessment and customer service. Based on our experience with Positive Futures, we make the following recommendations for engaging seldom heard young people:

- Go to where young people are, and where they feel at home. Seek them out, don't expect them to come to you. Young people who approach a health/social care setting directly are likely to be well

supported and motivated, perhaps with an interest in an NHS career already. Others, who may lack support and have low aspirations, are unlikely to make a direct approach, but their skills and confidence could be nurtured and developed through social action.

- Look further than schools and colleges, approach youth hubs / youth centres. Many will have detached youth workers who engage young people on the street who are at elevated risk (e.g. at risk of violence). Establish a relationship with staff, and from here, connect with young people. This may be done through a mix of formal approaches (e.g. talking to a group of young people about social action in health and social care) and informal approaches (being available at the centre to talk to young people and answer questions). Also consider working with specialist organisations, such as the youth offending team, local authority leaving care team, refugee support teams to pilot approaches to engaging their client group in social action.
- Tailor your offer to the young person as far as possible. Provide a choice of roles and be flexible in the duration, timing and commitment. Ideally, involve the young person in designing their own role.
- Tap into the interests of the young person. For example, some East London Youth Hubs successfully engage young men by offering music studio facilities. Where young people have a passion for music, they might be interested in performing in a health or social care setting. One off experiences like this can introduce young people to health and social care and could be a route into other roles, and career pathways.

<sup>1</sup> Embedding inclusive practices in opportunities for youth social action, The National Development Team for Inclusion and #IWill

- Provide opportunities for young people to volunteer in groups or pairs and with friends, as a way to build their confidence. Alternatively, staff who have built a positive relationship with a young person could provide support.
- In order to be inclusive, be prepared to invest time in engaging and supporting a young person. It may take several weeks for an initial interest to turn into practical action, and there may be false starts along the way. Be consistent in your communication over this time. Provide ongoing support to volunteers through catch up meetings and build in time for reflection. Have an open door policy, so that young people know they can come to you for support.
- If, as a health or social care setting, you don't have the resource to fully support young people, consider developing partnerships with other programmes or organisations which could do this on your behalf. Examples could include:
  - A supported volunteering scheme, where community volunteers support young people with disabilities to volunteer.
  - A mentoring/befriending programme, such as Independent Visitors for young people in care, where the mentor or befriender could support the young person in volunteering.
  - Initiatives such as Positive Futures or Envision's [Community Apprentices](#), where another organisation can facilitate social action and support the young volunteers.

For an in-depth review of “what works” in enabling the full participation of children and young people who risk being excluded from opportunities for youth social action, see the 2014 [Report](#) from the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) in conjunction with #iwill and the PearsFoundation.

### Wayside Day Centre

Volunteering Matters recruited and supported two young women (17-18 years old) from BME communities, both with English as an additional language, into the Positive Futures programme. Both were interested in building their confidence and improving their English language, and were keen to volunteer together. One was also interested in working in social care. Volunteering Matters put them in touch with the Hackney Wayside Day Centre which provides social interaction and day time activities for older residents, often in their 80s and 90s. The young women had the idea of organising a tea party. They first met with the Volunteering Matters Project Officer to develop their ideas. They subsequently met with the Centre Manager and residents to plan the event. On the day, 10 service users attended and activities which the volunteers organised which included a ‘dance-off’. Volunteering Matters supported the Centre in undertaking a risk assessment for the volunteering activity, and ensured that they had the appropriate policies and procedures in place for engaging young volunteers.

The Centre Manager said that they were impressed at how the young women interacted with their service users. The Centre would like to do more with young volunteers, but don't have the staff time to recruit and coordinate the volunteering experience. They therefore value the opportunity to engage with the Positive Futures programme.

### Redmond Community Centre

Volunteering Matters facilitated the involvement of six young people (aged 15-18), in supporting a lunch club for older people at the Redmond Community Centre, Hackney. The volunteers, most of whom had English as an additional language, undertook a variety of activities including preparing and serving food, befriending and playing games with lunch club members. Some also helped with the garden, which was much appreciated by the lunch club, as the young people were able to tackle some of the more physical jobs.