The Impact of Volunteering on Social Capital and Community Cohesion

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Contents

1. Introduction

Project Re:action was a joint project between Youth Action Network, a national youth volunteering charity, and the Centre for Social Action at De Montfort University. The project received a research grant over three years from the Big Lottery Fund.

This research aimed to add value to the current corpus of work on young people and social inclusion by:

- The experience of young people who volunteer.
- The difference that full participation makes to the volunteering experience.
- The most successful ways of promoting participation within organisations.
- The wider benefits to and impact on the community of this type of activity.

The project aimed to involve young people fully in a process of researching the ways in which youth involvement and participation are embedded in organisations, and the ways in which communities benefit from these types of activity.

It sought to draw conclusions about the role that youth volunteering organisations play in the formation of young people's social capital, and how these organisations and the young people involved contribute to community involvement and community benefit.

Research methodology
A key feature of this project is that young people themselves were fully involved in planning, steering and carrying out the research.

- We surveyed 920 young people, aged 14 – 25, from across Youth Action Network's member organisations, representing age, ethnic and gender diversity.
- We surveyed 40 youth workers.
- Qualitative fieldwork was carried out with seven Youth Action Network member organisations. This consisted of a total of 16 discussion groups with young people, two discussion groups with workers and eight discussion groups with community members.

2. Key concepts

The research uncovered an important relationship between participative youth volunteering and social capital. You can find out more inside – but first, an introduction to these key concepts…

Youth Action Volunteering

Youth action volunteering is different to placement volunteering and is commonly referred to as way of supporting young people to develop and lead their own group based volunteering opportunities. The participative process allows them to have more choice or say over what volunteering they do. This involves giving young people opportunities to play a key role in the design, delivery and evaluation of their projects.

Social capital

People engage with others through a variety of relationships forming many different types of networks. Social Capital is the resource that stems from these social interactions, networks and network opportunities which take place in specific environments, which in our research was the volunteering experience.
There are different types of social capital, based around different types of networks.

Most commonly they are referred to as:

Bonding social capital
This relates to relationships with family, friends and peer groups that provide a sense of belonging in the here and now. It is good for 'getting by' in life.

Bridging social capital
This is about creating links with people outside our immediate circles, who can help us to broaden our opportunities and horizons. It is good for 'getting ahead' in life.

Linking social capital
This relates to relationships between people with varying levels of power. It is good for accessing support from formal institutions.

Developing a variety of social networks can therefore provide a number of benefits: from personal and emotional support to giving young people more opportunities, choice and power.

3. Key findings and significance

3.1 Participative research project

- The young people involved in **Project Re:action** state that their level of participation has gone beyond their initial expectations.
- They expressed a strong sense of agency as members of the project team. They were involved in all decisions.
- The young people participating in **Project Re:action** feel respected and valued and they feel that their participation is purposeful.
- They feel more informed, as well as able to offer their subjective opinions and 'youth perspectives.'
- The young people feel that a key success factor in this project was the fact that they were resourced appropriately (for example, peer researchers have been provided with a laptop and a subsidised internet connection; travel and on-costs were fully covered) in order to fully communicate and participate.
- They demonstrate a high level of trust in the process and the research team, and the kinds of outcomes that they expect from the research.

3.2 Reasons for volunteering

The main personal motivations that young people gave for volunteering were:
- Giving something back to the community.
- Having interesting experiences.
- To meet other young people.

Whilst networking is not a primary reason for young people to volunteer in first instance, our research shows that during the volunteering experience this becomes more important.

3.3 Enhancing Social Capital through Volunteering

3.3.1 Challenging pre conceived attitudes

- Young volunteers state that volunteering encourages them to challenge the way they think about current affairs, about other people and their own life.
- Volunteering changes young volunteers attitudes towards people who are different to them and encourages ways of learning from each other.
- Almost half of the volunteers asked (45%) felt that volunteering has changed in some way the opinion that they previously held about other types of people.
- The biggest change in opinion identified through the research refers to attitudes towards people with different identities, lifestyles and social class. 51% of the volunteers started to socialise with people who are somehow different to them as a direct result of volunteering.

Significance
Whilst volunteering can encourage young people to change their attitudes towards people who are different to them and might enable them to learn from each other. However whilst there are a considerable number of young people who through volunteering enhance their **bridging social capital** creating links with people outside

their immediate circles, there is also a group of young volunteers (about half of the young people) who do not benefit from this enhancement. It is to note that new and diverse networks can be very important for broadening opportunities and horizons.

3.3.2 Gaining access to resources through meeting new people

- Through meeting new people a majority of volunteers report an increase in their personal and social development. Over 60% of young people who took part in the research feel that through volunteering they gain confidence and a better understanding of people
- Half of the young people feel that volunteering broadens their horizons and makes them happy.
- Half of the young people feel that through meeting new people they benefited in educational and career/ employment support.
- 66% of young people who had experience of volunteering in national and international settings compared with 44% of young people volunteering in neighbourhood settings reported that through meeting new people they benefited in educational and career/ employment support.
- 77% (compared to an overall average of 52%) of young volunteers who said that they had engaged in some sort of anti social behaviour perceive that through meeting new people they benefited in educational and career/ employment support.

Significance
The benefits received through young volunteers meeting new people is affected by the setting where the volunteering takes place i.e. neighbourhood and local community, school, college or university and national or international. Young people's social capital is enhanced by moving away from their immediate community and interacting with new people. New and diverse social networks are not only important in terms of emotional support but also crucial for their personal and social development and giving young people more opportunities, choice and power.

3.3.3. Participation, Influence and Trust

- One of the most important findings of the research is that there is a strong relationship between levels of participation (P) and young people's sense of influence (I) and being trusted (T).
- The feeling that they have high levels of influence and are being trusted by adult workers is extremely important to young volunteers.
    - 44% of those surveyed reported that they are experiencing high levels of participation, sense of influence and being trusted.
    - Not all young people want to take on a leadership role, but this isn't affecting their sense of influence or being trusted: 40% are experiencing low levels of participation, with high levels of influence and trust.
    - 85% of young volunteers agree or strongly agree that, in their voluntary organisation, adults put a lot of trust in young people.
- However expectations and demands on young volunteers from projects and workers can be too high which can lead to in some cases to stress, disappointment and disillusion for the young people.
- Another central finding is that the environment and dynamics which create high levels of participation, influence and trust (PIT) also enable better processes through which social capital is enhanced.

63% of young people with high levels of PIT against 40% of young people with low levels of PIT reported that through meeting new people they benefited in educational and career/ employment support.

Significance

Youth action volunteering promotes group based participative volunteering; this also reflects government policies which promote young people having a greater say in the design and delivery of services and in decisions that affect them, being in charge of their organisation, of their volunteering and generally leading or playing a part in decision making processes.

Important aspects in promoting participation of young volunteers are for them to be able to make their own decisions and being trusted to make these decisions. Within this, the support and trust they get from workers was identified as crucial element. Whilst it has to be noted that not all young volunteers want to take on leadership roles there is still scope to further young people's power, say and leadership within volunteering projects. Recognising that at certain times in their lives young people might not be in a position to take up these opportunities and responsibilities should not deter workers to create environments where young people can take advantage of the opportunities and the arising benefits of high levels of participation.

Areas for improvement
- Some young volunteers were disillusioned by the notion of participation in political or government affairs feeling that their voice wouldn't make any difference. Many young volunteers feel as if they are not listened to or not heard within political and government levels.
- Young people also pointed out that the expectations of the young person in thinking that their volunteering will give them power and voice is not always matched with the reality which can lead to disappointment and disillusion.
- Some young volunteers pointed out that the possibility to set up their own activities is not always being promoted by their volunteering organisation, and so they were often unaware of it is a possibility.
- Workers need to be very careful not to overburden those volunteers which already have high levels of participation.

3.4. Enhancing Community Cohesion

Key Findings

Young people highlighted the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and creating a safe environment where young people can meet other young people within organisations and groups.

Young people feel that they can contribute to community cohesion:
- by breaking down stereotypes in their community or neighbourhood
- fostering understandings of different cultures and religions
- solving social problems within communities and neighbourhoods
- bringing different people from the community/ neighbourhood together
- helping others to be more active in their community/ neighbourhood.

About 60% of young people felt that their volunteering activity had an impact on the community or the neighbourhood, however around 40% think that volunteers are a

small proportion of the community and they don't see how so few people can affect the whole community.

- Over 60% of young people perceive their volunteering to bring different people from the community/neighbourhood together and help others to be more active in their community/ neighbourhood
- Common in volunteering projects was the support they gave to isolated members in communities, supporting them and building bonding ties. However less common was to build bridging ties between isolated members and the rest of the community.
- Young people and members from communities feel that volunteering supports communities however it is less common in volunteering projects to build bridging ties between different communities, solving social problems or breaking down stereotypes.

Significance

Community cohesion is as vital to a vibrant community as economic and environmental success and good local services for the diversity of people living in these neighbourhoods. Youth Action volunteering projects happen within different types of community. Quite often higher levels of community cohesion stem from, and are a result of, young people having the opportunities to participate in decision-making and take an active part in the shaping of their community.

A distinction has to be made between supporting people within communities and enhancing community cohesion which is about bridging the gap, changing or challenging structures or interacting with organisations or people of other communities. Volunteering does not contribute to community cohesion per se; if volunteering projects aim to enhance proactively community cohesion they need to build this into their project plan and consider how to make cohesion outcomes sustainable.

4. Participative research project

A key feature of this research is that young people themselves were fully involved in planning, steering and carrying out the research process. 35 young volunteers were trained over a weekend residential to conduct discussion groups with other young volunteers. Eight young people also volunteered to be part of the **Re:action** steering group. This group worked very closely with the project workers over the three years, making an essential contribution to the running of the project. Their participation included designing the research, conducting focus groups, formulating the survey questions, taking part in the analysis of data and producing an evaluation toolkit.

This was an equal partnership that recognised the different skills of the young people, the researchers and workers from Youth Action Network. Young people were supported and trained by professionals to play a full part in the design of the research tools. A group of young people formed a project steering group which met throughout the project to oversee the progress of the research, analyse the data and contribute to the dissemination of the findings.

A key task of all those involved in the research was to establish a methodology reflecting young people's values, principles and understanding of volunteering.

At the centre of our work were three primary values:

- The project was, as far as is possible, defined by the young people.
- All work carried out was based on equal partnership with the young people.
- Third, it has been important to recognise that everyone (young people and adults in this project) had unique skills, knowledge, experience and the capacity to be creative. The project was based on that principle; therefore everybody was able to learn from everyone else.

We set out to understand young people's volunteering experience, the impact it has on their lives and their communities. Young people are active participants living in an ever-changing environment. Involving young people in all aspects of the research process enabled them to define and interpret their volunteering experiences and their actions collectively. The researchers were able to enhance not only their own but also our understanding about their own living environment and their experiences.

In June and July 2007, seven young people from the **Re:action** steering group and/or research team were interviewed about their experience of participating in the project by Philippa Collin**.** Philippa, 'Pip,' was a visiting researcher at the Youth Action Network from June – August 2007, conducting fieldwork for her PhD in youth participation (University of Sydney, Australia.) The following section is a summary of her report for the **Re:action** project. Young people were asked to talk about why they got involved in the research project, what their role was and what they get out of it.

Pip was particularly trying to find out:

1. How participatory or involving **Project Re:action** felt to them?
2. What the young people involved got out of being involved so far.

4.1 How participatory did the volunteers feel Project Re:action was?

The young people involved were partners in **Project Re:action**, exercising a high level of influence in various decision-making processes. For some this is because they have been involved at all levels of the project – planning, developing research tools, conducting field work and analysis. For others, though their participation in all phases of the project may not have been consistent and sustained, they have felt valued in the process, that their opinions have been heard and responded to. They feel welcome to link back into the project and have input when and if they choose to in the future.

