



# Volunteering in Children's Society Youth Clubs

Experiences from the West Midlands

Final Report

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# 1. Introduction

This report documents the learning from the Institute for Volunteering Research's (IVR's) qualitative research of volunteering in two youth clubs in the West Midlands.

## 1.1. Background to the project

The Children's Society (TCS) approached IVR in 2013 to carry out independent research related to the impact of volunteering within one of its West Midlands Programmes. The programme works with vulnerable young migrants between the ages of 14-21, the majority of whom have come to the UK as young refugees without their families. TCS run a youth club for these young people to offer emotional and social support (through workshops, sports and activities) information, advice and guidance. Although there are paid staff at the youth clubs, volunteers play a key role in these clubs to provide support and friendship to young people. The project runs two weekly youth clubs in Birmingham and Coventry which support the young people to integrate in to their local communities. The work aims to support young people to gain skills to support independent living.

## 1.2. Evaluation aims and objectives

The overall aim of the evaluation was to research the value of volunteering and its unique contribution to TCS, volunteers and young people themselves, with specific reference to volunteer delivery within the two youth clubs. There were several specific objectives within this aim which were to explore:

1. A description of the youth clubs including the breadth and depth of services delivered by volunteers in the two youth clubs and how volunteering is delivered;



2. Perception of the impact of volunteering on:
  - a. The volunteers
  - b. Children and young people supported by volunteers
3. The effectiveness of the support provided to volunteers and their management;
4. The added-value of volunteering:
  - a. Differences in what volunteers and staff can, should and do undertake
  - b. The unique contribution of volunteers, as opposed to paid staff
  - c. The potential limits to volunteer involvement, appropriateness, and challenges (including relationships between paid staff and volunteers)
5. Lessons, recommendations and learning for the two youth clubs and for other clubs throughout the country.

### 1.3. Methodology

A multi-dimensional approach was taken to answer the research aims and objectives from a variety of perspectives described below.

1. **Analysis of existing data** to describe the number of young people, age, ethnicity, gender, local authority and length of time registered at the club.
2. **Eight telephone interviews with volunteers** (three in Coventry, five in Birmingham) to explore their experiences of volunteering, the support they have received, their relationship to and with paid staff, perceived differences between their role and value and that of paid staff, and perceptions of impact. Most of the volunteers we interviewed were employed full-time and were time-pressed, taking time out from other commitments to speak to us. Length of interviews varied from 20 to 60 minutes, with most lasting 30 minutes. Interviewees were given a £20 voucher as a 'thank you' for their time.
  - **Three snapshot case studies of volunteers** based on the interviews are contained within the appendices, and provide a snapshot of their motivations and expectations



3. **Three interviews with key staff members** including the Programme Manager, Project Worker and Counsellor (two face-to-face, one by telephone). These interviews explored staff experiences of working with and supporting volunteers, perceptions of how volunteers and staff differ, and opinions on the value of volunteering to the youth club.
4. **Fourteen informal conversations with young people** (nine in Coventry, five in Birmingham). These conversations focused on exploring perceptions of impact and experiences of being supported by volunteers, and views on differences between paid staff and volunteers. The data were collected in one visit to each youth club on 26 and 27 February 2014.
5. Some **observational data** were obtained during the youth club sessions to understand how the clubs are organised and operate. These are incorporated into this report although care has been taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of young people.
6. On 29 May 2014 we held a **half-day deliberative workshop** at TCS office in Birmingham which was attended by 10 staff from TCS. The purpose of this was to discuss emergent findings, their implications for the development of volunteering within TCS, and any recommendations or learning. Volunteers were invited by TCS but none were able to attend. The outcomes of this workshop have been fed into this report where possible, with further notes in the appendices.

Prior to the youth club fieldwork visits, guidance was produced covering ethical issues for consideration (e.g. data anonymisation and safeguarding issues) which was approved by TCS and in-line with their policies. No respondents have been identified in this report; where relevant, pseudonyms have been used. Topic guides used in data collection can be found in the appendices.



#### 1.4. Scope and limitations

The final methodology evolved during project initiation meetings and was adapted from the original proposal to suit the needs of stakeholders. Specifically some of the changes included:

- We agreed not to calculate the Volunteer Investment and Value Audit (VIVA) which would have provided a cost-benefit analysis of the volunteering service because not all the required data was available within the timeframe of the research.
- It was considered that it would be disruptive to the youth club sessions to have a focus group with volunteers run concurrently with youth club activities and it was not possible to recruit a sufficient number of volunteers to participate in a focus group outside of these times as many had other commitments such as full-time work. We therefore conducted telephone interviews rather than a focus group in order to understand the volunteer perspective.
- We agreed not to conduct a focus group with young people due to mixed levels of English language skills.
- The online survey with families was cancelled, as agreed by all, as most young people were unaccompanied. We considered a survey or interviews with social workers; however it was felt that engagement would be too low to obtain meaningful data.

Limitations to our approach included:

- While we invited all staff and volunteers to take part, we were unable to obtain a response from everyone within the timeframe, and consequently not everyone's views will be accounted for in this report. However, similar themes did emerge across the interviews we conducted therefore we feel confident that we have captured the key benefits and challenges of volunteering.
- We conducted informal conversations with young people however the depth of information we were able to obtain from our conversations was somewhat



limited as many respondents were not fluent in English. It should also be noted that these conversations took place ad-hoc while activities in the youth club were running and while volunteers were in close proximity thus it is possible that these factors may have influenced what young people said about the volunteers and volunteering in the club, and how open they felt they could be. Nevertheless, we have been able to validate their views to some degree through what we observed and through staff and volunteer interview data.

We have based this report on the data we were able to obtain in the timeframe; it is possible that more data may have led to additional recommendations.

The report will include sections describing the activities and structure of the youth clubs and the role of volunteers within the clubs; volunteer management within the programme; the impact of volunteering on both volunteers and service users; the value and limits of volunteering within the clubs; challenges and lessons learned and a concluding section with recommendations for the future.

## 2. The Youth Clubs

This section of the report looks at the structure and format of the youth clubs, the role of volunteers and characteristics of the people involved. It attempts to provide a descriptive account of what is being delivered at the clubs, particularly by volunteers.

### 2.1. Structure of clubs and format of sessions

The Birmingham Youth Club started in 2001, funded in part by the local Clinical Commissioning Group with the addition of a counsellor providing therapy, while the Coventry Club began in 2011 having been previously run by various charities. The funding structures of the clubs differ but they both fall under the remit of the TCS



West Midlands Programme. This programme overall involves approximately 400 volunteers on activities such as befriending children in care, helping in TCS shops and volunteering in the youth clubs. TCS values the contribution of these volunteers at more than £1 million per year. The clubs work with vulnerable young migrants between the ages of 14-21, in either Birmingham or Coventry at youth groups which take place every Wednesday and Thursday evening.

At the time of the research there were five members of paid staff associated with the clubs, although at any given time there may only be one paid staff member in the club. The Programme Manager oversees both clubs but does not have direct contact with volunteers or young people, rather a more strategic role. Both clubs also have a Project Coordinator and Project Worker. The main point of contact for volunteers is the Project Worker, who works weekly in Coventry and less frequently in Birmingham. This role is part-time (currently 15 hours per week) and the current staff person has been in post seven years in both voluntary and paid capacities. This role is responsible for co-ordinating all aspects of the clubs and dealing with more complex situations which happen during sessions as well as volunteer management including recruiting and interviewing volunteers, induction and supervision of volunteers. Birmingham also has a Counsellor (who provides individual counselling to young people) and an Administrator.

