

Duke of Edinburgh Volunteers - are they worth the effort?

Why is it when charities and not-for-profits are crying out for volunteers they do not seem very encouraging to young people doing the D of E scheme?

Paul Bowen of Surrey County Council tells us that sometimes young volunteers find it difficult to find volunteering opportunities. However, some organisations clearly find these enthusiastic young people a real help in their charitable work. I went to see one such organisation to ask how they made it work....

Disability Challengers was identified as an organisation that has had great success with the D of E volunteers. Laura Sercombe, CEO, told me some volunteers who joined to do their D of E are still active volunteers 10 years later. Laura also told me that getting to know disabled youngsters lets the volunteers gain a much better understanding of the challenges faced by disabled young people. A space for them to really express themselves and have fun in provides benefits which are impossible to quantify, but are clearly invaluable to young people and their families. Her tales of people who felt so uncomfortable that they went to the lengths of crossing the road to avoid someone in a wheelchair are upsetting, and if working together helps break down this kind of barrier, then that alone make it worth getting these younger volunteers involved.

The short time the volunteers need to allocate to volunteering as a minimum has not been a problem for Disability Challengers as they follow Oliver's example in Charles Dickens novel and ask for **more...** In fact, they require a commitment to at least a term of volunteering for one or two sessions a week before they accept the young people. This extra time is willingly accepted by most of the young people. Disability Challengers make volunteering fun but treat their volunteers just like any employee, with both an induction session and on the job training. They provide a handbook and clear guidance on what-to-do or not-to-do. For example, no mobile phones are permitted on duty. Non appearance requires a notification by telephone as early as possible they make it clear to the volunteers that a young person will be left without a play-worker if they fail to turn up (no pressure there then!) but it works with a really successful volunteer force of over 180 volunteers covering all their locations.

We would urge you to take up the Challenge and start recruiting these young people to help your organisation. We can help get the right people in place and if you want to set up the rules and induction. We can advise or provide template guidelines.

There is a volunteering section on the Surrey Youth Focus Website:

<http://www.surreyyouthfocus.org.uk/volunteering> where you can add your vacancies for regular volunteers, Project volunteers, or now D of E Volunteers. There is also a form for potential volunteers to add their details. SYF will try to match on your behalf. The Surrey County Council Duke of Edinburgh website will promote our webpage and will email participating schools with the information.

Remember get these young people involved now and you could have them and their families as volunteers and supporters for many years to come.

For more information contact youthfocusvols@gmail.com