The following factors appear to be central to the level of participation achieved by the project:

- Agency and power
- Communication and resources
- Exceeding (not managing) expectations

Agency and power
Young people express a strong sense of agency as members of the project team. Knowing that they can determine their level of participation – from being hands-on researchers and involved in all decisions, to playing more of an advisory role – is important to them:

> *Originally we were meant to be just the steering group and there was meant to be other researchers around. But then they said that if we wanted we could be researchers as well and do it in our own organisations.*
>
> Katrina

Being empowered to learn new skills, engage in discussion, make decisions and take responsibility for different aspects of the research has impacted on young people's perceptions of their roles in the project. They describe their roles (as members of the steering group and as peer researchers) as being of equal or greater importance than adult researchers.

> *The adults listen to what we have to say. If we've got something to say then we sit down and listen to what each other has to say and respect what each other has to say. We've all got individual opinions and there's no right or wrong answer, there are just different points of view and they try to bring all of that together.*
>
> Niral

There is also a strong sense that young people participating in **Project Re:action** feel respected and valued and that their participation is purposeful:

> *I liked the look of it (**Project Re:action**) – it was actually trying to find something out. And we weren't just being asked questions, it was like, 'get your hands in there' and looking at it and learning about it – learning different skills. And the fact that it was all youth-led was really attractive. Often these projects are just adults saying 'ok, do this, do that'.*
>
> Chris

Communication and resources

The approach to communication taken by **Project Re:action** holds both practical and symbolic meaning for the young people involved. Young people feel that the research coordinators understand the general demands on young people's lives (work, study, friends, family), as well as the individual needs arising from complex experiences related to mental health needs, cultural background, access to social and economic resources and gender. Young participants appreciate that the research coordinators share documents and encourage them to learn about theoretical and conceptual material underpinning the research. They feel more informed, as well as able to offer their subjective opinions and 'youth perspectives.'

Being given sufficient time to access, read over and consider the material was also seen as a respectful way to work with young people.

> *Generally they send us out material as attachments ahead of time, so Thilo will send us something and just ask us to read it before our next meeting. So I have been busy with university work, but I generally look at it and jot down some thoughts for the next meeting.*
>
> Niral

Feeling informed contributes to young people's belief that they are a part of the team, and not just recipients of a program or service:

> *Cos they always keep us – what's the word? – keep us, informed. About everything that they're doing at the time and make us feel involved by always giving us things to do – not just telling us what they're doing, but asking if we want to be doing it too - 'do you want to help with this – do you want to do this'?*
>
> Katrina

Ensuring that young people are resourced appropriately in order to fully communicate and participate is a key success factor in this project. For example, utilising email has worked for most of the group and appears to be a successful strategy – in part because peer researchers have been provided with a laptop and, where possible, a subsidised internet connection. Paying for travel and on-costs reduces barriers to participation and indicates to young people that they are a valuable and necessary part of the team.

> *Chris: I get emails every couple of week with stuff that's going on asking me to get involved or give them an opinion, or to do an interview for a new staff position. They're really accommodating cos I'm a real pain in the backside –*
>
> **PC: What?**
>
> *Chris: Well, I live a long way away, so I'm expensive because I've got to travel so far and because I'm on a train for a long time so I've got to eat and drink. But they're always really good about that. Some places make it hard because you have to jump through so many hoops. But they make it easy to volunteer. That's one of the reasons I love working with them* [YAN] *– everyone's really friendly. Even the people who don't have a lot of 'front line' contact, when you go to the office everyone is really cool and really friendly.*

Exceeding expectations

Young people state that their level of participation has gone beyond their initial expectations.

> *For me personally, I didn't know I'd be able to do these things, as a young person - for example, data analysis. I didn't know we'd be sitting in a room looking at questions that young people have answered and analysing it. We thought, oh we'll just do the focus groups and run the sessions, but the adults will do it [the analysis] after. So that's been a big step I think.*
>
> <div align="right">Niral</div>

They describe having personally achieved things previously unimagined:

> *I'm going to University in September. That's something that I didn't think I'd do. That's the biggest thing that I've got out of it. I'm more confident, I've learnt a hell of a lot. I'm still learning but I've learnt a hell of a lot. I've met fantastic people from different backgrounds who I never would have even had the opportunity to meet a year ago.*
>
> <div align="right">Chris</div>

This is a direct result of developing skills, and being given responsibility for developing and conducting the research in **Project Re:action**. One steering group member (Brandon, 21) described his sense of accomplishment after visiting Downing Street and meeting Prime Minister Blair. He said he felt he had 'earned the right' to represent the project and the organisation but never expected he'd ever feel that way.

Being able to contribute, but also to increase levels of personal achievement is important for these young people and is closely linked to the high level of participation that they perceive to define the project.

> *It's inclusive of young people – and it helps us progress as well…From what I've seen, all the people who've worked on [this] research project - or on another project with the YAN staff - they all say that it has helped them to progress as people and that it's inspired them to do things they'd not ever thought was possible for them.*
>
> <div align="right">Nathan</div>

In the process, young people's expectations of 'adult' researchers have also been exceeded:

> *Chris: …decisions get made, things get changed, policy gets influenced. But it can be difficult to gauge what you do – I know that they take stuff that you say on board and take notice of it – but it's more than that. Like, I just applied to go to Uni and Jonathan supported me through this application process. I got to the stage where I was, like, banging my head up against a wall and I thought 'I don't want this no more' – but Jonathan was like, 'no, you do - you've got to keep working at it, and working at it.' So he was almost as happy as I was when I finally got it* [the application] *in. So they're really great like that.*

PC: So it's not just about you being a volunteer?

*Chris: No, it's about reciprocity – that's a word I learnt from **Re:action**! It's improved my language! They help me which makes it easier for me to help them, which makes it easier for them to help me. You know, it's like a circle.*

Chris

Young people demonstrate a high level of trust in the process and the research team, and the kinds of outcomes that they expect from the research.

This will make a difference to many young people once people know what Youth Action achieves and the change it can make in the community. Young people who have experienced what I have and will say, 'I got involved and helped change the community.'

Hogar

4.2 What have young people got out of being involved?

The most common benefits that young people reported result from their participation are personal benefits. These include:

- Increased confidence.
- Learning new skills.
- Having fun.
- Building strong, positive relationships with other people in the group – particularly those who are 'not like them.'
- Feeling that the 'adult' / 'young person' divide has been broken down.

They also believe that their participation will make a tangible difference to the community.

Young people also indicated that they believed their involvement in **Project Re:action** meant that:

- Young people's views and experiences were more accurately represented by the research.
- Policy makers and practitioners would have a better understanding about young people's contribution to the community.
- They were contributing to shifting negative perceptions about young people in the community.

5. The research methodology

This study recognises and attempts to address within its methodological framework the important idea that adult views of children and young people, and children's and young people's views of themselves differ. Young people's own, subjective accounts and constructions of their social world lie at the heart of this study[1] and it is informed by the work of two British social anthropologists, Allison James & Alan Prout [2] and the recent development of this by Prout.[3]

In order to explore the complex research question we decided to use a mixed methods research approach. Creshwell and Plano Clark[4] define mixed methods research as follows:

> "Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method; it focuses on collecting, analysing, and mixing both, quantitative and qualitative data in a single or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone." (p.5)

This decision was explored with young people and throughout the research we had many discussions about why and how to conduct a mixed methods research project.

The following quote from a member of the steering group highlights how young people who have been part of an academic research project grasp this and how the participative element of the research was crucial to achieve this understanding:

> *This was a pleasant opportunity to take part in something which is recognised but also represents young people. It was an opportunity to contribute my opinion as somebody who has experienced volunteering with the members of the group. What I think I liked is the fact that I did make valuable contributions as a young person. For me, what I have got out of it was also to see the breakdown of the analysis and the different ways to analyse the data and present it. Also to find out what quantitative and qualitative research means.*
>
> *Taking part in that experience it is now in my mind and I can tell other young people what quantitative and qualitative is about and how it represents different schools of thought but also how to combine them. That's what I have got out of it: education and an eye opening experience.*
>
> Nathan

[1] Morrow, Virginia. 2002 "Improving the Neighbourhood for Children." in *Children in the City: Home, Neighborhood, and Community*, edited by Christensen, Pia and Margaret O'Brien. London: Routledge. Retrieved November 26, 2006

[2] Allison James & Alan Prout 1997 *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, London: Falmer Press

[3] Alan Prout 2004 *The Future of Childhood*. London Routledge

[4] Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2006). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

5.1 Sampling

- The target group for young people was 14 to 25 years old – an age range chosen to reflect both a time of key life transitions and of significant policy concern.
- The total survey sample size was for 920 young people across the members of Youth Action Network representing age, ethnic and gender diversity.
- The qualitative fieldwork was conducted in seven projects which are part of the Youth Action Network:
  - Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (Birmingham)
  - VSU Youth In Action (Kent)
  - Berkshire Association of Clubs for Young People (Berkshire)
  - Greater Manchester MV (Manchester)
  - Youth Point (Leeds)
  - Youth Action Blackburn (Blackburn)
  - Volunteer Centre Merton (Merton)

Community members
- This was a selection of local community representatives suggested by projects and young people to be interviewed about the wider benefits of the project, e.g. local police, community workers, councillors etc.

Youth workers
- Youth workers from different agencies took part in two discussion groups.
- A survey sample of 40 youth workers, identified through convenience sampling/ snowball sampling.

5.2 Phases of the research

First phase of our data collection
35 young volunteers were trained in conducting focus groups during a weekend residential training event. The young people also refined the research questions and research tools. The young volunteers from eight different organisations conducted went on to conduct a total of eight discussion groups with young volunteers in different regions within England. These groups explored elements of social capital, participation and reasons for volunteering. The steering group also conducted two discussion groups with workers from different areas, focused on youth participation and the dynamics within organisations. After intensive work with the young people from the steering group and reflecting on our findings from the first research phase, we devised a survey questionnaire and further refined other group research tools.

Second phase of our data collection
This phase consisted of a survey with over 920 young people currently being supported by Youth Action Network membership organisations and a survey with 40 workers from the different organisations within the Network. These were completed both on and off-line.

Third phase of our data collection
During the third phase, we looked closely at the qualitative data collected so far in order to build on the findings of the first and second phase. Young people (with the support of the project team) visited eight locations and conducted a total of**:**
- Eight discussion groups with young people (one in identified region).
- Eight discussion groups with community members (again, one in each region).
- One discussion group with representative workers of each project.

5.3 Analysis of data

As we illustrated earlier by research carried out by Philippa Collin, participatory research is beneficial both because of its implicit values (such as empowerment and inclusion) but also because it enhances the quality of the research and value of what is found.

When analysing data, as adult researchers, we need to be aware that we are interpreting young people's accounts of their worlds from our own perspective. The danger is that, as researchers, we fit our findings into a conceptual frame which is not an adequate reflection of young people's experience. Having young people as equal partners on our steering group and participating in data analysis has not only made a difference to young people but also to the adult researcher, and has contributed to the quality of the research process.

> *At these data analysis sessions, when Thilo and Jonathan say something, sometimes we think 'no, that's not what they* [young people] *mean'…We can feed that back. I know Thilo says that this has really changed his view of young people. So I know it's having an impact on them and hopefully when this project gets out it'll affect other people too.*
>
> Niral

With this research we are aiming to not only understand the meanings and significance that the social world has for young people, but also to explore its properties with them. All of the information relating to this has been generated and verified by and with the young people involved in the project. Involving young people in all aspects of the research process enables them to become active participants in defining and interpreting their actions collectively with the researcher and has enhanced their understanding about their own living environment.

