

**YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND: THOSE WHO VOLUNTEER  
AND THOSE WHO DO NOT**  
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**Background**

A UK-wide National Survey of Volunteering in 1997 indicated that 43% of 16-24 year olds were involved in volunteering, a decrease from 55% in an earlier survey conducted in 1991. The report caused concern with its conclusion that there had been a 'sharp reduction in levels of participation by young people aged 16-24' and that young people 'were considerably less likely to be involved on a regular basis' than they had been in previous years (Davis-Smith, 1998). Subsequent research in Scotland sought to explore whether volunteering is sufficiently user-friendly for young people (Volunteer Development Scotland, 1999a). The study found that while the experience of young volunteers in Scotland is primarily a positive one and levels of satisfaction are high, a number of areas of concern existed. These included:

- A failure of adult society to present volunteering to young people as a realistic and attractive option;
- Under-representation of young people who are not white, female and in education;
- Out with the voluntary youth sector, some organisations struggling to have any meaningful involvement of young volunteers;
- Unequal treatment of young volunteers compared to older volunteers in some organisations, and tacit barriers to their full participation.

Volunteering agencies also faced problems with high turnover rates of young volunteers and were having to compete with increased demands on young peoples' time and resources (Volunteer Development Scotland, 1999b).

Similar research in England and Wales explored the conditions and incentives that attract young people to voluntary work and the most effective ways of publicising and marketing volunteering opportunities to young people (Gaskin, 1998). This study concluded that the essential requirements of volunteering for 16-24 year olds are flexibility, legitimacy, ease of access, experience, incentives, variety, organisation and laughs (or 'Flexivol').

**Being Young in Scotland**

In 2003 YouthLink Scotland commissioned MORI Scotland to undertake a major survey of a representative sample of 3,000 11-25 year olds across Scotland. The survey explored young people's characteristics, the things they like to do and their attitudes and opinions on a range of issues. The opportunity was taken to ask a number of questions about young people's involvement in volunteering and the data provide some insights into what can facilitate and what appears to hinder their involvement.

**11-16 Year Olds in Scotland**

Young people aged 11-16 years (n=2,124) were asked what they are most likely to do in their spare time. While listening to music and visiting friends' houses were the most popular activities, 11% of respondents said they were most likely to 'give up some time to help others (that is, volunteering)'. Young people aged 11 and 12 years were significantly more likely than those aged 13-16 years to say they were likely to volunteer in their spare time and girls (13%) were significantly more likely than boys (9%) to say they volunteered.

The data suggest that young peoples' perceptions of their academic ability may influence their participation in volunteering – those who expected to leave school with Standard Grade qualifications were significantly more likely than those who expected to leave with Highers to say they were likely to volunteer in their spare time. Similarly, those who thought it was 'very' or 'fairly likely' that they would go to Further or Higher Education College were significantly more likely than those who thought it was 'very' or 'fairly likely' that they would go to University to say they volunteered. This suggests two things:

- among the 11-16 year old age group, volunteering might be regarded as being a predominantly vocational activity that is particularly suitable for people with average academic aspirations; or,
- those with higher academic aspirations may feel that they have less time to devote to volunteering because they have to devote more time to their studies.

Support for the former suggestion comes from the finding that young people who believe that they do not 'have good job prospects in the future' are significantly more likely than those who feel that they have good job prospects, to say that they volunteer.

Over one quarter of 11-16 year olds (28%) stated that they would like to do more volunteering in their spare time, with girls (35%) being significantly more likely than boys (20%) to want to do more. Those who expected to leave school with Highers and those who thought it was 'very' or 'fairly likely' that they would go to University were significantly more likely than those who thought they would leave school with Standard Grades and those who thought they would go to College to say they would like to give up more time to help others. This finding supports the suggestion that those young people who are more academically orientated have less time for voluntary activity. Table 1 below shows the proportions of young people saying they would like to give up more of their spare time to help others.