The history of the programme included substantial funding from a variety of sources. Most recently this included Big Lottery Fund and this funding ended in July 2013, which was seen as a pivotal point for the programme. Following this, the number and hours of paid staff were reduced. Prior to this there was a full time Manager and a Project Worker on 28 hours each in Coventry and Birmingham. In 2012 there were two additional full time staff as well. Staff and volunteers described the current service as a “skeleton service”. Previous funding also meant that residential trips took place as well as more one to one support work and mentoring.



The Coventry Youth Club run one evening session per week for young people on Wednesdays which staff and volunteers attend for two hours (5.30pm - 8.30pm). There was a perception that the needs of young people in Coventry are greater in some ways than in Birmingham and that young people in Coventry are more likely to experience gang violence, domestic violence or to be in care. Differences in deprivation levels and cheaper housing was felt to make Coventry “A dumping ground for young asylum seekers” and less likely to get needed support or counselling. The Coventry club includes a kitchen and pool table.

The Birmingham Youth Club run one evening session per week for young people on Thursdays which staff and volunteers attend for up to three hours (5.40pm - 8.45pm). There is a dedicated computer room, kitchen, a sports hall (which is often used for football) and a number of dedicated smaller rooms, which one respondent noted made it less sociable because the spaces were quite separate from each other.

The general format of the sessions start with volunteers setting up the venue, a volunteer will welcome the young people who arrive and sign them in. Young people arrive and leave at their own convenience during the session rather than being rigidly monitored and can freely pick and choose what they do, move between activities or decide to just sit and talk to each other or listen to music. Activities in the youth clubs include playing games (board games such as Jenga and Connect 4 and group games), cooking and eating together, sports, dance sessions, IT, socialising and signposting to additional support services (e.g. on education, health, immigration).

A volunteer is responsible for cooking the meal with young people helping. The meal is served by young people and volunteers at the end of the session when everyone eats together. After the meal, the young people leave and the venue is cleaned and furniture rearranged. Finally there is a debriefing at the end of sessions for volunteers and staff to pick up any issues or concerns which arose during the



session – some explicit problems which staff/volunteers have directly faced (e.g. a young person talking about depression), but also noted and recorded on paper are any behaviour changes they have observed in individuals (e.g. if someone is quieter than usual).

Volunteers support TCS work by giving 3-4 hours per week, three times a month at a weekly youth club, for a period of at least six months. In Birmingham, volunteers take on more responsibility generally, as the whole club is organised by volunteers and overseen by a staff member. It was thought by all we spoke to that this system worked well. There is a lead volunteer each week who emails other volunteers and coordinates who will be responsible for each activity. This is not the case in Coventry, where volunteers are less likely to take on responsibility for organising the club. Currently the Project Worker allocates roles and coordinates volunteers. It was suggested that this difference is due to there being more volunteers in Birmingham, whereas fewer volunteers in Coventry may mean that they feel less capacity and do not want to take on more responsibility. However in Birmingham there are a greater number of separate rooms which need to be covered by volunteers.

## 2.2. Volunteer roles

All participants acknowledged that the Youth Clubs would not run without volunteers – they are seen to be essential to the continued existence of the clubs. Specific volunteer roles in the clubs include:

- Set-up and close the venue before and after the club runs (including arranging furniture, doing the washing-up and cleaning the kitchen)
- Staffing the front desk to welcome and register young people
- Helping young people with their homework
- Playing games (board games and group games), and organising and supervising activities for young people (such as football in Birmingham)
- Buying food and cooking meals for the young people and involving the young people in cooking



- In Birmingham there is a computer room for the young people to use, and volunteers sometimes help the young people with IT skills
- Volunteers talk to the young people, help them to practice their English language skills
- Some offer basic advice if they feel confident to do so (e.g. practical advice and signposting to services) and refer more complex situations (e.g. mental health, information for other services) to the Project Worker
- Some help with interpreting or offer other practical skills (e.g. those with medical expertise or careers advisors)
- Coordinating volunteer roles at the club and managing the volunteer schedule

All respondents emphasised the importance of being there to listen and talk to young people, this was seen as the critical role of the volunteer. Many mentioned the general role of 'befriending' and it was clear that some volunteers have very strong relationships with the young people and the young people appreciate the interest shown in them, for example by remembering small details (e.g. asking how a family member is doing, or how their college course is going). Additionally, the role of observation was clearly a critical one. The volunteers regularly check on and monitor the young people and are sensitive to any changes in behaviour and flag this up to staff as appropriate.

Respondents felt that while there were some similarities between the roles of volunteers and staff, ultimately, staff had overall responsibility for what happened in the youth club and resolving complex issues. Volunteers in both clubs saw their main role as supporting the staff and young people and ensuring the clubs ran smoothly. While it was felt that staff and volunteers all put in as much effort as possible, it was frequently mentioned that staff had ultimate responsibility and say for what happened in the clubs and how they were run. This included dealing with practical issues such as approving money volunteers spent on food, but also more complicated issues with individual young people such as those requiring more complex support or



advice. For volunteers it was reassuring to know that staff have ultimate responsibility for the programme. The volunteers did not always feel they had the skills or confidence to deal with some of the more complex situations with young people, and so it was important for them to feel they had a safety net of a staff member to refer young people to.

### 2.3. Characteristics of volunteers

In the past year, 12 volunteers have been involved in the Coventry Club and 13 in Birmingham. Currently, there are 12 active volunteers at the youth clubs; 9 in Birmingham, 3 in Coventry; however they do not volunteer every week. Among those we interviewed:

- All were in employment or studying
- The length of service ranged from 1-7 years
- People volunteered at least once a month with some going every week or every two weeks
- The youngest volunteer is aged 22

Some volunteers had previously been involved in a different capacity- either as a staff member or beneficiary. Young people attending the clubs can go on to become volunteers if they do not attend the club for six months. Staff felt that this type of volunteer tends to be very reliable and committed because they know first-hand the positive impact of the programme.

### 2.4. Characteristics of young people

The numbers of young people (the beneficiaries) attending the clubs vary each week but average 10-15 people at the Birmingham Club and 20-30 people at Coventry. Young people attending were aged 14-21 although some are age disputed so there is a degree of flexibility around this. In the past, where there was The Big Lottery funding, there was an exit strategy at age 18 but now young people can stay on to age 21 and normally leave by the time they reach 22. Almost all of the young people



who attend the clubs were male. This was considered unsurprising among staff as it fits with the national picture of young asylum seekers<sup>1</sup> in this country. However, it was felt by staff and volunteers that having male-dominated clubs may deter young women from attending. The current set-up of the clubs might also not suit young women who may have different circumstances, needs and issues.

In Coventry, most young people find the club through friends via word of mouth and turn up on the door. In Birmingham, young people can also just turn up but they are more likely referred through social workers and agencies. These differences are likely because of the differing structures and funding of the clubs, for example that Birmingham is considered therapeutic and funded by the CCG. It was suggested by one interviewee that promoting the Coventry youth club to agencies would be difficult as there were not enough volunteers to support additional young people attending.