The data has been analysed through an iterative process of describing, classifying and connecting data[5] within a general framework of 'adaptive' grounded theory.[6] The use of mixed strategies of data collection was used to facilitate cross-checking,[7] achieve triangulation[8] and aid further exploration. In the early stages of the research process, analysis was quite general with initial hypotheses largely tentative. Analysis gains greater clarity and explanatory power as qualitative and quantitative data is being analysed through constant cross-checking and further exploration.

This process as applied to the present study was as follows:

Exploratory phase one
The exploratory phase has a qualitative emphasis (QUAL). The data was explored by using NVIVO7 (a qualitative computer analysis package). The development of the survey questionnaire was informed by the results of the focus groups conducted by the young volunteers, combined with theoretical considerations and discussions with the steering group.

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[5] Dey, Ian. (1993) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A User Friendly Guide for Social Scientists.* London: Routledge.
[6] Layder, Derek (1993). *New Strategies in Social Research*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers/ Polity Press
[7] Denscombe, Martyn (1998). *Ground Rules for Good Research: a 10 point guide for social researchers*, Buckingham, Open University Press
[8] Shaw, Ian (2003). Cutting edge issues in social work. *British Journal of Social Work, 33: pp107-116*

Exploratory phase two

This phase has a quantitative emphasis through the administration of the surveys. These were analysed by exploring frequencies, significant and meaningful differences, performing factor analysis and cluster analysis using SPSS (a quantitative analysis computer package).

Exploratory phase three

The insights gained through phase one and two were further explored through the detailed analysis of the focus group data of the third part of our data collection. Results were validated and further explored with qualitative results.

5.4 Quality in the analysis process

The academic rigour and quality of the process was checked by using Tashakkori and Teddlie's[9] suggestion that mixed methods researchers should be able to defend their interpretations by asking the following questions:

- Does the inference follow the findings?
- Are the interpretations consistent with theory and state of knowledge in the field?
- Are the inferences consistent with each other?
- Do the global inferences adequately incorporate the inferences made from the QUAL and QUAN strands of the study?

These questions were explored during the whole analysis process by involving the steering group, colleagues from De Montfort University and Youth Action network staff.

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[9]Tashakkori, A. and Teddlie. C. 2003 *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioural Research*. London, SAGE Publication

6. What is social capital?

Young people engage with others through a variety of associations forming mar., different types of networks. Sometimes each of these networks has different sets of norms, trust and reciprocity. Social networks are not only important in terms of emotional support but also crucial in giving people more opportunities, choice and power.[10] However, there can be significant differences between the types of networks people have, not only in quantity but also in quality. The concept of social capital can encapsulate these differences.

Many authors tend to make a distinction between different types of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital resides in family and friendship relationships, and peer groups that provide a sense of belonging in the here and now. Bridging social capital is, as it sounds, about creating links with people outside our immediate circles. These networks can be very important for broadening our opportunities and horizons. Putman[11] considers the distinction between bridging and bonding to be of crucial importance, referring to bridging as 'exclusive networks' and bonding as 'inclusive networks.' He does not only state the difference, he also highlights what he considers being some of their consequences:

> "Bonding social capital is …..good for 'getting by' but bridging social capital is crucial for 'getting ahead."[12]

Thus, bridging social capital is seen to generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves.

In previous research,[13] the ideas about social capital have been applied to young people's friendship and socialising networks formed in their neighbourhoods, schools, leisure and interest groups. This offers a way of examining whether these are helpful in enabling young people to move on in their lives and access jobs, training and education, or whether they act to hold them back and deter them from trying new things. As such, social capital is seen as a social resource.[14]

Other perspectives see social capital as the 'glue' of society. For example, Putnam's[15] notion of social capital as a community asset emphasises civic engagement as in membership of local non-governmental organisations. Norms of reciprocity and trust among community members provide general guidelines for a positive experience.

A perspective which tries to integrate different perspectives can be described through the analogy of "The Harbour, Setting Sail and Navigation."

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[10] Boeck, T., Fleming, J. and Kemshall, H. (2006) 'The Context of Risk Decisions: Does Social Capital Make a Difference?' *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 7 (1)
[11] Putnam, Robert. (2000) *Bowling Alone - The Collapse and Revival of American Community New*. New York: Simon & Schuster
[12] Putnam 2000 and Field, J. (2003) *Social Capital*. London: Routledge.
[13] Holland, J. Reynolds, T. and Weller, S (2007) Transitions, Networks and Communities: The Significance of Social Capital in the Lives of Children and Young People. *Journal of Youth Studies, 10 (1) 97-116*
[14] Holland et al 2007 and Weller, S. (2007) Skateboarding Alone? Making Social Capital Discourse Relevant to Teenagers' Lives. *Journal of Youth Studies, 10 (1) 557-574*
[15] Putnam (2000)

The 'Harbour' can be a safe space, but also for many young people a place where they feel trapped. The social capital is more static and young people tend to interact with other, similar young people. Networks are based upon their immediate locale of the street, local park and home and are characterised by a strong sense of belonging.

To 'Navigate' means that young people have the resources to interact with different groups of other young people and adults and they draw from a more dynamic social capital. Within these different networks, some young people show a more complex diversity, especially within groups from different places such as the school, the local area, interest groups or identity groups. The diverse networks are varied and dynamic in nature and young people engage in a varied range of activities with more choice in how to spend the free time.

Friends are more diverse within the family and school environment. This, combined with a more supportive neighbourhood environment and seeing themselves as part of the school community and other alternative communities and groups, creates the necessary field for young people to develop bridging social capital.

7. The main findings of the research

7.1 Profile of participants

Eight organisations participated in the focus groups and 16 organisations participated in the survey, with some of them returning over 100 surveys.

38% of the young people who replied to the survey are male and 62% are female; 4% declared themselves as disabled; 63% are of White UK origin; 7% of Black origin and 20% of Asian origin.

Overall 23% of respondents live in cities, 62% in towns and 15% in villages. 40% are at school, 21% at college, 19% at university, 18% are in employment or training (full-time and part-time) and 6% are unemployed. Most respondents (55%) have been volunteering for up to one year, 28% between one and three years and 17% over three years.

7.2 Reasons for volunteering

Young people's reasons for taking part in volunteering were varied across the Youth Action Network membership. The following accounts exemplify some of these experiences.

> "My school told me it would look good when you do it so I thought I will do it and I went for it."

> "I was really bored in the summer and I wanted something constructive to do and also hopefully to try and help me find a career that I would be interested in so that was why I volunteered."

> "It was a theatre company and I have just graduated and I did my degree in archaeology but I don't want to do archaeology as a career, I want to do something more creative. So I thought do lots of different creative things and try and find out which one interests me the most."

> "I do various different volunteering things but I would say most of my youth work volunteer roles that I do, which includes mentoring, youth justice work, and various other things, anyway the youth work stuff I would say more stems from passion and wanting to help either underachieving people or alternatively those who are getting into trouble with the law".

> "I didn't start volunteering to change adults' opinions of children across Britain at all. I don't know if anyone else started because they thought children were being picked on and there were generalisations being made and we want to stand for the rights of kids… So I don't think changing images and stuff like that well personally it is not an important factor in why I take part.""

Whilst these are just a few of the accounts of young people, overall the main motivations that young people gave for volunteering were:

- Giving something back to the community.
- Having interesting experiences.
- To meet other young people.

Whilst networking is not a primary reason for young people to volunteer in the first instance, our research shows that, during the volunteering experience, this becomes more important. The chart on the following page was devised by young people in the analysis sessions using NVIVO 7 and organises the motivations given by young people for volunteering.
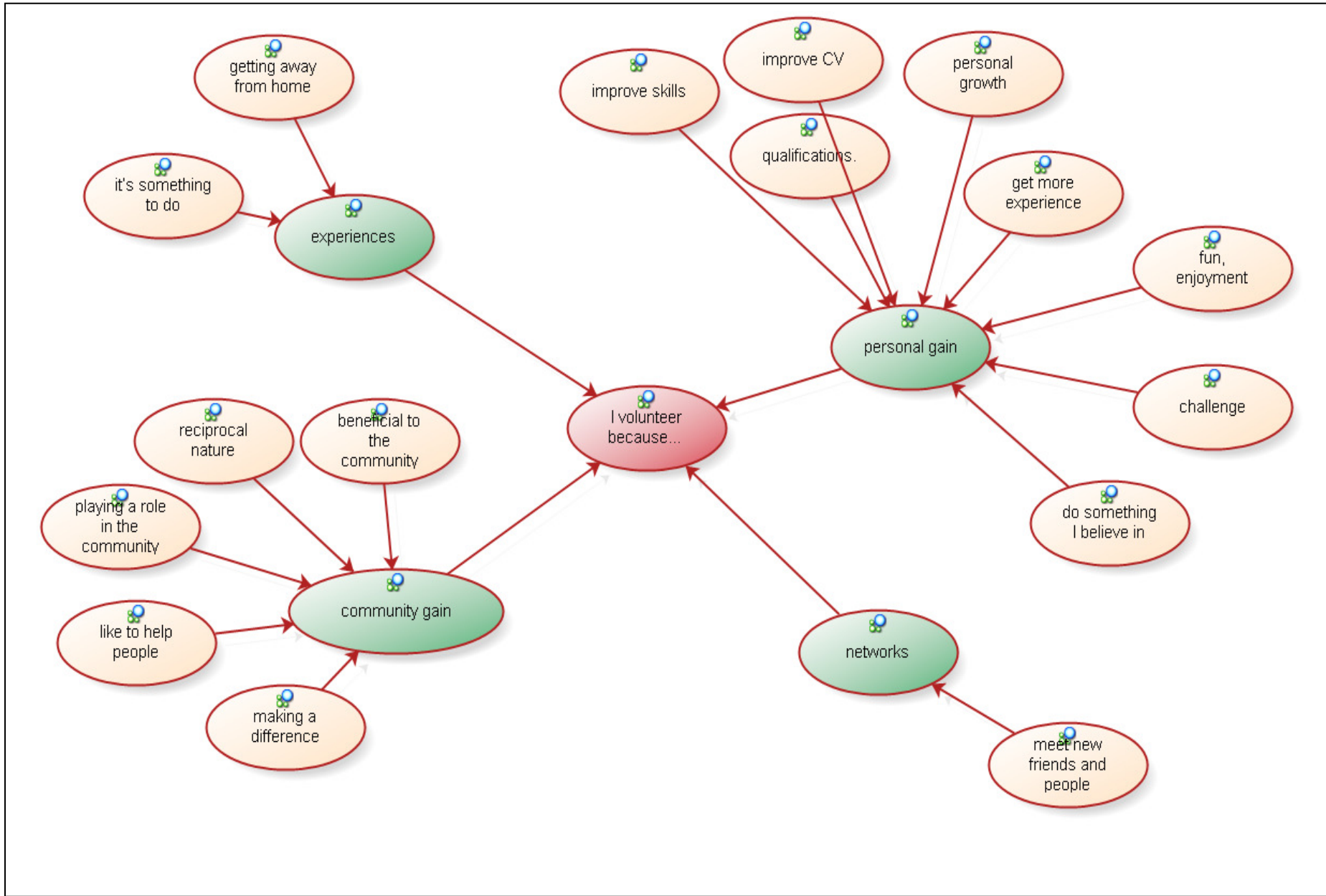
7.3 Types of volunteering

Youth Action Network's vision is for all young people to have access to a Youth Action opportunity. Conceptually, Youth Action is a synthesis of youth volunteering and youth work governed by nine principles:

The nine key principles of Youth Action
1. Youth participation
2. Benefiting others
3. Fun & rewarding
4. Flexibility
5. Support
6. Recognition
7. Progression & leadership
8. Diverse & inclusive
9. Developmental & educative.

Both Youth Action Network and its members adopt these nine principles in delivering youth volunteering activities. 63% of staff members who participated in the survey said they offered some support to young people doing Youth Action with another 37% mainly providing volunteer brokerage.

