

advice for young people and parents

Volunteering can be viewed in many different ways, it's a way of engaging with your community, a tool to combat isolation and loneliness or a way to get the experience you need to further your job prospects or education.

Quite rightly, many young people are utilising volunteering as a way for furthering their experiences. Here are some top tips for young people and their families when considering if volunteering is the right choice.

First of all think, do you want to? Volunteering is about choice, and if you are being pressured into it by your family, school or college then you may not do it well which isn't going to make you look good in the long run.

Sometimes volunteering isn't always the right way into things either, the Warrington Borough Council strategy says that volunteering is...

'...an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives.'

Sometimes you will get more fulfilling experiences by joining in something and participating, the teamwork and focus from that may give you more of what you need than formal volunteering.

It is important to plan ahead. If you are trying to gain experience especially over a short space of time (e.g summer) don't wait until summer has started and you are home to start applying.

Volunteering is very competitive and summer roles are very popular. You will need to get your place sorted before the time you want to be in role.

Most organisations will happily have conversations by email or over the phone. Also, like a paid job, it can take time to go through the application process and your summer / Duke of Edinburgh or placement is over by the time you have gotten started. Be sure and include all of these considerations in your planning.

Introduce yourself. It is sometimes easy and reassuring from both sides to have your parent / relative / guardian make the enquiries and the call for you. We acknowledge that sometimes you are unsure or nervous about making the contact. It does work better however if you can make the contact yourself, not only for your own experience but for the first impression you can make to the organisation.

Volunteers who are proactive and confident in their applications and meetings often do better in achieving a place. If you are a representative of the volunteer, it may be an idea to briefly explain why you are making the contact in their behalf.

When you are making your introduction, be open and honest about your motives. Most organisations are happy to give people experience but tell them that that is why you are there. Also, it's a good idea to declare that you are doing Duke of Edinburgh so they know you will expect them to fill out a booklet, better they know at the start rather than you get through your time and they refuse to fill out your paperwork.

Have reasonable expectations. You may want to gain experience relevant to your course or future plans but for some things the opportunities are simply not there. Things like law, midwifery, counselling or nursing are almost impossible to get a voluntary placement in. For things which are very specific you need to have a think about the transferable skills you can gain from another opportunity. It may not be the most obvious route or connection but the skills you gain will stand you in good stead and you will appear flexible and willing to future employers or educators.