

**Submission
No 1**

VOLUNTEERING AND UNPAID WORK PLACEMENTS AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NSW

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Date Received: 22/01/2014



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Submission for Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People

Inquiry into volunteering and unpaid work placements among children and young people in NSW.

My name is Peter Risbey I am the manager of Community Connect Gardening , in operation since 1991 , Thank you for requesting my input .This program assists residents in the Manly, Warringah and Pittwater areas who are frail aged or people with a disability and their carers by providing an affordable gardening service as well as advice on how to plan a low maintenance garden , the teams who undertake the gardening are predominantly comprised from volunteers who do a "Backyard Blitz" on a clients garden in one day . At present we currently have 700 clients and over 100 on the waiting list, we have over 120 volunteers in 8 teams, many of the teams have young people in them and two of the teams are predominantly filled with young people. We have an excellent record in recruiting and retaining young people in our teams and have developed quite a few strategies to enable us to do this. We have successfully ran programs for 2 local High Schools over the last 3 years as well as volunteer programs/partnerships with Macquarie University, University of NSW and The Australian Catholic University .We are also a centrelink approved activity for job seekers and have received excellent feedback from both the students, schools, and Universities this is evident in the fact we are such a popular choice for students to do their community placement with us we have had to knock back some students as the allocated places fill up so quickly. I will list these strategies and points of interest below.

- We have found it is very important in order to attract young people you need to promote the benefits they will receive in return for their time and effort (What's in it for me)
- Participation leads to employment, having volunteering in your resume gives you an edge when applying for a job and in the interview process.
- Exposure to the real world of working, completing allotted tasks and taking on responsibility
- Empowers young people to make decisions

- An opportunity to learn new skills and gain experience and apply them in a real workplace.
- Exercise for the body and mind
- Gives young people contact with an older generation building bridges between young and old.
- Young people gain a greater understanding and empathy for those less fortunate in the community and realise they are better off than they previously thought
- Tangible/measurable /visible satisfaction of a job well done, which leads to an increase in confidence and self esteem.
- I feel it is very important to make the work that a young person undertakes important , tangible and real, by real I mean the young person needs to see the visible difference they are making by giving their time, they will see straight through any manufactured activity/task that was given to them to just simply use up the time they are there for, this can be difficult as quite often the task requires experienced or trained /qualified staff but must be achieved if you are serious about retaining young people after recruiting them. This problem can be alleviated by a number of steps.
 - 1) Comprehensive and engaging orientation/training at the commencement of the young person's volunteer employment.
 - 2) Buddy them with an experienced volunteer or staff member.
 - 3) Identify tasks and activities that are important but are able to be done by a young volunteer.
 - 4) Don't be scared to give them some responsibility .A thorough risk assessment and adequate training enables this to happen without incident as young people are energetic, smart and highly capable when given the opportunity.
- Do not ask for more than the young volunteer is able or willing to give as this is sure way to lose them. You are far better off giving the young volunteer a little early mark than expecting them to hang around after their allotted time to complete unfinished tasks, thus it is very important they are given realistic time frames to complete the work given to them.
- Include any training in the time the student has indicated they are able to attend, don't expect them to turn up to training outside of the hours they have made available.
- Time is precious to all of us but particularly young people it is their most precious commodity and therefore must be respected, in other words don't waste their time.
- Give them a sense and feeling of importance and value by providing opportunities for them to contribute ideas and thoughts about the workplace they are engaged in .This can also be enhanced by providing regular positive feedback to the young person. Also this young fresh thinking when embraced by the employer can be of great benefit to the company/organisation/service.

- Show respect and respect will be shown in return, it is important to not treat the young volunteer as if they know nothing, so to save time you will undertake the task yourself be mindful they have come to you learn and gain skills so be patient and allow them to grow and learn the skills required to fulfil the required tasks. I strongly believe young volunteers are our future leaders in both business and the community.
- All organisations that require young volunteers need to remember this may be the young person's first experience in volunteering and a good first impression and experience is essential if they are to continue volunteering and extolling the virtues of volunteering throughout their lifetime. Even if the job/tasks they undertake prove to be not what they are suitable for or desire it can still be a positive experience when good organisation , good management and a caring empathic attitude is shown towards them.

The enthusiasm and energy that young people bring and also young hands make light work .I think volunteering when supported correctly provides a great opportunity for young people to connect with the community and for older people to see the many positive attributes in our youth today rather than the stereotypes that are more often than not portrayed in the media .Therefore perhaps a government supported media campaign showing the benefits of having a young volunteer as well as the benefits of being a young volunteer would greatly assist in further participation from both employers/organisations and young people.

Many Thanks for the opportunity; I hope my input is able to assist the committee in its recommendations

Regards



Peter Risbey

Operations Manager Northern Beaches Community Connect Gardening