Project Re:action staff survey		
How would you best describe your volunteering service to young people? (Tick one)		
Answer options	**Response percent**	**Response count**
100% Youth Action all of the time	11%	5
Mostly Youth Action with some volunteering brokerage	20%	9
An equal mix of Youth Action and volunteering brokerage	32%	14
Mostly volunteering brokerage with some Youth Action	30%	13
100% volunteer brokerage all of the time	7%	3

7.4 Investment in Youth Action projects

There are two widely recognised 'types' of volunteering – formal and informal. Where there is some organisational involvement, the resulting volunteering is regarded as 'formal volunteering,' whereas helping people outside your family or helping out in at a family member's sports or arts club is commonly understood to be 'informal volunteering.' Whilst throughout the research project we have explored the impact and dynamics of formal Youth Action volunteering, we also inserted in the survey a question about informal volunteering.

The time young people invest in volunteering (both formal and informal) within Youth Action Network member organisations is high. We explored informal volunteering by asking young people if they have given unpaid help to other people except relative during the last 12 months.

A total of 81% of the young volunteers had given unpaid help to other people (excluding relatives) at least once a week and once a month and 50% helped others at least once a week. The amount of time that young people invest in formal volunteering activities was also very high with a total of 79% of the young volunteers volunteering two hours or more at a frequency of between once a week and once a month; within this 55% of young volunteers are investing two hours or more a week.

8. Enhancing social capital

As we have identified through the analogy of navigation, a first step in order to enhance their social capital is for young volunteers to set sail. Our research tells us that young people's social capital is enhanced by moving away from their immediate community and interacting with new people. However, in order to form new and different networks, people need also to be at ease with different people and change their attitudes or behaviours towards new people.

For some young people, volunteering holds a peripheral place in their lives and is mainly about 'placement volunteering.' For other young people, however, their volunteering gave them an opportunity for reflection, learning and talking to others. This was mainly within 'Youth Action' volunteering projects: being part of a group, either with friends or with workers, sometimes volunteering as a group, sometimes being challenged and challenging themselves, sometimes exploring new things as well as sometimes having fun as a group.

Youth Action volunteering encourages young people to challenge the way they think about current affairs, about other people and their own life. It is also about changing attitudes towards people who are different and learning from each other, as highlighted in the following account by a young female volunteer:

> *(F) In terms of appearance and presentation it is like if you just look around the room there are people and they all look different and you all learn from each other, in the way they dress and things like that. So it just prepares you for different situations that you wouldn't look for on a normal day. So basically learning from each other, use of language, some of these lot said they have learnt many big words, confidence, talking to new people. The youth programmes and educational programmes help us to gain new skills.*

> *(F) Just the last two, being open minded helps you gain benefits and the behaviour of others, you see other people and you learn from them.*

Young people talked about the range of different people that they had met during their volunteering and we have organised this into a list (please note that this list is not exhaustive):

- Differences in lifestyle: dress, music.
- Differences in identity: faith, political views, ways of thinking.
- Differences in class: better or worse off economically.
- Differences in abilities: disabled and non-disabled young people.
- Differences in age: younger and older people.
- Differences in location: from different neighbourhoods.

Using this list we explored whether young volunteers have volunteered with different people, and whether through doing so their opinion had changed about these people and encouraged them to socialise with different people. Almost half of the volunteers asked (45%) felt that volunteering had changed an opinion that they previously held about other types of people. The biggest change in opinion identified through the research was towards people with different identities, lifestyles and social class. 51% of the volunteers surveyed started to socialise with people who are somehow different to them as a direct result of volunteering.
We explored whether some groups were affected by their exposure to difference

more than other groups and whether there are significant and meaningful differences between different groups (for example gender, ethnicity, length of volunteering). We discovered that a strong and significant difference is between ethnic groups, with more Asian young volunteers (65%) socialising with new and different people. This difference can be interpreted in various ways but might point to how cultural attitudes and behaviours might influence the dispossession of young people to socialise with new people.

From a social capital perspective, socialising with new people is important because this contributes to enhancing new and different social ties which might broaden young volunteers' horizons and understanding of diversity.

8.1 Benefits and volunteering

Young volunteers and workers at Youth Action Network membership organisations perceive that volunteering has a big impact not only on other individuals but also on the community and the organisation. Looking at the following chart, we can see that most of the staff believe that, generally, young volunteers in their project have an impact on different levels ranging form the individual, neighbourhood to the international level.

From the responses of the young volunteers, we can see how many of them would specifically feel that they are making an impact in each of these areas. Within this, the majority of young people feel that they are having an impact on an individual and neighbourhood level.

Project Re:action survey		
Do you think young people's volunteering has benefited any of the following? *(Please tick all that apply)*		
Answer options	**Staff**	**Young volunteers**
Other individuals	95.6%	84%
Other volunteers	95.6%	66%
The local community or neighbourhood	95.6%	63%
Your organisation	97.8%	63%
A school/college/university	71.1%	48%
Other organisations	80.0%	34%
On a national level	53.3%	18%
On an international level	26.7%	8%

There are existing studies exploring the benefits of volunteering to draw from. In our project, we focused on the social capital benefits young people receive when they meet new people through volunteering and the contribution they make to community cohesion.

The young person's survey asked what benefits the young volunteers felt that they had received from the new people that they met through volunteering. The results show that a majority of volunteers report an increase in their personal and social development.

Over 60% of young people feel that through volunteering they gain confidence and a

better understanding of people which also reflects our findings in the previous section (see 'interaction with new people'). Half of the young people feel that volunteering broadens their horizons and makes them happy. We will explore some of these aspects in detail in the following sections.

The following chart shows the range of benefits young volunteers feel they receive from new people they meet through volunteering and how members of staff generally see the benefits young volunteers receive. Whilst the two sets of data are not directly comparable, it shows that in both cases the biggest benefit is identified as 'increasing confidence.' The only difference between the perceptions is that for staff members 'organising an event' comes second in the list and for young people, it is 'understanding people.' This might point towards the importance that young people place on the social aspect of volunteering (such as understanding new people or meeting and socialising with new people) which might differ from the importance workers put into developing specific skills (such as organising an event).

Project Re:action survey				
Has volunteering given you/young people the opportunity to meet new people who were helpful to you/them in any of the following ways? *(Please tick all that apply)*				
Answer options	**Staff**		**Young volunteers**	
They gave them a written letter of recommendation	78%	7	21%	9
They supported them to think about a career	89%	3	32%	5
They supported them to find a job	76%	8	13%	10
They gave them a job	42%	10	7%	11
They helped them to gain more confidence	96%	1	69%	1
They helped them to broaden their horizons	84%	4	53%	3
They helped to make them happy	84%	4	51%	4
They helped them to better understand people	82%	5	62%	2
They helped them to organise an event	91%	2	31%	6
They helped them at school/college	64%	9	25%	8
They helped them to engage in their neighbourhood	80%	6	26%	7

8.2 Bridging and bonding volunteering activities and social capital

As we have explained in the 'what is social capital?' section, bonding social capital resides in family and friendship relationships, and peer groups that provide a sense of belonging in the here and now. Bridging social capital is, as it sounds, about creating links with people outside our immediate circles.

We already have explored the fact that young volunteers meet all sorts of new people and that through volunteering they understand different people better, start to interact with them and become more open-minded. We also have seen that this interaction with new people provides young people with concrete benefits which we have called social capital resources.

In this section we will explore how different settings where volunteering takes place have an effect on creating more opportunities for young volunteers. As we will see,

these different settings also have an effect on enhancing bonding and bridging social capital.

In order to compare the different settings where volunteering takes place, we divided the sample into three groups:[16]

Volunteering in neighbourhood settings
1   Local community or neighbourhood
2   My organisation

Volunteering in school/ college/ university settings
1   The school/college/university

Volunteering in national and international settings
1   National settings
2   International settings

Using these new variables we have found that:
- 38% of young people mainly volunteer within their neighbourhood and local community.
- 40% of the volunteers volunteer in their educational institution.
- 22% of young people 'bridge out' to more national and international settings.

Those volunteering in schools, colleges and universities quite often also volunteer in neighbourhood and local community settings and those volunteering in national and international settings are also quite often engaged in a number of other settings such as the local neighbourhood, school, college or university.

In the next section, we will explore whether social capital is enhanced by bridging over bonding: i.e. if volunteering activities which take young volunteers out of their immediate surroundings provide them with different benefits and opportunities. By immediate surroundings we refer to the neighbourhood, their local community or organisation and compare this with more bridging types of settings within schools, colleges and universities and even broader bridging in national and international settings provide them.

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[16] This was explored in different ways, through factor analysis, cluster analysis and through discussions with young people
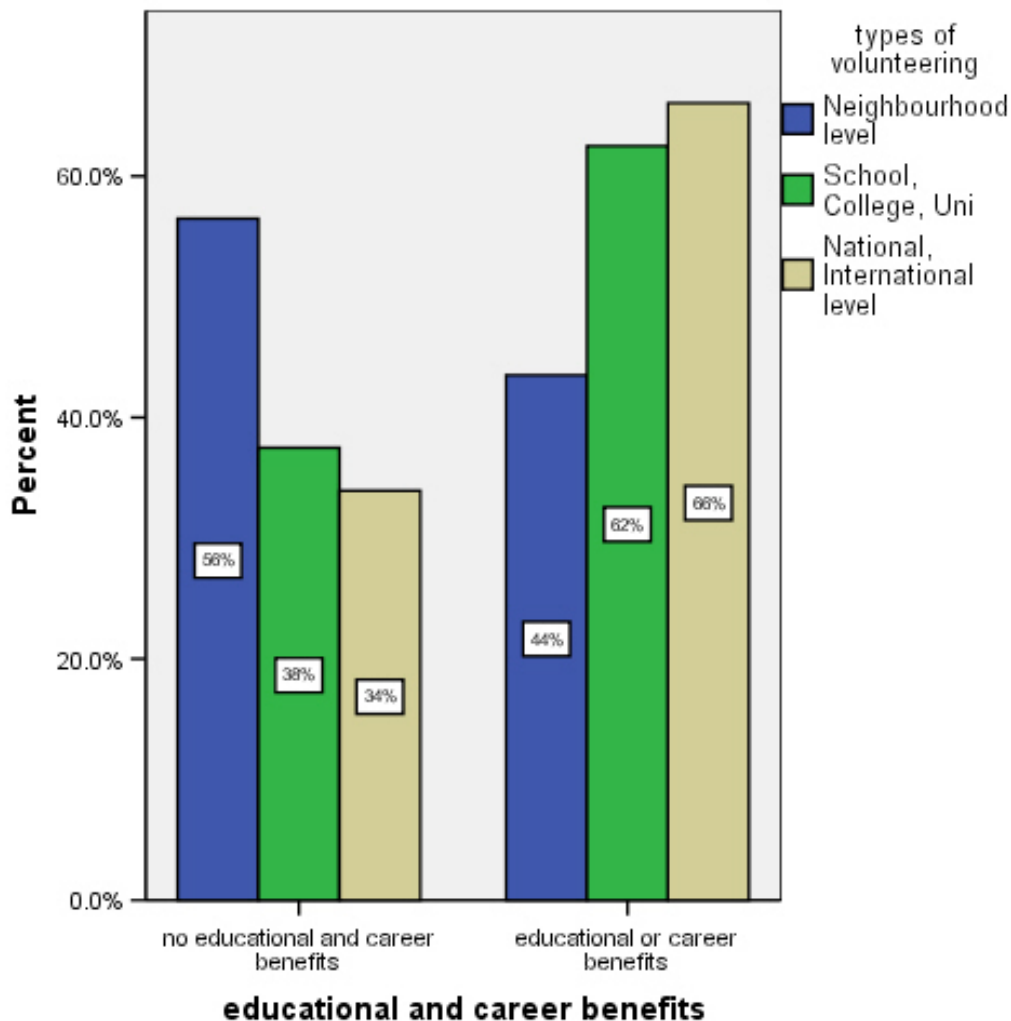
The following chart shows how many young people volunteer in the different settings.