In Birmingham, we had data for 73 young people who had registered with the club between 2008 and 2013 and were still attending<sup>2</sup>. At the time of the research, the majority of the young people attending were from Solihull or Birmingham and almost all were Afghani and spoke Pashto.

In Coventry, we had data for 121 young people who had registered with the club between 2010 and 2014 and were still attending<sup>3</sup>. At the time of the research, most of these young people were from Warwick or Coventry. More than half were Afghani and around one in ten were Eritrean, consequently the most frequently spoken languages were Pashto, Arabic and Tigrinya.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the national picture, see [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migration-uk-asylum](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migration-uk-asylum)

<sup>2</sup> This figure excludes young people who had been formally 'exited' from the project and therefore does not represent all those who had attended during this time period.

<sup>3</sup> This figure excludes young people who had been formally 'exited' from the project and therefore does not represent all those who had attended during this time period.



### 3. Volunteer Management

This section explores the volunteer management structures and practices in place at the clubs as well as looking at volunteers' motivations for involvement and expectations, training and development needs and the relationships between paid staff and volunteers.

Volunteers we spoke to found out about volunteering in the youth clubs through three main sources: actively looking for opportunities related to the issues they care about; the local volunteering infrastructure (this includes the local CVS - Birmingham Voluntary Services Council, BVSC and the Birmingham Volunteer Centre) and through being a service user at the youth club previously. Some volunteers sought out volunteering opportunities to generally help vulnerable groups, some to work on international issues and some wanted to specifically help asylum seekers. One respondent specifically mentioned the BVSC online brochure. Opportunities to volunteer in the clubs were advertised on Do-it, the national volunteering database as well as through local infrastructure.

Previously the clubs have used a volunteer management model that could be described as formal volunteer management, which includes recruiting, training and supervising volunteers in a format that is similar to managing paid staff. This normally includes an application process, interviewing potential volunteers, providing an induction and training and formal supervisions with volunteers to support and develop them as well as reimbursing volunteers for any expenses such as meals and travel. Some of this type of volunteer support is provided through a Volunteer Services Team centrally at TCS but much of the day to day coordination of volunteers is the remit of the Project Worker at the clubs. This model of volunteer engagement relies heavily on paid staff to coordinate volunteer involvement and it is our understanding that staff have not been actively recruiting volunteers for the past



six months (although some new volunteers have joined) due to decreased capacity and lack of clarity over future funding.

The Birmingham club appear to be shifting their volunteer management model slightly so as to give volunteers more power and control to run the club and coordinate themselves. This could be described as a 'volunteer volunteer-coordinator' style. The Coventry club have particularly struggled over the last six months to maintain necessary levels of volunteering in order to meet the needs to run the club. January 2014 was the first time that a session at the youth club had to be cancelled due to lack of volunteers.

Respondents felt there were a variety of reasons for the low numbers of volunteers in Coventry and there is a clearly marked difference in the 'health' of volunteering between the clubs, with the Birmingham club being reasonably well serviced by volunteers. One perception was that volunteers leave because they are overstretched and being asked to do more than they can manage while not getting the support they need. Another perception is that the uncertainty related to the future of the Club and the unstable funding environment has meant that resources were not allocated towards volunteer recruitment and people who have left have not been replaced. Lastly, there was a feeling that because Birmingham is a bigger city, the pool of volunteers is larger and more diverse. The Coventry club also sees more interest from University students and this particular population have a tendency to have higher turnover rates as volunteers, which could help explain the difference also.

### 3.1. Volunteer motivations and expectations

Volunteer respondents reported becoming involved as a volunteer for a variety of reasons both altruistic and self-serving. These motivations generally reflect the motivations reported from national volunteering surveys; specifically because they wanted to do something worthwhile, help others, give back, meet people, gain



confidence and gain experience working with young people. Those volunteers who had been beneficiaries at the youth clubs in the past (three of the eight we interviewed) knew first-hand the impact of the services and wanted to give back to the clubs. Many volunteers felt passionately about the 'cause', seeing this particular group of young people as being quite vulnerable and wanting to support them.

### 3.2. Volunteer training needs

TCS have a volunteer training and induction programme and the Youth Clubs expect all their volunteers to attend an induction and participate in training on safeguarding and health and safety. It was generally felt that training needs were responded to promptly - for example, one volunteer cited that when there was an issue recently in one of the youth clubs, they received conflict resolution training (organised by The Children's Society) in a timely way to help them with this. However, most volunteers felt that more support and training would help them to feel more confident in, and prepared for their roles and the challenges they might face. Most volunteer respondents stated that they wanted training, but not all were able to specify what type of training was needed and some wanted more information from TCS about what type of training was available and what might be useful. Those who did want more support and training to help them in their role or help them take on additional responsibilities mentioned a variety of information and training related to:

- the legal rights and entitlements of asylum seekers and the process that asylum seekers go through when they come to the UK
- issues on mental health problems and young people, trafficking and abuse
- services available to young asylum seekers (particularly related to health and education)
- communication and confidence skills
- organisational and leadership skills
- conflict management/resolution skills
- updates on changes to TCS policies and procedures (e.g. safeguarding)



Some volunteers expressed an interest in being trained to give one-to-one support to young people and wanting more confidence to do this. It was felt that volunteers needed both more experience in this area and more staff support and shadowing. One participant said that she wanted to know more about the young people who attend the clubs and to be updated on their circumstances (e.g. where they are in the process of applying for asylum, their contact and background, whether they have documents) so that she understands their situation better and does not 'say the wrong thing'. However, not all volunteers felt that training was necessary.

### 3.3. Relationships between staff and volunteers

While staff were considered to have ultimate responsibility for the youth clubs, there was a strong feeling among volunteers and staff that there was mutual respect, and everyone's contribution was valued. Volunteers highlighted that staff were highly qualified, knowledgeable and that they trusted them.

Although areas of improvement related to support and training were identified, volunteers felt that these areas were out of the locus of control of existing staff and due more to lack of resources. It was recognised by volunteers that staff face pressure and vice-versa, and both groups see themselves as working together to make the best of the current situation and to make each other's participation as easy and enjoyable as possible.

Volunteer expenses were felt to be one area which could strain the relationship between TCS and volunteers. Both staff and volunteers mentioned dissatisfaction with the length of time it sometimes took for volunteers to be reimbursed their expenses – particularly for buying food for the meals. Respondents felt it took too long for volunteers to be reimbursed for expenses, as the volunteers were already giving so much of their time, and then to wait for up to three months to be reimbursed was seen as unfair. This was felt to potentially strain the relationship between volunteers and youth club staff as well.



***“Last year volunteers waited three months for their expenses to be paid... and they often become lost and that sort of thing... that’s still their relationship with the CS and I am the CS in effect so that strains that as well, especially here (Coventry) because they’re overstretched but not having things processed properly.” (staff)***

There were mixed views among volunteers on whether young people recognised any difference between staff and volunteers. Some felt that young people did not see a difference, and while all beneficiaries are told that there are unpaid people helping at the youth club, for many young people the concept of volunteering is new. Although young people do not differentiate between staff and volunteers in their interactions, when asked directly it was clear that some understand that there are people involved in the club who give their time for free, and this was appreciated and valued, and held some meaning to the young people. Many young people identified the Project Worker as being responsible for overseeing the club.