**Table 1: Young People who Volunteer and who Would Like to Volunteer in Their Spare Time**

	Expect to leave school with Standard Grades	Expect to leave school with Highers	Very/fairly likely to go to FE/HE College	Very/fairly likely to go to University
Most likely to give up some spare time to help others	216 <b>12%*</b>	166 11%	188 <b>13%*</b>	158 11%
Would like to give up more time to help others	532 29%	461 <b>30%*</b>	432 29%	448 <b>31%*</b>

\* Difference significant at p<0.05 level

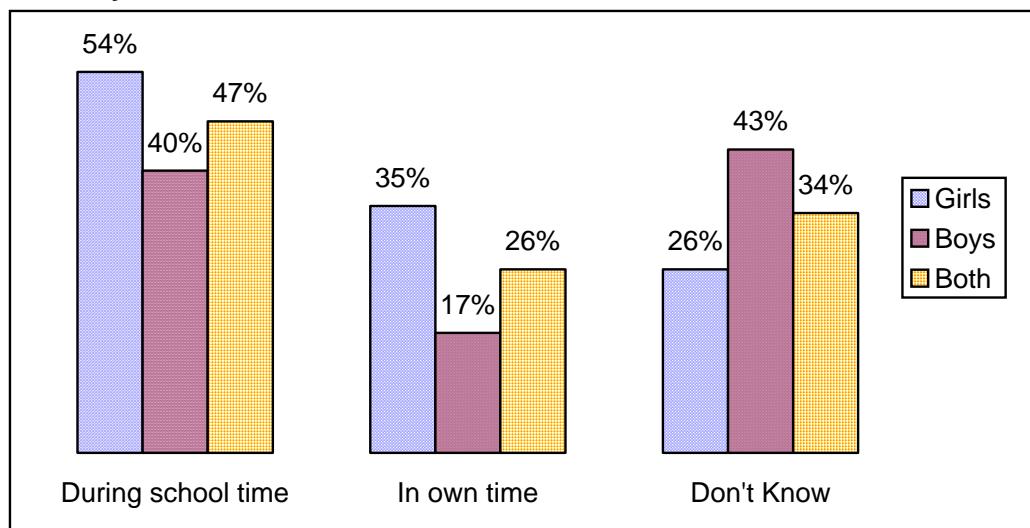
Over one quarter of 11-16 year olds (29%) thought it was 'very' or 'fairly likely' that they would 'take a gap year/do voluntary work' when they left school. However, just 6% hoped to work overseas as a volunteer. The data show that aspirations change with age, as 15 and 16 year olds were significantly more likely than 11-14 year olds to say that they hoped to work overseas as a volunteer. Girls in Scotland were significantly more likely (7%) than boys (4%) to say they hoped to volunteer overseas but this appears to arise from girls being more outward focused rather than from them being more inclined to volunteer – that is, girls were also significantly more likely than boys to say they hoped to study and work in another European country.

Volunteering appears not to feature highly in young peoples' information needs – just 13% of 11-16 year olds said they would find it useful to have information or advice on volunteering. Young people aged 11-12 years were most likely to say they would like information on this issue and girls were twice as likely as boys to want information.

One in five 11-16 year olds (21%) believe that volunteering to do things is one of the most important things that make someone a good citizen. This proportion is greater than that believing voting in elections makes someone a good citizen. Again, age is influential, with 11-12 year olds being significantly more likely than 13-16 year olds to say that volunteering makes someone a good citizen.

In addition to exploring what young people aged 11 to 16 years like to do in their spare time, the survey asked specifically whether they would consider doing some voluntary work. Chart 1 shows that almost half (47%) said they would consider doing voluntary work during school time (that is, within the school's curriculum and organised by the school). One quarter of young people (26%) said they would consider doing voluntary work in their own spare time in their community. Taken together, two in three 11-16 year olds (61%) said they would consider doing voluntary work.