Volunteering
Settings

■ Neighbourhood,
Community

■ School,
College, Uni

■ National,
International
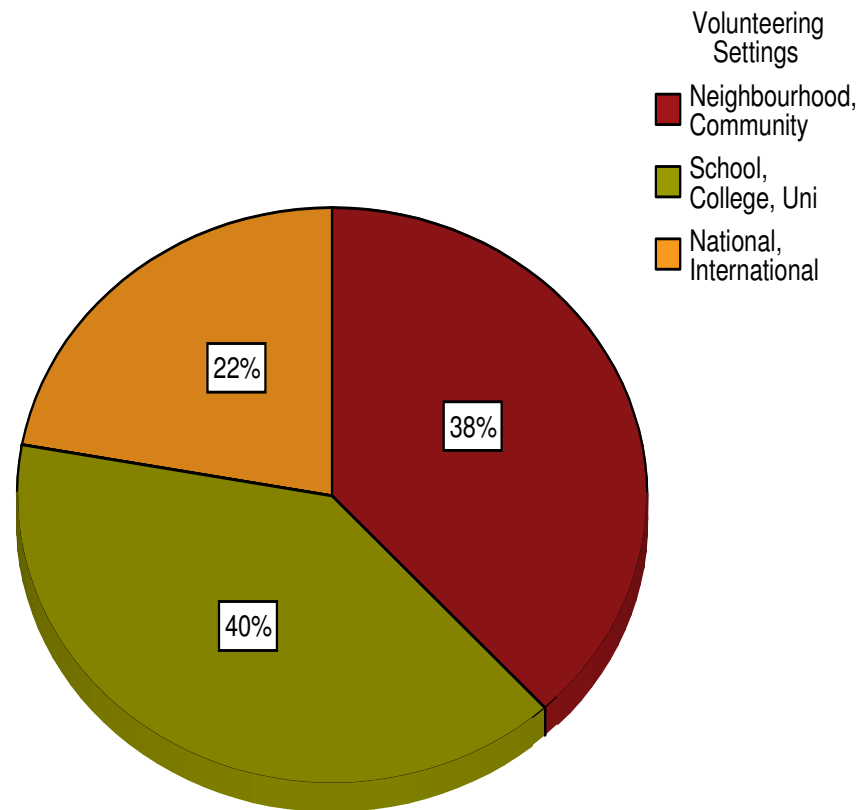
Overall, an important finding is that the number of benefits (in terms of opportunities and resources) received through young volunteers meeting new people is affected by the setting where the volunteering takes place i.e. neighbourhood and local community, school, college or university and national or international. Young people who volunteer at a national and international level receive an average of 35% more benefits than those who volunteer at a neighbourhood level. Those young people who are volunteering in educational institutions report a slight increase in benefits received, compared to the neighbourhood level volunteering.

In terms of gaining resources and opportunities that help young volunteers to get ahead in life (i.e. education and employment), our findings suggest that through bridging volunteering more young people report an increase in educational and employment benefits. 66% of young people who had experience of volunteering at a national and international level reported that through meeting new people they benefited in educational and career/employment support, compared with 44% of young people volunteering at a neighbourhood level.

From the next chart we can see that more young people report that bridging volunteering brings with it a greater number of benefits for the young people involved.

Percent (y-axis)

types of volunteering
- Neighbourhood level
- School, College, Uni
- National, International level

no educational and career benefits: 56%, 38%, 34%
educational or career benefits: 44%, 62%, 66%

educational and career benefits

Opportunities for young men and young women

There are statistically significant differences between female and male volunteers. Within the male sample, more young men (26%, compared to 20% of the female sample) volunteer in national and international settings. In contrast, more female volunteers (42%, compared to 36% of the male sample) volunteer in school/college and university settings. It is important to highlight this difference since, as we have seen from the previous discussion, the benefits received at a national and international level of volunteering are greater.

Therefore, female volunteers might not get access to the same opportunities, new contacts and the resources as the young men who volunteer.

Third parties

The **Re:action** survey asked young volunteers if they thought they received benefits from some specific adult people, such as representatives from other voluntary organisations, councillors, local MPs, business representatives and the police, on a range from very often (5) to never (1). Throughout our report we will call these people 'third parties.' We did not include religious leaders, community leaders or school staff in these calculations because we consider these adults to be quite often part of the volunteering organisation or people through which young volunteers might get involved with through their volunteering activity at the more local level.

In our research we explored whether or not these 'third parties' are able to reward young people for their volunteering efforts in some way. These rewards include offering young people access to better job opportunities, support with careers and education, and with the young people's personal and social development.

Volunteers who were volunteering in national and international settings show a 26% increase (compared to neighbourhood volunteering) in benefits from third parties, which contribute to the overall increase in volunteering benefits and especially the big increase of educational and career benefits through bridging volunteering for the young people involved.

8.3 Social exclusion and working with disadvantaged groups

In our discussion with young volunteers, they identified that quite often they are being stereotyped as being middle class and 'nice,' and not as young people who come from all sorts of backgrounds. Staff members highlighted that many organisations work with young people who come form all sorts of backgrounds especially NEETS (Not currently engaged in Employment, Education or Training) and young people with special needs.

| *Project Re:action* staff survey		
Do you support any of the following groups of young people? (Tick all that apply)		
Answer options	**Response percent**	**Response count**
NEETS	85.7%	30
LGBTQ	60.0%	21
Teenage parents	65.7%	23
Special needs	77.1%	27
Other (please specify)		11

Many of our conversations were also around anti-social behaviour and how young people are seen by adults within their community. Some young volunteers stated that they had engaged in anti-social behaviour, and that volunteering has changed their behaviour. We explored these issues through the following suggested responses to specific questions:

1. *I have always had positive social behaviour. This is why I volunteer.*
2. *I have engaged in anti-social behaviour and volunteering has improved my behaviour.*

Based on the first question, 62% of young people claim that they have always had positive social behaviour. More young women (69%) than young men (52%) would claim that they have always had positive social behaviour. Based on the second question 13% of young people have engaged in some sort of anti-social behaviour before volunteering and volunteering has changed this.

Following our previous exploration around benefits, it is significant to note that 77% of young volunteers who said that they had engaged in some sort of anti-social behaviour perceive that through meeting new people they benefited in educational and career/employment support, compared to an overall average of 52%.

The following shows the increase in educational and career/ employment benefits:

educational and career benefits
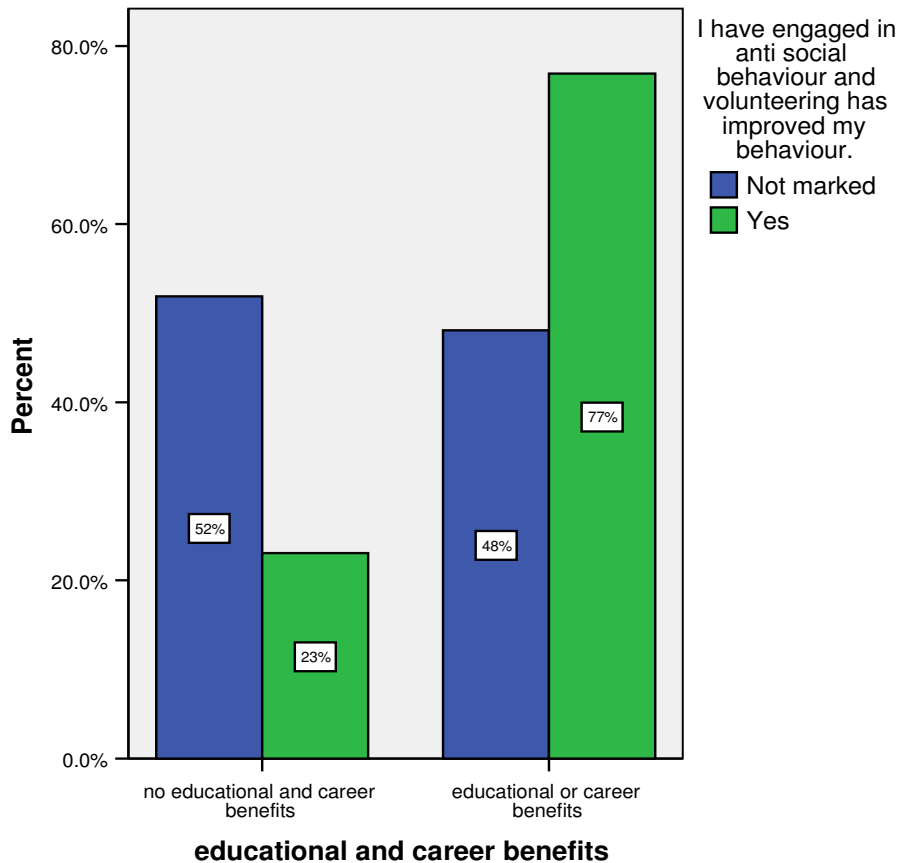
For some young people, it is important to leave behind earlier social networks that might have encouraged crime and create new networks which broaden their horizons and give them opportunities to interact with different groups of both young people and adults. The story of one young male volunteer shows how the creation of new bridging social capital can aid desistence from offending:

> *So there is something about jobs and things. Have you met people through volunteering you normally wouldn't have thought you would meet?*
> *Yes, I have met councillors, I have met MPs, I have met famous people through volunteering, and if I hadn't done volunteering I wouldn't have met them, I know for a fact… From the volunteer projects we have got two of the councillors on our project so we have got support from them, and if we need anything sorting out like money problems they will apply for us from the council.*

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***In terms of meeting these people do you think it has changed
something?***
*Yes, I come from a council estate which is quite run down and from that there
is not another person doing this kind of stuff where I live. So it has just
proved that even though you come from that sort of area you can actually do
stuff that you want to do.*

Do you think it helps you move on?
*Yes, it has moved me on because I used to nick cars and stuff so it has
moved me on from instead of nicking cars I am trying to do something with
my life, so like jobs and things.*

8.4 Youth Action volunteering and social capital

In our research we were especially interested if the dynamics and processes behind
Youth Action volunteering added anything to the experience of young volunteers,
especially in enhancing their social capital.

One of the most important findings is that there is a strong relationship between
levels of participation (P) and young people's sense of influence (I) and being trusted
(T). We will refer to this in the next section as 'PIT.' Overall, there are high levels of
participation, a high sense of being able to exert influence and a strong sense of
being trusted.

Many young volunteers doing Youth Action pointed to the empowering nature of their
projects and to the fact that they have choices. Being able to make their own
decisions and being trusted to make these decisions seems to be an important
aspect to promoting participation:

*You are never told what to do, we have been involved in things where you
have talked about what activities to put on, what things people enjoy. But
even if you are not involved in that decision-making you never have to do
certain things, you just chose whatever you want to do. So in that way you
get more enjoyment out of it because you are doing it for yourself and
someone is not ordering you to do something.*

*…the entire thing is choice of course… for example I recently went on a
personal development thing to Wales, and you could chose what activities we
did instead of just being told you are going to do this. I think that is very good
in building up trust, giving people the choice of what to do.*

Throughout our conversations with young people the support they get from workers
appeared to be a crucial element:

*I think people like to make choices in what they do but you need the
organisation to give you the opportunities that you might not be able to get
yourself… I think that is important because I have heard people saying they
would like to make their own projects and stuff, it is hard to get that going, to
get that off the ground. Having some one there to give you the thing to do, to
get you in to it initially, is a pretty necessary part of it.*

Let's explore each of the components within PIT:

P= levels of participation

The levels of participation were explored by looking at levels of participation within the organisations and within the volunteering activities. One thing to bear in mind when interpreting the percentages here is that the staff survey looks at overall perceptions and the youth survey explores individual feelings.