Most respondents felt that relationships were about individuals’ characteristics rather than whether someone fit into the category of staff or volunteer. For example, one person described how young people might seek advice or disclose information to one volunteer rather than another depending on the personal characteristics of the volunteer. As such, it was considered by many to be important to have a diverse group of volunteers.

***“I think young people see different volunteers in different roles depending on their age, nationality, gender. There’s a lady here... she gets something out of the young people that other people can’t. She’s able to boss them around a little bit more... and they don’t mind that. But they wouldn’t want to talk to her about sexual health... They bring their own life experiences so they have very individual and worthwhile relationships with young people based on that.” (staff)***



One long-standing volunteer noted that they felt the boundary between the roles of staff and volunteers was becoming increasingly blurred as volunteers were having to take on more responsibility because of reduced staff numbers and hours. This reflects a common tension seen within many volunteer-involving organisations between staff and volunteers in relation to job substitution issues and fears related to volunteers replacing paid staff.

## 4. Impact

This section looks at the impact of volunteering on both beneficiaries and the volunteers themselves. It examines the perceived impact on young people based on discussions with volunteers and staff as well as the experienced impact reported by the young people themselves.

### 4.1. The experiences of young people

Volunteers, staff and young people identified three main drivers for beneficiaries attending the clubs: emotional support; safety; socialising and fun. Key additional benefits of attending the club for young people were getting a guaranteed meal, practicing English, and gaining new skills, practical information and advice. People we spoke to often talked about wanting to occupy their time, with several mentioning boredom, especially those who were unable to get a job. The clubs provide a place where beneficiaries can be teenagers, play games and sports and learn skills such as cooking or IT. In Birmingham football is very popular; a universal game which people can participate in regardless of background and language.

***"They want your attention and they want to discuss their problems with you." (volunteer)***

***"They arrive with low self-esteem - they feel inferior, they feel people look down on them." (volunteer)***



On our visit we observed staff and volunteers talk in the debriefing session about some of the services (e.g. counselling) to which they could refer certain individuals. Interview participants also spoke about services to which they signposted young people, such as health and legal services. Although it appeared some of the referrals made by staff or volunteers was being recorded on the hardcopy debriefing notes at the end of the club session, this information was not available to us in the research timeframe therefore we were unable to quantify the number of referrals made to which services.

Related to the benefits experienced by young people is the wider impact of the services and activities on the lives of beneficiaries. It is difficult to establish cause and effect or to understand the longer term impacts without following the young people for a longer period of time, however there are clearly reported impacts being experienced currently. These impacts include reduced isolation, cultural integration, cohesion and gains in confidence and self-esteem for beneficiaries.

***"It is a really special group different to any other group because they are so isolated because the political context really hates on young asylum seekers... and there is nothing that supports them the way we do... It's an invaluable service." (volunteer)***

***"They feel like they are part of something. They belong there." (volunteer)***

Having a place to meet with other young people in similar circumstances helps beneficiaries feel less isolated and gives a sense of solidarity, belonging and confidence (especially in a climate which can be hostile towards asylum seekers). The clubs show young people that someone cares about them, and fosters the idea that they are important. Within the clubs, beneficiaries can mix with a wide diversity of people, including other young people, volunteers from all walks of life and staff. Beneficiaries felt that the clubs had a direct positive impact on their behaviour, how they felt and how they fit into the UK, supporting them and helping them to cope.



***"You see them open up... you see them smiling and saying hello...you see them change... The changes that it brings about - it's quite incredible really." (volunteer)***

***"It is like having a family." (beneficiary)***

***"It helped me to learn what's right and wrong here." (beneficiary)***

Several participants felt that the youth clubs should be there to serve vulnerable young people, particularly those who need a safe place to be, which they can rely on, and to give young people a sense of stability and security given the nature of their difficult and uncertain circumstances. The practical implications of this mean that some young people might rely on that proper meal being served at the club each week, and possibly more importantly are the psychological and emotional implications of having a place to go in an environment which can be hostile and stigmatising, particularly towards young male asylum seekers. It was felt that consistency and stability within the clubs, staffing and volunteers was crucial to beneficiaries.

***"Long periods of instability and uncertainty regarding funding, staff, resourcing is bad for volunteers and young people... there has been a lot of uncertainty and speculation about the future of the project... that doesn't go unnoticed by the young people either. Long periods of instability and uncertainty are far more damaging than having a clear cut off point where you say you can't do it anymore or are going to pass it on." (volunteer)***

The youth clubs were considered to be a 'quick win' as there are few services to support young asylum seekers, and because staff and volunteers felt that they had direct impact on young people. Some participants considered that the lack of certainty about the future of the club and the reduction of resources might reflect that the importance and necessity of the youth clubs was under-valued.

***"I think there is so little being offered to this particular group that it's a quick win in terms of the results you will see and the impact you will have and I think it's been undervalued quite a bit... It's proved to be invaluable by the fact it's gone on through various funding streams in the last 10 years." (volunteer)***



## 4.2. The experiences of volunteers

Volunteers at the clubs spoke about a range of benefits that they felt they experienced as a result of their volunteering. These benefits included the enjoyment and satisfaction that they felt from helping, making new social connections, gaining skills and experience related to working with young people and broadening and enhancing their life experience. Linked to these benefits are several wider impacts from the volunteering which include increased confidence, leadership skills, community cohesion and routes to employment or retraining.

The volunteers expressed how much they enjoyed the good atmosphere and positive energy of staff and other volunteers, and felt they gained skills, particularly communication and leadership skills. They also described the benefits of meeting a diversity of people and speaking to people from different cultures from their own. It was clear that volunteers valued being able to make friends with other volunteers and staff. The volunteers described feeling more confident in dealing with new situations and being able to lead a group of young people.

***"I love the feeling when I see if I don't go one week when I go there the next week they ask me "where were you? Why didn't you come?" (volunteer)***

***"On a selfish level, I find it fun to go. I like speaking to the young people and volunteers and staff there." (volunteer)***

Volunteers specifically spoke about how they learned about asylum seekers and their experiences, and the broad range of practical and emotional problems they face and some of the services available. They learned how to cook for large numbers of people and felt the satisfaction of giving something back, including feeling valued in their role and appreciated by the young people. One participant we spoke to told us about her experience which led her to retrain to work with vulnerable groups:

***"It sounds clichéd but it has completely changed my life volunteering on the project... I've gained a lot of skills in dealing with difficult issues dealing with asylum and mental health***



*issues and understanding the asylum process and useful communication skills and skills in organising workshops and games... and also having met other likeminded young people and making friends with other volunteers... it's improved my working life". (volunteer)*

Many of the volunteers we spoke to told us that they have recommended volunteering at the clubs to other people, because they believed people could gain much from the experience. They also felt it was important for people to help and support young asylum seekers given the stigma faced by this group.

## 5. Challenges

This section looks at two key areas of challenges related to volunteering in the youth clubs. The first directly relates to volunteering and volunteer management within the clubs while the second area looks at indirect issues that have had an impact on volunteer management.