**Chart 1: Proportion of 11-16 Year Olds who Would Consider Doing Some Voluntary Work**

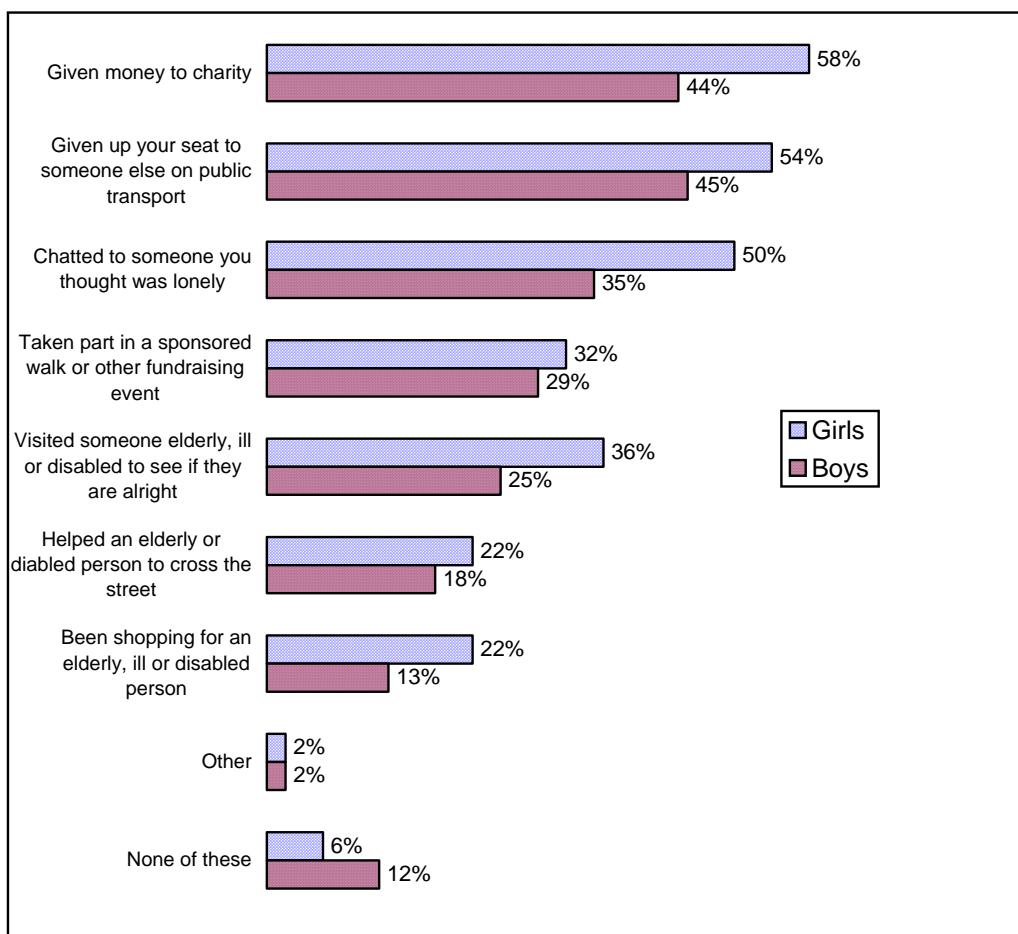


Again, girls were significantly more likely than boys to say they would consider doing voluntary work in both scenarios. The data suggest that household composition might have an impact on young peoples' perceptions of the amount of free time they have available for volunteering. Those from households in which both parents work were significantly more likely (48%) than those from households where one (42%) or no parents (40%) worked to say they would consider doing voluntary work during school time.

A young person's family can have a substantial impact upon their attitude towards volunteering. Research by MORI in England and Wales shows that while school is a highly influential factor in encouraging young people to volunteer, family influence is also crucial. Three quarters of adults who had participated in voluntary work in the previous year said they encourage their children to undertake voluntary work and half said they themselves had been encouraged to undertake voluntary work by their own parents (MORI, 2000).

The Being Young in Scotland survey shows that a willingness to help others outside of the family and to engage in activities that could be construed as contributing to active citizenship is firmly established by the time young people reach their teenage years. Chart 2 shows that around half of 11-16 year olds (51%) had given money to charity in the previous six months and around half (49%) had given up their seat to someone else on public transport. The chart shows that helping others is more common amongst girls than boys and this difference is significant on all activities with the exception of 'taking part in a sponsored walk or other fund-raising event'. The chart also shows that encouraging proportions of young people had taken direct action to help specific people, for example by visiting someone to make sure they were all right or by shopping for someone who could not manage for themselves.