Young people's leadership roles and levels of initiative within activities is higher than within organisations. It is noticeable that staff members' perception of organisational leadership of young volunteers and especially taking initiative in activities is higher than the individual perception of volunteers.

Project Re:action survey		
What has been the highest level of participation within your organisation?		
Answer options	**Staff**	**Young volunteers**
They ran their own organisation	11%	4%
They have been part of the management team of the organisation	39%	24%
They represented the organisation in a certain area and made decisions	47%	35%
None of the above	13%	38%

Project Re:action survey		
What has been so far the highest level of participation within an activity?		
Answer options	**Staff**	**Young volunteers**
They have had the idea for an activity and they organised it with a group	73%	45%
They have had the idea for an activity and workers organised it	13%	12%
They have been asked to take part in an activity	13%	27%
None of these	%	6%

I = sense of influence

This was explored by asking about levels of power and influence within the organisation and the volunteering activity. Please note again, when interpreting the percentages, the staff survey looks at overall perceptions and the youth survey explores individual feelings.

It is interesting to note that staff and young people's perception of influence and power within the project/organisation is almost the same. When it comes to their own volunteering activity, the answers of staff members reflect the emphasis on joint work between staff and young people. The young volunteers' answers reflect their knowledge that they can have influence but that they might not necessarily take up leadership roles. This will be discussed further in the following sections.

Project Re:action survey		
Who has the highest level of power/influence in your project/organisation?		
Answer options	**Staff**	**Young volunteers**
Young volunteers	16%	18%
Joint (staff and young volunteers)	60%	59%
Staff	24%	23%

Project Re:action survey		
Do you believe that it is possible to set up their own volunteering activity?		
Answer options	**Staff**	**Young volunteers**
Yes, and I/they have done it without the help of adults	35%	18%
Yes, but only with the help of adults workers	47%	25%
Yes, but I/they have never done it	18%	54%

3% of young volunteers don't believe that it is possible to set up their own volunteering activity

The last chart within influence and power shows that adults have a higher perception that young volunteers can influence their voluntary activity than it is the individual perception of the young volunteers. Whilst we are not able to make assessments of the reasons for this, we think that this finding is of relevance and should be explored further within voluntary organisations.

Project Re:action survey		
Do you think that young people can influence their voluntary activity?		
Answer options	**Staff**	**Young volunteers**
Strongly agree	70%	45%
Agree	24%	39%
Neither agree nor disagree	2%	9%
Disagree	4%	5%
Strongly disagree	0%	2%

T= Trust and being Trusted
The levels of trust and being trusted were explored by asking if adults put trust in the young volunteers and if volunteering has helped young people to open themselves up to trust other people.'

It is encouraging to see that staff members' overall perceptions are reflected by the individual perceptions of young volunteers. The trust that adult workers put into young volunteers has been one of the most important and consistent aspects mentioned by young people throughout the research project. Many young people think that trust is the most important thing when it comes to building new relationships.

> *I think a lot of adults don't really trust children because we don't get the opportunities to show them that we can be trusted. But I think in volunteering … you work with other people, you manage other things, you have to take care of other people, so I think that gives young people a chance to show that we can be trusted and that we deserve that trust.*

> *Obviously you must be getting trusted in some sort of way because they are always giving you all these projects and sending you out to go and work with other people. So I just think that is important for you to be able to trust in them because obviously you have been to work with 13 to 19 year olds, so you think it is important for them to trust you enough to think oh she can deal with them sorts of situations so we will send her to go and work with them, which I think is important.*

Project Re:action survey

In my voluntary organisation adults put a lot of trust in the young volunteers

Answer options	Staff	Young volunteers
Strongly agree	47%	49%
Agree	38%	36%
Neither agree nor disagree	11%	8%
Disagree	2%	5%
Strongly disagree	2%	2%

Project Re:action survey

Volunteering has helped young people to open themselves up to trust other people

Answer options	Staff	Young volunteers
Strongly agree	58%	44%
Agree	35%	34%
Neither agree nor disagree	7%	14%
Disagree	0	6%
Strongly disagree	0	2%

8.5 Different groups: Participation, Influence and Trust (PIT)

Within our survey we have been able to identify four different types of volunteers characterised by their levels of participation, sense of influence and trust:

1   **High P**articipation, sense of **I**nfluence and being **T**rusted.
2   **Low P**articipation and **high** sense of **I**nfluence and being **T**rusted.
3   **High P**articipation and **low** sense of **I**nfluence and being **T**rusted.
4   **Low P**articipation, sense of **I**nfluence and being **T**rusted.

A positive finding in terms of Youth Action Network membership organisations is that most of the volunteers are either in high PIT (44%) or in low P high IT (40%). The dynamics of this and why this happens will be further explored through the qualitative data. However it has also to be noted that 12% of the young volunteers are in low PIT and 4% of the young volunteers in high P low IT.

Youth Action Network promotes volunteering where young volunteers can take a leadership role. This also reflects government policies which promote young people having a greater say in the design and delivery of services, being in charge of their organisation and their volunteering and generally playing a part in decision-making processes. However, in our focus groups, not all young people want to take a leadership role and are quite happy to say: "If I want I can, but I don't want to…"

The feeling that they have high levels of influence and are being trusted by adult workers to take on leadership roles is extremely important to young volunteers. However, they also don't want to be pushed into taking up leadership roles; at certain times in their lives they are not in a position to take up these opportunities. We feel that this message is important as it recognises that not all young people involved in Youth Action will wish to take on leadership roles. Good volunteering for young people does not necessarily mean having a leadership role but knowing that you can influence decisions and that you are being trusted.

> *I don't want to run my own thing, I like it when they give me an opportunity to do something and then I can just go and do it and I don't have to worry about organising everything myself. It perhaps sounds selfish but it is easier to do. And like we were saying before it is a lot more effective if you just get a job to do and you just do it.*

> *… I think when you think about it you have got all your exams and all your course work and all your school work, on the whole I think you have got bigger things to think about…*

> *I don't think you have to be in a leadership role to have your say and have your opinions. I think if you go about it the right way you can be heard even if you are not in that position.*

However young volunteers also pointed out that sometimes the possibility to set up their own activities is not necessarily being promoted by the volunteering organisation, and so they were often unaware of that opportunity.

> *Talking about the solo projects I think if you went to MV and said ok I have got five people who want to do a certain thing in the community they would say yes you can do that, if you need help we can give it. But I don't think anyone would do that because they have not been told that it is a possibility.*

When I was volunteering and first started there was a list of things that I wanted to get involved in but on the bottom of that it didn't say you could possibly create your own volunteering scheme. I think that needs to be added because I would never think about starting my own thing, I just thought you could do set things, so I think that needs to be added.

It was interesting to note that some young volunteers were especially disillusioned by the notion of participation in political or government affairs. Some young people thought that their voice wouldn't make any difference and many young volunteers feel as if they are not listened to or not heard within political and government levels.

Personally I wouldn't get involved because from what I can see of the government, they pretty much don't listen to its own people on several issues in the House of Commons. The only time I would get involved in politics is if I had a position of responsibility, say I was the managing director of some company, because that way I can get a big amount of people behind me. But if I am just an ordinary person walking in the street then they are not just going to listen to a normal person, they want someone with some position or some responsibility behind them.

I have no interest in politics, I have no interest in how this country is run. I don't see me taking an interest will make any difference… there is nothing I can do I think. Nobody is going to listen to me.

## 8.6 Participation and social capital resources

Our research suggests that the environment and dynamics which underline high levels of participation, influence and trust (PIT) enable better processes through which social capital is enhanced. The number of benefits (in terms of opportunities and resources) young volunteers received through meeting new people is higher when young people have higher levels of **PIT** (an average of about five benefits) and lower when young people have lower levels of **PIT** (an average of three benefits).

In terms of gaining resources and opportunities that help young volunteers to get ahead in life (i.e. education and employment) the following chart highlights that through higher levels of PIT, more young people report an increase in educational and employment benefits. 63% of young people with high levels of PIT against 40% of young people with low levels of PIT reported that through meeting new people they benefited in educational and career/ employment support.

From the following chart we can also see that a high level of participation is the most indicative factor for higher educational and career/ employment benefits. This points to the positive processes underlying participative types of volunteering in enabling young people to enhance their social capital.
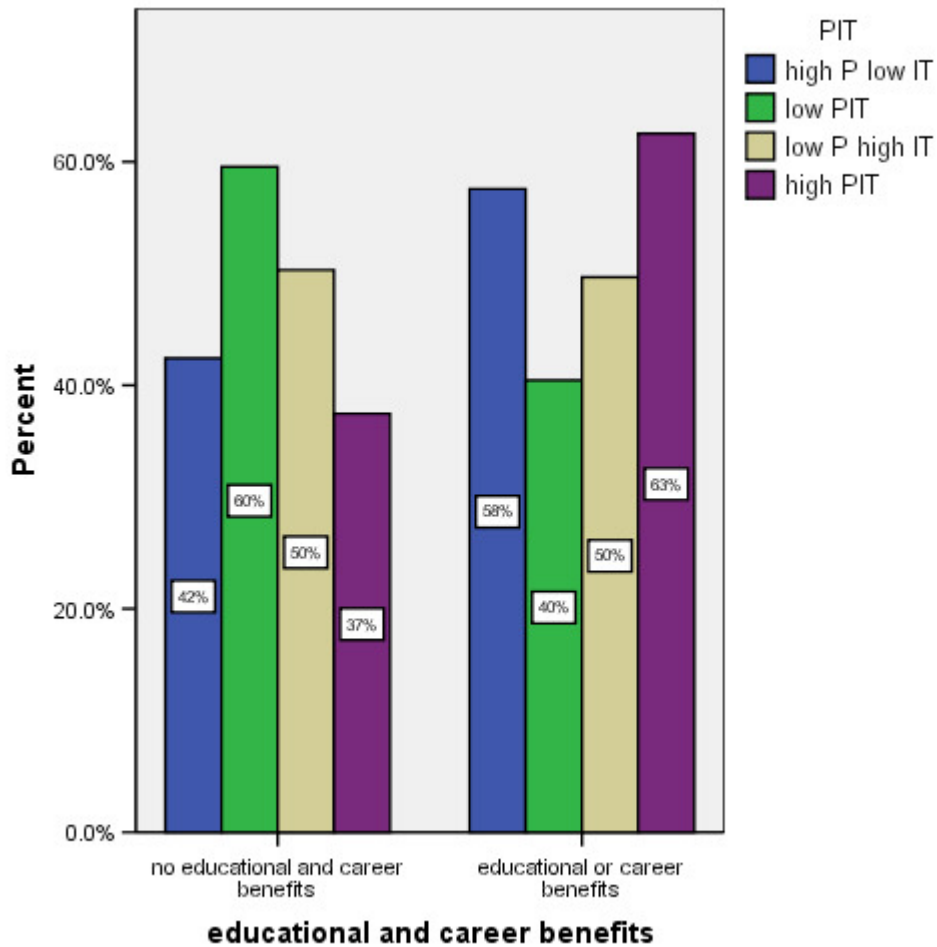
The next chart highlights that, whilst young volunteers within all types of Youth Action Network member projects have a high sense of influence and trust, it is within national and international settings (red line) where the highest levels of PIT are observed.
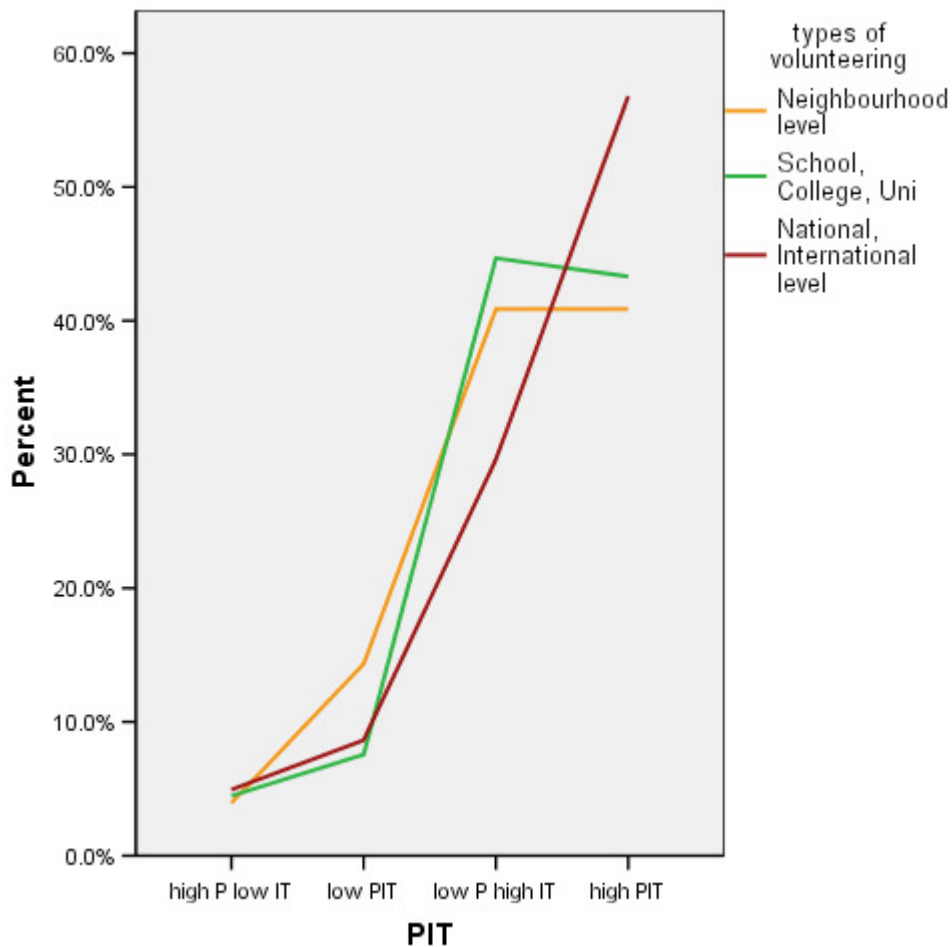
Similar differences can also be seen in the perceived benefits from third parties. Reciprocal and positive relationships with third parties and staff are very important for increasing young volunteers' sense of influence and trust.