### 5.1. Volunteer management challenges

Staff understood that good volunteer management was a long-term investment that was essential and worthwhile for all stakeholders, however they currently feel unable to manage volunteers due to time and resource constraints. The reasons for this are discussed in the section below on organisational challenges. This reality has many ramifications on the day to day experience of volunteers.

Staff and some volunteers felt that volunteer support and management could be improved, and had in fact been better in the past. Staff and volunteers who have been at the youth club for a long time spoke about seeing changes in management and support offered over time. Formal supervisions for volunteers have stopped as staff feel they no longer have time for this. Instead supervisions have become more informal and are incorporated into a daily debrief at the end of each session, a kind of weekly mini group supervision.



*“I don’t think they feel well supported because we don’t have supervision to the same extent as we used to and I think it does make that relationship awkward where something does need doing... I don’t want to ask them because I know they’re overstretched and that creates a bit of awkwardness there as well.” (staff)*

Some volunteers noted changes in the amount of time staff are available in the office; staff were previously around more frequently which meant that volunteers and young people could potentially have more contact with them. There was a perception that changes in funding, and therefore staff structure, had negatively impacted on the supervision and support volunteers were receiving. Staff and some volunteers felt that additional staff hours would lead to better support because it would help improve volunteer retention and relieve some of the pressure that current volunteers are feeling by giving volunteers someone who could quickly respond to queries outside of session times. Retention was felt to be a crucial issue to ensure stability and consistency for the clubs and beneficiaries as it can take time for young people to build relationships and trust. One volunteer speculated that lack of support might cause some less confident volunteers to leave if they did not feel they could take on the level of responsibility they were being given. It was felt that potentially this can lead to volunteer ‘burn out’ and the exhaustion of the goodwill of volunteers who feel pressured to attend in order for the clubs to exist. Some of the volunteers have other pressures and commitments outside of work but may feel unable to say no to involvement in the youth club. It was also noted that there would be a benefit to having an Administrator and a Volunteer Coordinator in Coventry who could take responsibility for training, communication and supporting volunteers.

Additional volunteer management time was also seen as being important for enabling more individual attention to be spent on young people and ensuring that volunteers’ skills and interests are identified and used in the sessions. It would also ensure higher quality recruitment and matching of volunteers with appropriate skills and interests. One participant mentioned that there had been rare occasions when



volunteers were recruited who were not a good fit and had too many of their own emotional and support needs.

Some volunteers spoke about the schedule and timing of sessions and opportunities. There were volunteers who had to change their hours or who could not participate as much as they would have liked because the clubs only run for a few hours each week and they were not always able to make it due to other family or work commitments. More flexible volunteering opportunities outside of session hours would allow volunteers to support the clubs even if they cannot attend the sessions in person. This was also considered important for young people as they might need support at times outside of session hours or that a week between sessions might be too long for those in need of support.

It should be noted, however, that not all volunteers wanted formal one-to-one supervisions. One volunteer preferred the support they receive currently, stating that in the past they had more supervision meetings than they needed and would prefer to get support as required. Some volunteers also recognised that the clubs would not run without them, and that there was therefore some pressure to keep volunteering in order to maintain the services for young people and to ensure the young people had a place to go.

***“I couldn't dream of some of the things the young people had been through... so while they're coming to the youth club I want to be there to provide it for them... I want to go to make sure it happens for as long as they want to go”. (volunteer)***

## 5.2. Organisational challenges

It is clear from our observations that the current programme is experiencing a number of organisational challenges that include reduced funding and staffing scenarios which create real uncertainty about the future of the programme and leads to increased pressure on current staff and potential reductions in services offered.



This issue was present in the background of almost all the discussions we had with staff and volunteers and while it is not directly related to volunteering, it has implications on volunteer management and organisational culture.

Most of the interviewees compared the current model of the clubs with how it ran in previous years, and alluded to the past models being better for staff, volunteers and young people. When asked what the 'ideal' youth club would look like, many described the previous staffing models:

***"It's been really squeezed right down" (staff)***

***"It used to be so much more" (volunteer)***

Some respondents spoke about the staff feeling overstretched and undervalued because they are unable to organise and run the clubs the way they think best due to lack of resources and capacity and there was a sense of frustration and dissatisfaction at this, as well as uncertainty over the future of their employment. Staff regularly are working longer hours than they are contracted for and taking on more responsibilities and duties than they were expected or required to.

Communication about the future of the programme was felt to be received too late which created concerns among respondents. Uncertainty about whether the clubs would exist and how they might be funded has prevented staff from planning ahead. In particular, it has stopped staff from proactively recruiting more volunteers (particularly in Coventry) and more young people (particularly in Birmingham). Staff spoke about a conundrum of needing more referrals through people and organisations but not having the resources needed to promote the service to these referral agencies.

***"I feel we could be doing a much better job if we knew what our future situation would be. Stability would mean a lot. There were two periods last year we didn't recruit volunteers because we thought it was about to end. I just think a clear message and understanding of just how critical it is for us to know what will happen will make things a lot easier."*** (staff)



Participants spoke about the loss of services for beneficiaries that had previously been available, for example residential, trips and one to one support and mentoring. These were felt to be incredibly important to young people as they help them to gain confidence in going out in the UK and providing a safe experience of the culture; to learn about where they are living and find their way around; give them something positive to do and an opportunity to experience other parts of the UK that they would otherwise not see.

Previously volunteers did more one to one support and mentoring or befriending with young people for up to a year; offering companionship and helping with practical goals such as seeing a GP or applying to college. This was considered very worthwhile and beneficial to all involved, with several noting that they would see a remarkable change in beneficiaries over the course of the one-to-one sessions. However, individual support is time consuming and can become in-depth because of issues raised. It requires a lot of staff time to supervise and help resolve issues. Less individual time available for young people has led to a feeling among many that the club is not doing as much as it could to serve beneficiaries and as a result there has been less focus on important preventative work and a concern that important issues may be getting missed.

***“It feels like a lot more like fighting fire rather than preventative work. I only pick up advice and advocacy issues when it becomes very serious”. There are some who are ‘ticking time bombs’ in terms of their mental health...” (staff)***

***“...There are young people thinking of ending their lives.. and their [staff] hands are tied because no money for hours is going into the youth club... there's no time to do the casework and this needs to be resolved somehow.” (volunteer)***

Consequently, staff and volunteers expressed feeling frustration that they were unable to offer what they thought was the best experience possible for young people.



Stability of youth clubs and earlier communication about the future of the clubs would improve volunteers' experiences by allowing them to make informed decisions about their participation. When participants were asked what they thought the clubs would look like in the future, all stated it was not possible to say, with many noting that they cannot say even what it might look like in the short-term given the climate of uncertainty.

***"Volunteers would be happier if there was more stability if we knew more than a month before whether it's closing or not... we can't plan ahead ourselves... it seems like that's been the case for a few years." (volunteer)***

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This section provides a thematic summary of the research and provides recommendations based on the learning.

It is clear that all the stakeholders involved in the youth clubs are passionate about the importance of the services it provides and that it makes a difference to all those involved. Many of the respondents we spoke to have demonstrated a commitment to the programme by the fact that they volunteer frequently and have been involved for many years.