**Chart 2: Things Done by 11-16 Year Olds to Help Others Outside Their Family in the Previous six Months**



Overall, just 5% of 11-16 year olds claimed not to have taken part in any of these activities, a finding that does not correspond with earlier questions on whether young people were likely to give up some of their spare time to volunteer. This difference may be accounted for in part by the question of whether young people see ways of helping others such as donating money to charity and giving up their seat on public transport as forms of volunteering. Irrespective of whether these activities amount to volunteering, however, engaging in them arguably amounts to active citizenship by young people and contributes to the development of social capital. Young people aged 11-16 are clearly willing to help others but this willingness appears not to be capitalised on to the maximum extent and translated into formal volunteering.

### **17-25 Year Olds in Scotland**

The Being Young in Scotland survey also sought the views of a representative sample of 972 17-25 year olds across Scotland. Watching television and listening to music are again the most favoured spare time activities but one in ten of this age group said that in a typical week they are most likely to give up some of their spare time to help others (that is, volunteer). Again, females and those at the younger end of the age spectrum (17-20 year olds) were more likely than males and 23-25 year olds to give up their time to volunteer. However, the differences were not significant.

For this age group household composition appears to have an important influence on volunteering – those who are married or living with a partner and those who are home owners are much less likely to give up some of their time to volunteer than those who live with their parents or in rented accommodation and those who are single or of other marital status. It is important to recognise, however, that employment status may also have an influence here – those who are homeowners are more likely to be in full-time employment and, therefore, may have less time to give to volunteering. Indeed, the data show that those 17-25 year olds who are employed are less likely than those who are unemployed, in government work or training or in further/higher education to say they are most likely to give up their spare time to help others.

The relationship between volunteering and 11-16 year olds' expectations of their school leaving qualifications was explored earlier in this paper and the data indicated that those with higher academic aspirations were less likely to volunteer. This tendency appears to be carried through to actual academic attainment among 17-25 year olds. The data show that those who have a degree and/or professional qualification are less likely to say they give up some of their spare time to volunteer than those who have vocational qualifications, Highers or School Leaving Certificates. However, the important influence of time should be borne in mind again – those with a degree may be more likely to be in full-time employment and feel they have less time to give to volunteering.

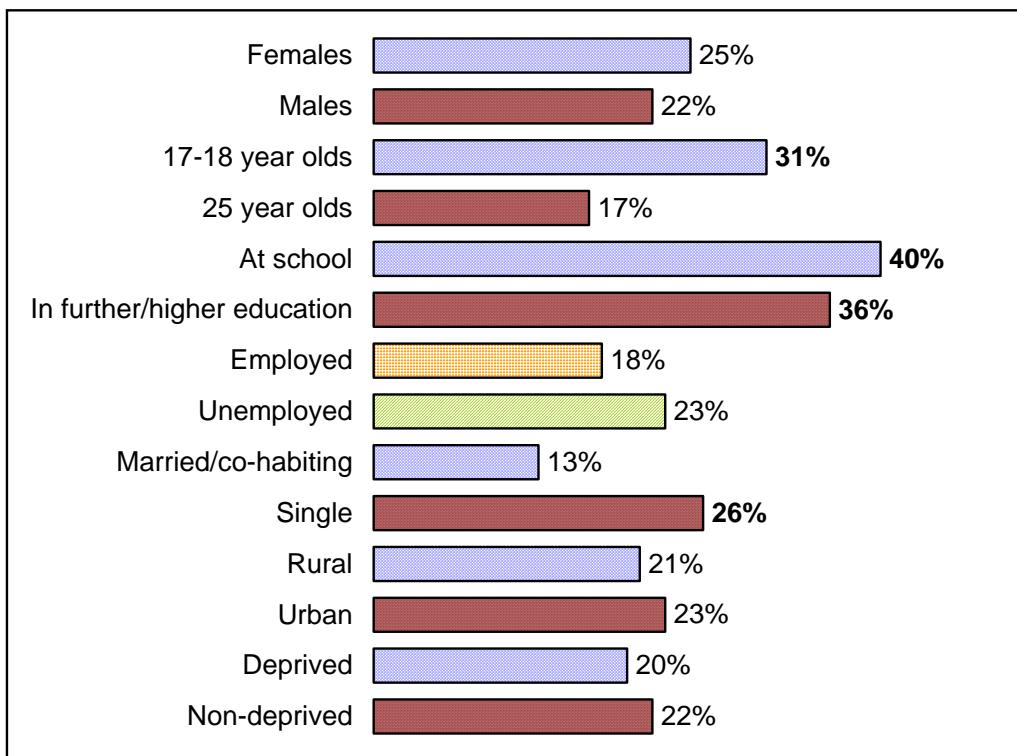
One in ten 17-25 year olds (11%) said that they do not currently volunteer in their spare time but would like to. Again, females (13%) were more likely to express this view than males (9%). Neither marital status nor household tenure appear to have any influence on desire to undertake voluntary work among those 17-25 year olds who do not currently do any.