8.7 Vulnerabilities created through high expectations

Creating positive expectations and stretching young people was identified throughout our research as something positive within Youth Action volunteering. Some young volunteers took leadership roles because they felt that they might be the type of person who enjoys it. However some young people felt that they put too high demands and expectations on themselves and others felt that they were having responsibilities dumped on them with many extra demands made on them. Bearing in mind the importance that young people place on feeling valued and trusted, workers need to be very careful about these kinds of feelings, which can lead to stress, disappointment and disillusion.

> *Taking on a leadership role, for me personally, I think it is a natural thing for me to do but I try to pull myself back mainly because I get a whole load of expectations from the organisation, not even the people around me, and they are expecting me to do literally something what a paid worker would do, or someone who has been in the job for so many years. Then you are thinking, whoa, you know, I am only a volunteer and there is only so much I can do.*

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Then sometimes it depends, like I don't need to be recognised in massive ways but sometimes you are overlooked and you are expected to do all this stuff and then when you don't do something it is like, why haven't you done it, or whatever. So I would say there are pros and cons to being a leader.

Another problem can be that organisations may build up the expectations of the young person so they think that their volunteering will give them power and voice with the reality being different:

….sometimes organisations give young people the right to express their views and so forth or say, you know, put your point across and say we are going to be doing X, Y and Z and nothing comes of it. Most times the reason why they open up a forum like that is because they are getting pressures, whether it is target pressures or from the government and so forth, but they are not exactly doing stuff. So I would say, from my point of view, it is better to literally do nothing as opposed to building up that young person, putting them through the motions and then everything just comes crashing down.

Overall, in our analysis sessions with the young researchers it was felt that, although there is no question that volunteering is fantastic for a lot of young people, things might not always go smoothly and this can be quite frustrating. The frustration can be because of pressure and being overloaded but also, as the account of a young woman shows, the feeling that after having put a lot of effort into a project nothing is being followed up and projects are not delivered, supported or taken on board by the staff.

Yes, expectation, pressure, and they wanted results, and when I produced that full term, nothing much was done after that. It was like, ok so what was the point of me doing that work if you are going to do nothing with it.

So it is about how it resonates, it is how it is being taken forward. First you get all this kind of oh you are a fantastic volunteer, you have all the power, and then suddenly nothing happens.

These accounts point to the fine and somewhat difficult balance in the relationships between staff and volunteers, especially relating to mutual trust, expectations and reciprocity. This does not only point to the feelings of the volunteers but also to the demands and expectations put on members of staff who are there to not only deliver a project but also be part of a process of enhancing positive relationships with young people.

8.8 Young people setting up their own projects

During our analysis, we noticed that sometimes young people only have power to set up their own projects as long as they comply or are in tune with the priorities, targets or values of the volunteering organisation. Some organisations might only promote certain types of volunteering and as long as the young person fits into this, they can lead the voluntary activity. We are aware that some organisations might have restrictions put on them because of the funding they are getting. However within the aim of promoting volunteering projects which are set up by young people and supporting them to pursue this, organisations should also be aware about the barriers to participation and how this relates to Youth Action and the enhancement of trust and influence.

One of the steering group members put it in simple terms:

> *… it is almost like, let's put it in a family, you are part of a family and if you say oh I now decide to clean the house your parents will say fantastic yes. If you say I have now decided to redecorate the whole house and do my own stuff they might say no, that you can't do. So they are deciding what you are allowed or not allowed to do. So as long as you volunteer and are doing nice things for society then you are allowed to do it. If you were to do something which might be a bit more controversial then it is more difficult.*

In our focus groups with workers this concern was also being voiced by some workers:

> *...[it] is so much easier when you are within a structure or a thing and people higher up say yes you can do that, here are a few contacts and off you go. It is so much harder if you are outside that structure to say well actually I want to start this, yes it is a lot harder to do so there is definitely an element of that.*

The following dialogue is presented in full because we believe it reflects many of the discoveries we made during our research, particularly around what the young volunteer here has termed 'controlled volunteering':

> *… I was born rebellious so I like to rebel from things…. There is controlled volunteering and there is no such thing as non-controlled volunteering, it is always led by somebody or somebody has got something to say about it. You can't please everybody.*
>
> **But you were able to set up your project?**
> *But I couldn't set up my other projects which I haven't told you about, which was for Asian gay people, I couldn't set it up in my own community. Because the majority are Islamic community and it doesn't fit their religious remit. So we can't befriend Asian gay people in the community or support them.*
>
> **So therefore you found there was a limit to the support you would get?**
> *Yes, if we did go ahead with it, or if my community centre said yes we are going to get funding for you to go ahead with it then ultimately there would be protests outside from the community saying you can't do this. But it was just an educational establishment doing computers, ultimately bad press.*
>
> **So what is happening?**
> *Nothing, it is a no go area, you just can't do things in certain areas. So it is controlled.*

Whilst this experience was not common within our research and should not lead to generalisations, we think that it is important for projects to reflect on this experience with young people to explore its implications for Youth Action projects.

9. Youth Action and Community Cohesion

Many young people in Youth Action projects have told us that they like to volunteer because they want to give something back to their community. The word 'community' is used everywhere in the language of young people, residents of neighbourhoods, professionals, policy makers and politicians and can have slightly different meanings in different scenarios. Let's disentangle some of the uses:

Community of place: Neighbourhoods and places where people live. There are many examples of good community spirit based on a positive perception of the neighbourhood, pride and trust.

Sometimes people feel that the sense of community is dwindling. The loss of a local community spirit can affect some people and leave them with small groups of support and friends, which can make them feel isolated. Sometimes in these communities there are conflicts or tensions between different people or groups of people.

Community of interest: Communities based on improvement, access, activities and campaigns. Well known campaigning charities such as Amnesty International have strong communities of interest. Young people can also come together in communities of interest around shared taste in music or a passion for sport, or their Youth Action activity. These can be long-term or short-term communities.

Community of identity: Many people feel a strong affiliation to groups which are not necessarily linked to their neighbourhoods. They feel a sense of belonging to religious and cultural groups for example, or because of their gender or sexual orientation. Communities of identity can also form around economic status or ethnicity. Young people also tell us that what starts as communities of interest can develop into communities of identity for example those around music.

Youth Action volunteering projects can happen within all of the different types of community. Quite often the enhancement of social capital stems from, and is a result of, young people having the opportunities to participate in decision-making and take an active part in the shaping of their community. Participation can happen on different levels and in different ways, from using facilities, to deciding what to do at sessions, to active participation in local democracy which is about the contribution volunteering makes to community cohesion.

9.1 What is 'community cohesion'?

There are lots of formal definitions of 'community cohesion.' Community cohesion is most often talked about for communities of place; in its simplest sense it is about how people feel about their neighbourhoods and how they live together and what makes an area 'a good place to live.'

Community cohesion is as vital to a vibrant community as economic and environmental success and good local services for people living in these neighbourhoods.

Communities of interest and identity also have a role to play in community cohesion as community cohesion is about the wellbeing of communities and people in them; it is about places or groups where people feel happy and safe. A cohesive community is one where trust exists between people within the groups, but also between different groups of people and where people perceive themselves to be included, to feel part of the community and to have a sense of being able to influence things that matter to them. This means having positive relationships within the community and a sense of belonging.

9.2 What have we found?

About 60% of young people felt that their volunteering activity had an impact on the community or the neighbourhood. However, around 40% think that volunteers are a small proportion of the community and they don't see how so few people can affect the whole community. Young people participating in Youth Action projects felt stronger about the positive impact they make in the community. Participants in the **Re:action** project felt that if a volunteering activity wants to have an impact on community cohesion, it will need to be consciously built into a project.

In our focus groups, young people and members of the community mentioned the good work that has been going on within organisations or within defined groups. Our focus group with asylum seekers highlights how important it is to foster a sense of belonging and create a safe environment where young people can meet other young people:

> *When I was coming to England for the first time I did not have anything, I don't know anybody here, but when I joined the group I met different people from different cultures so I now have lots of friends and meet some new people.*

> *Two months ago we did some gardening, cutting trees and gardening, with some young people coming from different parts of the UK just for one week.*

We found that many organisations support young people to meet other people in safe environments and quite often provide different kinds of support from emotional, personal and social to finding jobs.