There were clearly articulated positive impacts on young people, most importantly around reducing isolation and increasing integration. Volunteers spoke about the benefits of volunteering which included gaining skills, community cohesion and learning about asylum issues as well as helping with a career change. The experience has made those we spoke to even more passionate about helping young asylum seekers and has in some cases led to people pursuing opportunities to help this group further. However, there are challenges, and those we spoke to identified several areas where improvements could be made in volunteer management and



this is clearly a challenging time for the organisation given the current economic environment.

The organisation is at a crossroads in terms of volunteer management for the youth clubs and may need to make a decision about what type of volunteer management model it should use. Should it attempt to go back to previous formal volunteer management which is resource heavy or should it look to find a new way of providing services and engaging volunteers which does not rely so heavily on staff management of volunteers? Volunteering is never a 'free' resource and issues around job substitution must be taken seriously, but it is also possible to re-think how volunteering is coordinated and managed within a new organisational framework. These key questions about volunteer management and organisational structure will need to be addressed before being able to look at how this learning could be translated into other areas of the organisation.

The key ingredients for success based on what we observed within the youth clubs included having good facilities, staff with the right skills and knowledge, and a core group of dedicated, reliable volunteers with good interpersonal skills. Resources are likely to be critical to the degree of success and impact the programme could have but the key question will be exactly how those resources are allocated. For example, should more resources go into developing volunteer leaders and in training volunteers or is the ideal to have a full time paid volunteer coordinator. In the meantime, there are a number of recommendations that we have put forward; some of them have resource implications while some are cost neutral.

## 6.1. Recommendations

There are both short term and longer term suggestions here and some have costs attached to them while others involve little to no cost. We have tried to concentrate on recommendations that relate more directly to volunteering however there are



clearly other changes and decisions related to wider organisational issues that would have a positive impact on the volunteer programme.

Recommendations for volunteer management which could be implemented quickly or easily:

1. Improving the system by which volunteers are reimbursed expenses and ensuring that barriers are removed so that volunteers are never out of pocket. All expenses should be paid directly to volunteers either in cash or by bank transfer ideally within 14-30 days of submitting.
2. Improved communication to volunteers directly about TCS, policies & procedure updates, organisational issues, funding and improved communication specifically about training or mentoring available to volunteers. Staff should ensure that all volunteer contact details are available (such as email) and perhaps consider a volunteer newsletter or e-bulletin or using social media more and ensuring that the volunteers are using the same mechanisms. Communications about the future of the programme sent in a timely manner are critical.
3. Provide additional games and equipment for the clubs (such as board games).

Recommendations for volunteer management which would take time to implement but potentially have a longer term benefit:

4. Review the training available to volunteers and look at possible shadowing schemes across TCS and offer volunteers training across the entire organisation. Improving volunteers' skills in specific areas and offering some accredited training would also help improve and add value to volunteers' experience, and give them confidence. It would also help staff as volunteers could relieve pressure from them by giving better advice and signposting to young people rather than competing for staff attention.



- a. Areas of training interest from volunteers included legal rights of asylum-seekers, mental health issues, communications, leadership skills, conflict management, TC policies & procedures, the process that asylum seekers go through when they come to the UK and services and signposting available to asylum seekers. Full time working volunteers expressed interest in online learning.
5. Review the volunteer policy of TCS and ensure that the rights and responsibilities of volunteers are up to date so as to manage expectations related to supervision and support appropriately.
6. Develop additional volunteer opportunities for volunteering outside of the weekly session times.
7. Ensure that all available volunteering infrastructure resources are being utilised effectively. This includes the services of the local volunteer centres and CVS and utilising online volunteer brokerage tools such as Do-it.

There were also recommendations related to the programme which would indirectly impact volunteers and volunteer management:

8. Improve services to young women; one-to-one services might be preferable options instead of attending the clubs. It was strongly felt that there needed to be a service for young women, as they are currently under-served but may be facing difficult situations such as trafficking, mental health issues or domestic violence.
9. Provide residential and trips to beneficiaries.
10. Do more one to one mentoring and befriending with young people.
11. Provide skills workshops and training for beneficiaries which could make the most of volunteer skills – a type of skills sharing programme such as car mechanics or IT.
12. Cookery was felt to be under-utilised as a way to bond with the young people and perhaps more could be made of the process such as having volunteers buy the food with the young people before the club.



In order to understand the clubs fully it would be helpful to calculate the economic value of volunteers (VIVA) to TCS and to monitor who is volunteering and using the services. There is an opportunity for improving systems for collecting this data in a useable format and for sharing it more widely across the organisation, maintaining complete and consistent records. Data we would recommend collecting includes:

13. Volunteer data: equalities data, employment status, length of time volunteering, frequency of volunteering, how they found out about the opportunity, reasons given for leaving.
14. Beneficiary data: equalities, languages spoken, length of time attending, frequency of attendance, reasons given for leaving, how they found out about the club (including who referred them), services they have been referred to.
15. Project data to calculate economic value would include:
  - a. Number of volunteer hours spent and
  - b. Expenditure data;
    - i. Salaries of volunteer manager/ coordinator/ administrator
    - ii. Salaries of other paid staff – the percentage of annual salary corresponding to the percentage of their time spent on managing or supporting volunteers
    - iii. Advertising and recruitment to recruit volunteers
    - iv. Administration, support and recognition for volunteers
    - v. Volunteer insurance – cost of the volunteer insurance policy or a percentage of the organisation's overall insurance policy, to cover volunteers
    - vi. Food and accommodation – costs of drinks, food and accommodation provided free to volunteers
    - vii. Supplies and equipment – clothing, badges, materials and equipment provided free to volunteers for their volunteering
    - viii. Volunteer-related building costs or expenses – rent and utility costs where buildings are maintained solely for volunteers.



## Appendix A: Case studies

### Testimonial: Volunteer #1 (Birmingham)

#### Background to involvement in the youth club

Volunteer #1 had been involved in the Birmingham youth club regularly since January 2010. At the time of interview, she was attending the youth club as a volunteer every week.

She decided to volunteer because she moved to Birmingham for work and wanted to meet new people. She was interested in international issues as this was related to her work, and felt that working with asylum seekers at the youth club would match this interest. She saw the opportunity at the youth club advertised in an online brochure listed by Birmingham Voluntary Service Council, and it was also recommended to her by someone she met through work who was volunteering there.

#### Perceived impact of volunteering experience

Volunteer #1 continued to volunteer because she believed the service was essential and had seen positive changes in the young people who attended. It was seen as providing a safe place for young people which helped them get the support they need, as well as helping them to feel more confident and less isolated.

Additionally, she felt she had gained a huge amount personally and professionally from her volunteering experience, and through working with vulnerable people in difficult situations. She cited practical and soft skills she had gained including meeting new people, and learning about the asylum process. She considered the experience to be life-changing as it was a catalyst for her retraining in a new career as a social worker.

*"Dealing with challenges presented by young people that are often 'unsolvable' involves developing a whole new set of skills, which you aren't taught at schools and universities. As a result, you develop as a person in a way you didn't expect - certainly that I didn't expect"*

*"It sounds clichéd but it has completely changed my life volunteering on the project... I've gained a lot of skills in dealing with difficult issues dealing with asylum and mental health issues and understanding the asylum process and useful communication skills and skills in organising workshops and games... and also having met other likeminded young people and making friends with other volunteers... it's improved my working life..."*

Volunteering at the youth club was an integral part of her life, and something she expected to continue into the future.