Those living in urban areas are significantly more likely (16%) than those living in rural areas (9%) to say they would like to volunteer but do not currently do so. However, there is no difference between urban and rural areas in the proportions who say they are likely to give up some of their spare time to help others or those who have volunteered in the past six months. In this respect the profile of 17-25 year olds is different to that of adults who volunteer in Scotland. Data from the Scottish Household Survey, a continuous cross-sectional survey, commissioned by the Scottish Executive, show that rates of volunteering by adults are highest in rural areas and lowest in large urban areas (Scottish Executive, 2002; Dudleyton et al., 2002).

The survey explored whether 17-25 year olds had 'done anything unpaid (that is, volunteered) to help others in the past six months'. One in four young people (24%) said that they had. Chart 3 shows that there was little difference in the proportions of males and females saying they had volunteered but those at the younger end of the age spectrum (17-18 year olds) were significantly more likely than those at the older end (21-25 year olds) to say they had volunteered. For this age group, however, the

relationship to academic aspirations is less clear – 17-25 year olds who were still in education (that is, at school or in further or higher education) were significantly more likely than those who were not in education to say that they had volunteered in the past six months. There was little difference between those with different levels of qualification, although those with a degree and/or professional qualification were slightly less likely to say they had volunteered than those with lower qualifications.

**Chart 3: Characteristics of 17-25 Year Olds who had Volunteered in the Previous six Months**



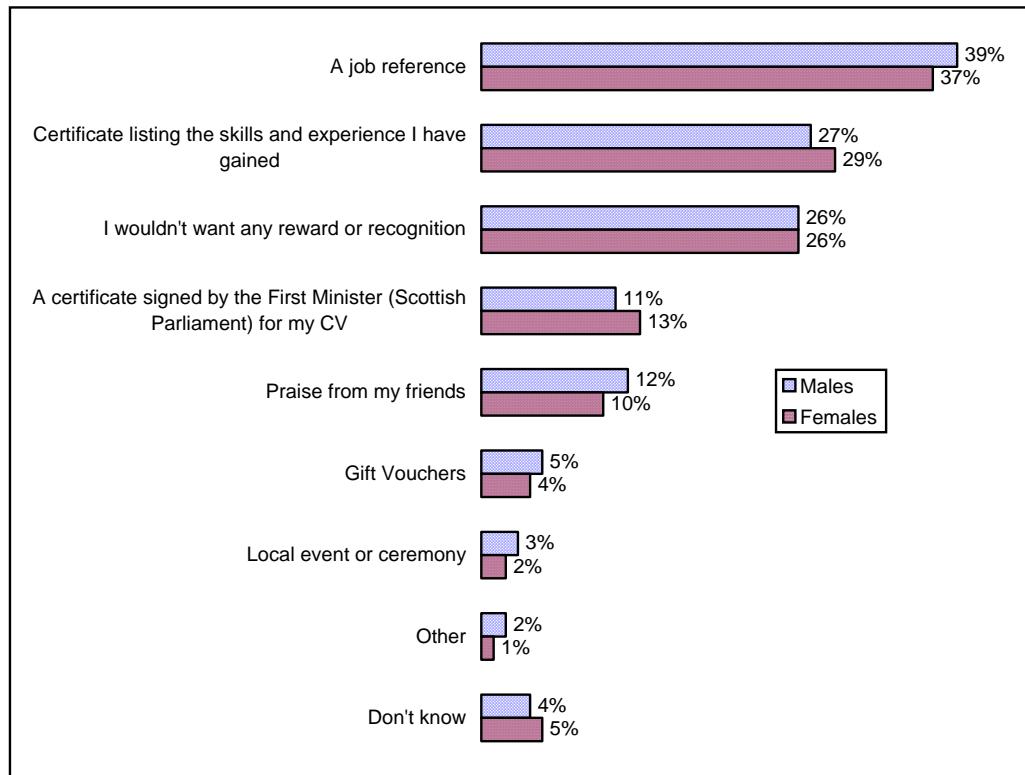
NB: Figures in bold are significant at the p<.05 level