An example of this is young people working with older people or disabled people:

> *Yes I think so, they were not from Youth Point but the chap you were talking to out there works for the old people, he has an initiative where some of the volunteers are university students, so they are youngish, and they get paired up with an older person. So they will go and visit that older person every week and they might play dominos or take their library books back or just have a chat.*

Residents of a home for disabled people liked the volunteers coming to visit them and as a young researcher put it:

> *...from what I got out of it, it is kind of like putting them back in touch with the world which they are quite obviously cut off from. They seem to enjoy the fact that it is young volunteers that come to hang out with them. One woman was saying she loves the fact that they are students and they are all 17 and 18. I don't know why that could be but maybe just reminds them of home or whatever. As for the impact that those young people have on that group, I think they have a massive impact… and they do seem to make what is, lets face it, a difficult life, a bit more bearable. That is what I got from that at least.*

As such, there is an effect on the community in the sense of interaction with the residents of the home, supporting them and building bonding ties, but not in the sense of interacting with staff or people of the wider neighbourhood and building bridging ties. We have seen this in some of our meetings with groups of people who might be more isolated, such as asylum seekers, older people or disabled people. Organisations or groups quite often give older people and disabled people a sense of belonging and volunteers support these groups, but do not necessarily tackle their isolation from the wider society. The focus group with asylum seekers exemplifies this:

> *…it is very hard to find friends in college… because your English is not good it is very hard to make any friends who are born in England.*

And also, from the focus group with disabled people:

> **So when you do activities, do you plan things with other people from the neighbourhood?**
> *No*
> *No it is usually just us.*
> *Three of us go to church on Sunday.*
>
> **And when you go to church…**
> *Some people from the church volunteer to drive us.*
>
> **So there are people from the church who come here to pick you up. And do they also volunteer to come here to interact and do things with you?**
> *No there isn't a lot of interacting…*
> *The vicar is quite good isn't he?*

When discussing these examples, steering group members felt that this kind of volunteering was about "filling a gap, socialising, interaction and playing games… but it is not about community cohesion, it is not about bridging the gap, it is not about changing structures or challenging anything…"

These perceptions were also shared by many youth workers:

> *I think the kind of volunteering that we encourage as Youth Action Network, we specifically try to mix things up a little bit and I think that can work very well… (but) most people who I see volunteering tend to volunteer about something that they are passionate about and that will tend to come from the cultural background that they have, whether it is religion or whether it is the environment or whatever.*

And just like any other workplace or group of people, you tend to get people sticking basically with the people they feel comfortable with unless you actively mix it up.

In the survey, many young people feel that they can contribute to community cohesion in the following ways:
- Breaking down stereotypes in the community/neighbourhood.
- Fostering understanding of different cultures and religions.
- Solving social problems within communities and neighbourhoods.
- Bringing different people from the community/neighbourhood together.
- Helping others to be more active in their community/neighbourhood.

In the following chart we can see similarities between staff and young volunteers' perceptions of the impact of volunteering on community cohesion. However, it is also important to look at the difference between the two groups. Staff members stress firstly the attitudinal aspect of breaking down stereotypes (a more cognitive approach) whilst young volunteers focus on the social aspect of bringing different people from the community together, which highlights the social capital element to community cohesion.

Project Re:action staff survey		
Do you think that your young peoples' volunteering activities helps... *(Please tick all that apply)*		
Answer options	**Staff**	**Young volunteers**
...to break down stereotypes in the community/neighbourhood	93% 1	50% 3
...community members to understand different cultures and religions	59% 5	41% 4
...to solve social problems within the community/neighbourhood	66% 4	39% 5
...to bring different people from the community/neighbourhood together	89% 3	65% 1
...to help others to be more active in their community/neighbourhood	91% 2	61% 2

The following diagram is an overview of how young people referred to community cohesion in our focus groups.
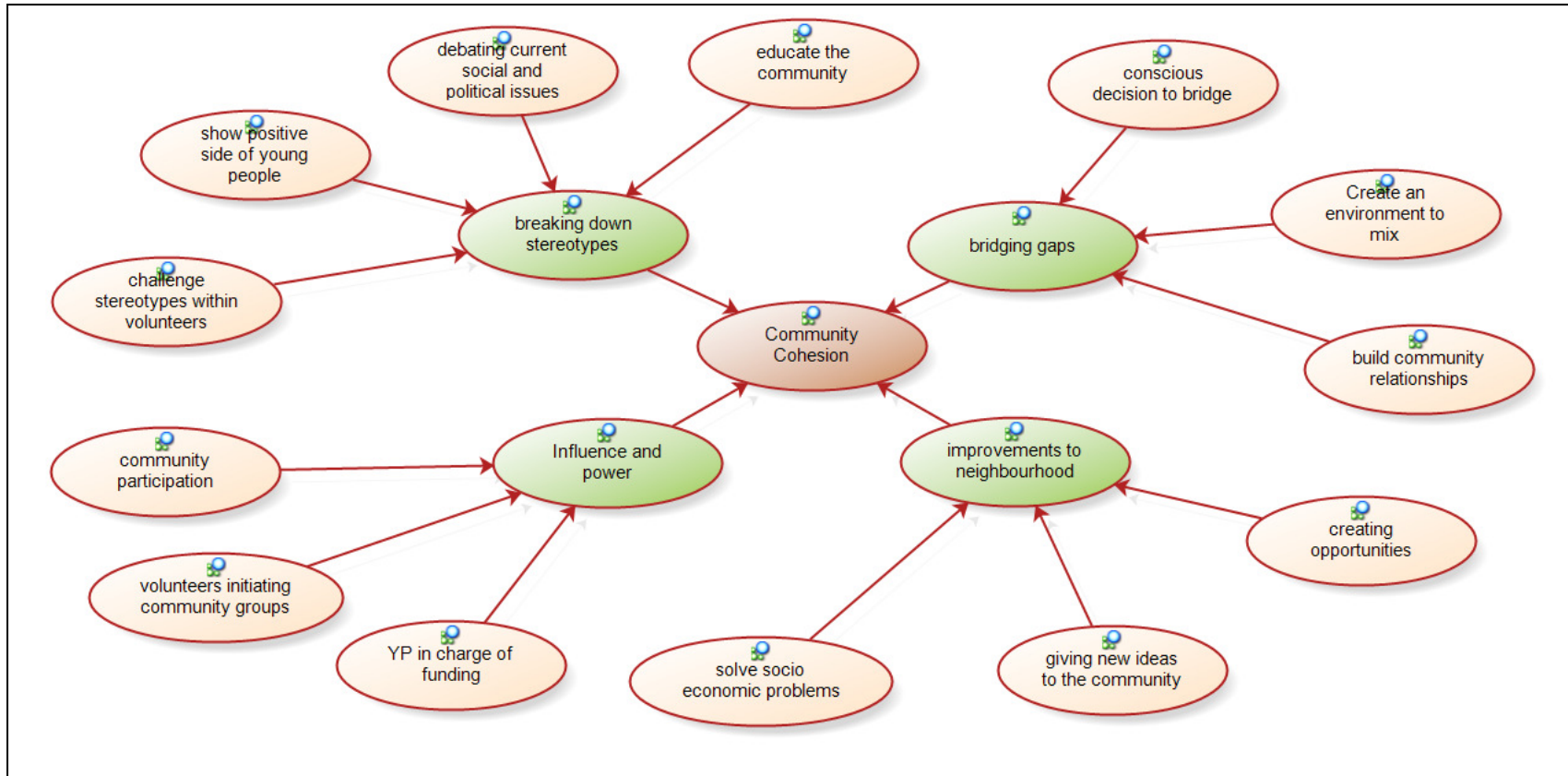
10. Conclusions and recommendations

10.1. Messages from the research

10.1.1 Young people and enhancing social capital

- Youth Action volunteering can contribute to enhancing young people's 'choices' in developing bridging social capital. It has to create the appropriate social context to allow young people to 'navigate' life transitions and therefore have ultimately the resources to make informed choices and act upon them. Widespread network relationships contribute to processes of self-assurance and personal development.

- Volunteering projects should enable access to new contacts and relationships. This does not mean judging neighbourhood volunteering as less valuable than other types of volunteering but, particularly in the context of youth transitions, bridges to other milieus and social spheres are necessary.

- Volunteering projects should explore the possibilities for creating conditions that nurture social capital. Thus volunteering should move the focus from individual skills and qualifications and individual behaviour change to relationships and the nature and purpose of interactions between people and groups.

- Workers within the field need to support young people beyond the merely informational level. The time of workers (in the guise of 'significant others') may be well spent in enhancing trust and creating mutual trusting relationships which are foundations for developing dynamic and extended social capital for young people.

10.1.2.Youth Action

- Empowerment, participation and capacity release are core elements for the enhancement of social capital. Organisations should actively promote consultative and participative styles of leadership which contribute to shared discovery and learning.

- Youth Action projects should enable young people to set their own agendas for volunteering projects. Needs identified by young people which do not fit within government priorities or agendas should not be dismissed.

- Organisations should continue to invest in structures and routes to enable young people to influence the decisions that affect them.

- Organisations should build and explore further on the positive findings of this research in how young people feel that they can influence decisions by working together.

- Organisations should develop clearer processes for young people who traditionally do not engage in volunteering especially young people who identify as NEVET (Not in Education, Volunteering, Employment or Training).

10.1.3. Community Cohesion

Not all volunteering organisations will see enhancing community cohesion as one of their priorities. However, if they do, the following points should be taken into account:

• Contributing to the enhancement of community cohesion should be combined with addressing the lack of material and economic resources experienced by some communities.

• Volunteering organisations need to understand power dynamics within and between communities, organisations and policy makers.

• Volunteering organisations need to consider what contribution young people's community involvement makes to the community of which they are members, if this is this being recognised and valued by the community and to what extent participation enhances the social capital of young people and the communities which they are part of.

Volunteering organisations should:
• Strengthen connection and co-operation between young people and their communities who might otherwise not have the opportunity to interact.

• Strengthen initiatives for creating bridges between different neighbourhoods, schools, colleges and communities of identity and interests thus enhancing bridging social capital.

• Explore and implement ways to counter institutionalised and intergenerational stereotypes, and distrust of young people especially.

• Counteract the dominant view of young people as problems and build on the positive findings of this research.

• Encourage young people to celebrate the different dimensions of diversity and explore the positive outcomes of it.

10.1.4. Policy lessons

• Youth Action volunteering should ultimately be about helping to fulfil children and young people's rights to health, safety, learning and achieving, a decent standard of living and recognition of their position as equals in society. This should be done in a manner that is stronger done together than through their individual efforts.

• Policies need to respond creatively in order to support, rather than punish, young people.

• Policies need to turn the spotlight round from people as problems in themselves, to the problems they encounter, enabling them to see opportunities to develop a much wider range of options for action and change.

• A greater societal recognition is needed of the value of teenagers' social networks and resultant social capital in order to counter 'institutionalised distrust' of young people.

- Strengthen integrated youth volunteering services by bringing together the different institutions and organisations that work with young people, including voluntary sector providers.

10.2 Messages from the steering group

10.2.1. Messages for young people

We should encourage them to:
- Take up volunteering in the wider community and embrace new challenges.
- Remember that being trusted comes with great responsibility.

10.2.2. Messages for workers

- Trust young people and support them in taking control – you'll be surprised with the outcomes.
- Be prepared to invest your time – trust doesn't come easily or quickly.
- Be aware that trust is fragile; once lost it is difficult to regain.
- Encourage young people who start in small groups to expand into the wider community.

10.2.3. Messages to volunteering organisations

- Volunteering organisations should promote Youth Action volunteering in the wider community.
- Give young people the chance to prove themselves through Youth Action volunteering.
- Enhance partnership work between organisations and third parties, not only at a local level, but also at a national and international level.

10.2.4. Messages for the government

- Value quality over quantity.
- Continue to support youth volunteering initiatives.
- Support volunteering organisations to enable young people to personally develop, enhance social capital and increase participation.
- Support networking between organisations and third parties.

Youth Action Network

Youth Action Network offers services and resources directly to workers on the ground supporting young people in their volunteering. Youth Action Network can support organisations via an interactive website, bi-monthly e-bulletin, training days, residential events and regular networking events. There are a variety of resources including our **VIP** and **Re:action** toolkits, comprehensive **TREaD** training programme and a nationally recognised quality assessment framework, **Reach**.

To find out more, please visit:
www.youthactionnetwork.org.uk
Organisations wishing to get involved in our work or needing some support, should telephone us on **0121 455 9732** or email: **info@youthactionnetwork.org.uk**.

The Centre for Social Action:

The Centre for Social Action has been based at De Montfort University since 1995 and is part of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. A training, research and consultancy unit, the Centre has its roots in practical work with communities. The Centre conducts participative research, evaluation and consultations on behalf of a range of commissioners including central government, local authorities, voluntary organisations, community groups and funding bodies. We apply social action principles to the conduct of our research and often support community members as researchers.

To find out more, please visit:
http://www.dmu.ac.uk/dmucsa