*"I can't really imagine not doing it now. Most people I know who volunteer on this project get so much out of it, it's quite amazing really..."*



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## Testimonial: Volunteer #2 (Coventry)

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### Background to involvement in the youth club

**Volunteer #2 had been involved in the Coventry youth club since 2013, for just over a year. At the time of interview, she was attending the youth clubs as a volunteer every week.**

**She decided to volunteer because she was new to the country and wanted to gain new experiences and meet new people. She found the opportunity through Voluntary Action Coventry.**

### Perceived impact of volunteering experience

**Volunteer #2 felt that the youth club had an important role in helping the young people to integrate into life in the UK by supporting them in learning and practising English as well as helping them to understand the culture. It was considered important because it provided young people with a safe space to socialise and build their confidence.**

**She cited several benefits from her experience volunteering at the youth club. She enjoyed meeting the young people and volunteers, and this increased her confidence in dealing with new people and situations. She gained pleasure from the new experiences and challenges it presented, including learning about the experiences of asylum seekers and the issues they face. Additionally, she enjoyed building strong relationships with the young people, who liked and respected her, and valued her contribution as shown by the fact they noticed if she was absent.**



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## Testimonial: Volunteer #3 (Coventry)

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### Background to involvement in the youth club

**Volunteer #3 had been involved in the Coventry youth club for the past three years. At the time of interview, she was not volunteering as the hours of the youth club did not**

**Prior to attending the youth club, she already had volunteering experience, having been involved in volunteering opportunities since she was a teenager. She decided to volunteer at the youth club because it matched her principles and would allow her to make a positive difference to the lives of young people.**

### Perceived impact of volunteering experience

**Volunteer #3 felt that the youth club had an important role to play in supporting young people, giving them a safe place to go, helping them to access services, and giving them practical and soft skills such as preparing meals and team-working, which would ultimately help them make the transition to independent living.**

**She felt she had gained several personal benefits from her experience at the youth club. She stated that she had met a new and diverse group of people with whom she had formed strong friendships.**



## Appendix B: Summary of workshop

On May 29 2014, we held a half-day deliberative workshop with 10 staff from TCS to discuss the emergent findings from the research and the next steps for TCS. Below are the key issues which arose from the workshop discussions.

- Workshop participants agreed that the research findings demonstrated services delivered by the youth clubs are essential to the young people, and doing important, much needed work. However, it was felt that there was room for improvement as the clubs are currently not delivering at the optimal level. Staff at the workshop identified funding as a reason for this, but recognised that money alone was not the solution.
- Instead staff felt that consideration should be given to the structure and model of the youth clubs, and that these should take into account the needs and motivations of volunteers. For example, volunteers who needed more support and training might benefit from a more staff-led model. However, there was a diverse range of opinions on effective volunteering models among workshop participants. Understanding the best way forward requires further consideration and is something TCS will need to look at corporately.
- Workshop participants identified that there was a greater need for clarity over what volunteers were expected to do and how this was similar to or different from the roles of paid staff. In particular, people noted that it was important for staff and volunteers to know where and with who in TCS responsibilities and accountabilities lay.
- Staff felt that a Volunteer Co-ordinator would relieve pressure on existing staff. Again it was highlighted that their role would need to be clearly defined so that staff and volunteers understand each other's roles and responsibilities, and where accountability lies for different elements of the youth clubs.
- The importance of training, support and communication was identified as a key learning, which participants felt would help with retention of volunteers and



ensuring that their skills and interests could be harnessed and maximised to benefit the youth club.

- Also related to communication, it is important for TCS to involve key staff and volunteers in discussions to use and build on their knowledge and experience effectively. It was recognised that this was a challenge given the limited capacity of both parties
- In terms of our recommendations, workshop staff highlighted that since the research, several are already being implemented or considered.
  - Some of the quick wins have already been implemented, for example, buying new board games
  - Training was being reviewed and TCS was looking at how to make it more integrated and share skills and learning across the organisation while ensuring that it was relevant and appropriate to volunteers, their needs and expectations. It would be useful to consider other ways to share skills –e.g. train the trainer
- Other improvements will come through existing organisational improvement programmes which remain to be completed and then embedded within TCS e.g. case management, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, volunteering policy
  - Workshop participants emphasised the importance of being clear about the strategy TCS has for volunteering and embedding this in the organisation, for example through communications; a volunteer manager handbook and best practice framework including clear rationale and specification of ratios of volunteers: staff and volunteers: service users
- Some workshop participants recognised that while there was a lot of passion about the youth clubs, it was important for TCS to make bold ‘big picture’ strategic decisions which included:
  - While the vision and ethos of the youth clubs was clear to those directly involved, being explicit in the outcomes that were expected and how these would be measured



- Prioritising recommendations and how resources are allocated within the youth club
  - TCS having a clear understanding and strategy of whether, when and how to exit a project and turn it over to volunteers/ the community
- In terms of data collection, staff identified that there was a need for consistency across the organisation in terms of systems and format for collection, which would help to reduce duplication when data is being shared. Staff highlighted the importance of understanding from the outset exactly what data they need to collect, how to collect it, the format it should be collected in, and who was responsible for collection.
- Collecting robust data on volunteers is helpful for communications as well as allowing diversity to be monitored. A diverse group of volunteers would offer great benefit to service-users.
- As the needs of young people in Coventry can be more complex, it was felt important for the youth club to recruit more volunteers for one-to-one support. However, to do this an Administrator and Volunteer Co-ordinator were considered essential to organise the support and training and ensure the skills.
- Ensuring central processes are or can be implemented locally.



# Appendix C: Topic guide – paid staff

## The Children's Society: The added value of volunteering Topic guide – paid staff, Feb 2014

### A. INTRODUCTION

*Aim: To introduce the research project and purpose of the interview*

- Introduce self and IVR
- Introduce the purpose of the research and outline what it will entail
  - Commissioned by The Children's Society to explore the impact and value of volunteering in two youth clubs in the West Midlands
  - The research will explore the perspectives of staff, volunteers, young people and their families/ social workers
- Explain purpose of the interview
  - To understand their experiences and perceptions of volunteers
- Explain details of participation
  - Approx. 60 minutes
  - Voluntary nature of participation – can stop at any time
  - Digital recording of interview which will be stored securely and only accessible to the research team
  - IVR is independent from The Children's Society – there are no right or wrong answers
  - Data will be anonymised
  - Any questions?
- Turn recorder on

### B. BACKGROUND

*Aim: Introduction to find out background information about the staff member*

- Can you tell me about your role within the youth club(s)? (job title, length of time in role, how often attend the club, responsibilities)
- What do you see as being the key aims of the youth club(s)?
- Sum up the youth club(s) in five words

### C. STAFF EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERS

*Aim: To find out about staff experiences and perceptions of volunteers*

- What is the nature of your contact with volunteers? (e.g. manage them/ support them/ work alongside them)
- FOR STAFF WITH EXPERIENCE OF BOTH YOUTH CLUBS:
  - Does your experience of volunteers and volunteering differ across the youth clubs? How?
- What, in your opinion, should be the role of volunteers in the youth club(s)?



