

Youth Volunteer Engagement

Skills Development & Social Inclusion

Youth engagement is the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of him or herself. The kind of activity in which the youth is engaged can be almost anything – sports, the arts, music, volunteer work, politics and social-activism – and it can occur in almost any kind of setting.

- Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

Youth Volunteering

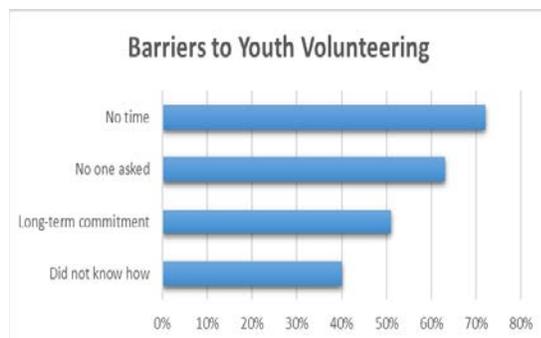
Volunteering helps people and communities reach their potential. With 44% of Canadians 15 years of age and older volunteering an average of 154 hours each year, **youth (aged 15-24 years) are leading the way with a volunteer rate of 55%.**

Common characteristics

Many youth volunteers:

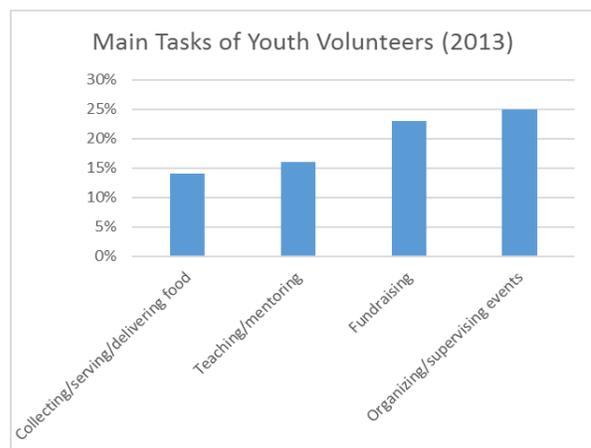
- Are flexible and receptive to new ideas
- Are energetic and enthusiastic with high levels of vitality
- Are both technologically savvy and responsive to online communications
- Prefer peer camaraderie and enjoy meeting new people
- See volunteering as a bridge that supports their search for employment, skills development and networking
- Are sensitive to perceived age discrimination
- Tend to favour less formal avenues

Barriers



Tasks

Youth volunteer their time in a variety of ways. The graph below illustrates the top four volunteer tasks that youth take on. The exception is in volunteer opportunities that involve driving, office work and, most notably, serving on boards and committees.



Motivations

The main motivations for youth volunteering are:

- To contribute to the community;
- to use skills;
- to explore their own strengths;
- and to find job opportunities.

With high youth unemployment rates, volunteering offers a great deal to youth, not only to enhance their employability but also to maintain their sense of purpose and self-worth as well as maintain some structure in their days.

Skills Development

Volunteering is a great vehicle for learning new skills, gaining experience and exploring interests. Given the stage in life, it is natural that younger volunteers are interested in developing skills and in career development.

Facilitating skills-transfer

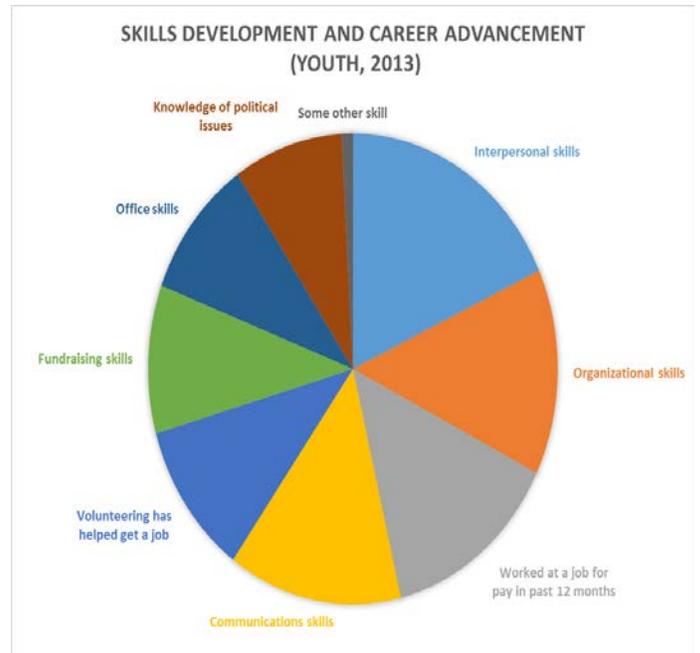
Youth report that volunteering helps them develop interpersonal skills, organizational skills and communications skills and that it is instrumental in helping them get a job.

The top benefit of volunteering that youth report is the development of interpersonal skills (82%), followed by organizational skills (64%) and communications skills (62%). Nearly half (48%) of youth volunteers indicated that volunteering has helped them find a job.

Key Strategies

Various strategies have emerged to facilitate skills-transfer through volunteer opportunities. Such strategies include:

- Linking youth to organizations and activities that are aligned with their **passions, interests and career aspirations**
- Encouraging **intergenerational mentorship**: retired professionals can mentor youth volunteers to take on roles in organizations and impart valuable skills and knowledge



Many volunteer opportunities offer youth a head start in their professional lives. Employers seek out employees who demonstrate they are able to adapt to new environments and are willing to learn new skills.

- Building the Bridge for Youth Engagement,
Volunteer Canada

Social Inclusion

Volunteering is considered to be a significant form of youth engagement in that it takes a person outside of themselves with the opportunity to join others in **common pursuits**. In addition to the increased capacity and social inclusion, engaged youth have **decreased incidences of a range of health and social issues** such as addictions, depression, homelessness and conflicts with the law.

Social inclusion means welcoming people into current structures while being open to people contributing to the evolving structures.

In order to foster the social inclusion of youth, organizations must develop **intentional strategies** to embrace generational and other demographical shifts.

A sense of belonging

Feeling valued for what one has to offer and being included in decision-making enhance a sense of connection and belonging. Rather than seeing themselves as recipients of services, support, and care, youth see themselves in a new light – as someone who can provide services, support and caring to others. This shifting self-image enhances self-esteem and builds confidence in other areas of life. It also helps people see youth in new ways and that, in turn, helps **alleviate ageism** and negative youth stereotyping.

Inspiring Practices

Various inspiring practices have emerged to increase the social inclusion of youth. They can be grouped into four clusters:

1. **Inclusive Organizational Culture:**
Organizations that are welcoming and inclusive of people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds
2. **Designated Youth Volunteer/Youth Engagement Programs:**
Organizations that have been established specifically to promote

youth engagement or youth volunteering or organizations that have a youth engagement or youth volunteering program

3. **Youth Engagement Tool Kits:**
Kits that promote inclusive organizational cultures as well as designated youth engagement programs and provide useful templates for attracting and integrating youth
4. **Youth Engagement Funding Programs:**
Funding programs or streams on youth engagement (i.e. for youth leadership programs or youth engagement strategies)

Key Strategies

1. Change the narrative about youth engagement from how do “we” engage youth to how do “we all” engage with each other
2. Recognize that youth are already engaged with the highest (formal) volunteer rate
3. Expand the definition of volunteering to capture informal volunteering and organic movements
4. Focus on creating a welcoming and inclusive organizational cultures
5. Address the barriers identified by youth – that no one has asked them to volunteer and/or that they do not know how to find a volunteer opportunity