- In the perfect youth club, what would volunteering look like? (how many volunteers, what type of people would they be, what skills would they have, what would they do, what wouldn't they do, how would they be managed, what resources and training would they have access to)
- What do you think the volunteers currently bring to the youth clubs?
  - What impact do you think the volunteers have:
    - on the children and young people?
    - on the families of the children and young people?

**\*\*Probe fully around what the youth club would look like without volunteers\*\***

- Do you think that the young people see a difference between the roles of staff and volunteers? In what ways? **\*\* Probe fully around the value of having staff vs. volunteers vs. a mix of both\*\***
- What differences are there between the young people's relationship with staff and their relationship with volunteers?
- Is there anything you would like volunteers to do which they do not or cannot currently do?

#### **D. CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING**

*Aim: To find out about staff perceptions of challenges associated with volunteering, and suggestions for potential solutions to these*

- What is the impact (positive and negative) of having volunteers in the youth club? (on your specific role, the way the club operates, on staff generally, on young people)
  - Are there any solutions to these?
- What are the challenges of having volunteers? (time to recruit and train, recruiting enough volunteers, recruiting the right people etc.)
  - Are there any solutions to these challenges?
- What do you think could be improved about volunteering in the youth club?
  - What is needed to bring about these improvements? (more volunteers, volunteers with different skills, resources, training)
- Thinking about the relationship between staff and volunteers, are there any ways these could be improved? (probe around staff-volunteer relationships)
- Are there any ways that the youth club could maximise the skills and attributes of the existing volunteers?
- Do you think the model of your youth club(s) would work elsewhere?
  - What is needed to make this model work elsewhere? (probes: resources, facilities, training, volunteer management)

#### **E. Future steps and close**

*Aim: This section will briefly cover future expectations for volunteering*

- How do you see volunteering changing in the youth club? What do you think about these changes?
- Anything else you would like to add?
- Thank you and close



# Appendix D: Topic guide – volunteers

## **The Children's Society: The added value of volunteering Topic guide – volunteers, Feb 2014**

### **F. INTRODUCTION**

*Aim: To introduce the research project and purpose of the interview*

- Introduce self and IVR
- Introduce the purpose of the research and outline what it will entail
  - Commissioned by The Children's Society to explore the impact and value of volunteering in two youth clubs in the West Midlands
  - The research will explore the perspectives of staff, volunteers, young people and their families/ social workers
- Explain purpose of the interview
  - To understand their experiences and perceptions of volunteering at the youth club
- Explain details of participation
  - Approx. 30 minutes
  - Voluntary nature of participation – can stop at any time
  - Digital recording of interview which will be stored securely and only accessible to the research team
  - IVR is independent from The Children's Society – there are no right or wrong answers
  - Data will be anonymised
  - Any questions?
- Turn recorder on



## **G. BACKGROUND**

*Aim: Introduction to find out background information about the volunteer*

- Which youth club?
- Can you tell me about your role within the youth club? (length of time volunteering, how often you attend the club, responsibilities)
  - Other volunteering roles in the past/ currently
- What do you see as being the key aims of the youth club?
- Sum up the youth club(s) in five words

## **H. VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS**

*Aim: To find out about volunteer's experiences and perceptions of volunteering at the youth club*

- Why did you decide to volunteer at the youth club?
  - What do you think you have you gained from volunteering at the club? (skills, increased employability, meet new people, get involved in local community etc.)
  - Is there anything you expected to gain that you haven't yet? Why/ not?
- What do you like about volunteering at the club? Is there anything you dislike? (probes: volunteer roles, volunteer support/ management, co-ordination/ management, communication)
- What, in your opinion, should be the role of volunteers in the youth club(s)?
- In the perfect youth club, what would volunteering look like? (how many volunteers, what type of people would they be, what skills would they have, what would they do, what wouldn't they do, how would they be managed, what resources and training would they have access to)
- What do you think the volunteers currently bring to the youth clubs?
  - Does this differ from what the staff offer? In what ways?
- What impact do you think the volunteers have:
  - on the children and young people?
  - on the families of the children and young people?
- Do you think that the young people see a difference between the roles of staff and volunteers? In what ways?



- What differences are there between the young people's relationship with staff and their relationship with volunteers?

\*\* Probe fully around the value of having staff vs. volunteers vs. a mix of both\*\*

- Is there anything you would like to do at the club which you do not or cannot currently do?

## **I. CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING**

*Aim: To find out about staff perceptions of challenges associated with volunteering, and suggestions for potential solutions to these*

- What are the challenges of volunteering at the youth club?
  - Are there any solutions to these challenges?
- What do you think could be improved about volunteering in the youth club? (probes: volunteer roles, volunteer support/ management, co-ordination/ management, communication)
  - Are there any ways that the youth club could maximise the skills and attributes of the existing volunteers?
  - What is needed to bring about these improvements? (probes: more volunteers, volunteers with different skills, resources, training)
- Thinking about the relationship between staff and volunteers, are there any ways these could be improved? (probe around staff-volunteer relationships)
- Are there any ways that the youth club could maximise the skills and attributes of the existing volunteers?
- Do you think this project could work elsewhere?
  - What is needed to make this model work elsewhere? (probes: resources, facilities, training, volunteer management)
- Would you recommend volunteering at the youth club to other potential volunteers? Why/ not?

## **J. Future steps and close**

*Aim: This section will briefly cover future expectations for volunteering*

- How do you see volunteering changing in the youth club? What do you think about these changes?
- Anything else you would like to add?
- Would you like to attend the feedback session? What times are convenient for you?



- Thank you and close
- INCENTIVE - ADDRESS



# Appendix E: Topic guide – young people

## The Children's Society: The added value of volunteering Topic guide – children and young people, Feb 2014

### K. INTRODUCTION

*Aim: To introduce the research project and purpose of the interview*

- Introduce self and IVR
  - *My name is [interviewer name] and I am a Researcher at the Institute of Volunteering Research in London. We have been asked by the Children's Society to speak to a variety of people at the youth club to understand their views and experiences of the volunteering which happens here. We are speaking to the people who work here and also young people like you who come here. Would you mind having a quick chat with me to tell me about your views of the youth club and volunteering here?*
- Explain details of participation
  - Approx. 10 -15 minutes
  - Voluntary nature of participation – can stop at any time
  - Researcher will take notes
  - IVR is independent from The Children's Society – there are no right or wrong answers
  - We will not include their name on any reports we write
  - Any questions?

These short interviews will cover **background; experiences and perceptions; challenges and solutions; thank and close.**

1. How did you find out about the club/project?
2. How long have you been coming here? How often do you come here?
3. Why do you come here? (activities, learn new skills, meet people/ make friends etc.)
4. What do you like about the youth club? (probe around staff and volunteers)



- What support or help do you get here?
  - Has coming to the club made any difference to your life or your family, if so, in what ways?
  - What do you like about the people who help to organise or run the club and activities? (\*\*probe around differences between volunteers and staff, and whether there are perceived differences; probe fully around value of having staff vs. volunteers vs. a mix of both\*\*)
5. Thinking about the people who help to organise the club and activities is there anything you'd like them to do that they're not already doing?
  6. Are there any ways you think the youth club could be improved?
  7. Would you recommend that other young people come to this youth club? Why/ not?
  8. Anything else you would like to say about the club?

Thank you and close