For those in employment, time may have been an issue, but the incidence of volunteering was also lower among those who were unemployed and who were not available for work. These findings reflect those for the adult population. The Scottish Household Survey shows that in 2000 18% of unemployed adults volunteered, compared to 28% of adults in employment, 36% of students and 35% of school pupils (Scottish Executive, 2002).

Interestingly, one quarter (26%) of those who felt their job prospects were good had volunteered in the past six months compared to just 15% of those who felt their job prospects were not good, a difference that is significant. It is not clear from the survey whether participation in voluntary activities enhances young peoples' positive feelings about their job prospects. However, 17-25 year olds were asked how they would like their volunteering to be recognised and two in five (38%) said they would like a job reference. This was slightly more important to males (39%) than it was to females (37%) and significantly more important to 17-20 year olds than it was to 25 year olds. This suggests that the link between volunteering and employment is of greater importance to young people who are at the start of their careers or work history than it is to those who are established in employment. Those who agreed that their job prospects were good were significantly more likely than those who disagreed to say that they would not want any reward or recognition for volunteering.

Chart 4 shows the ways in which young people said they would like their volunteering to be recognised.

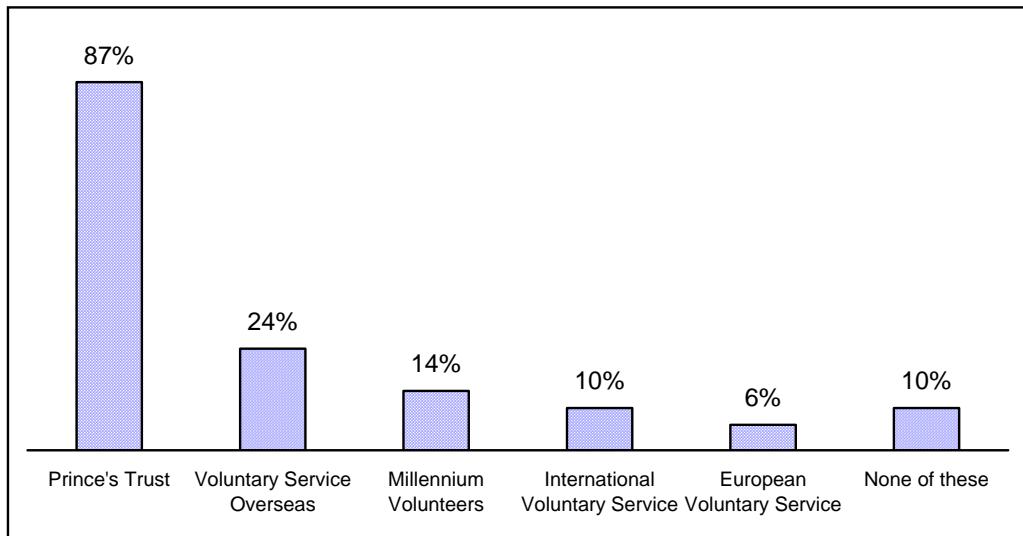
**Chart 4: Ways in Which 17-25 Year Olds Would Like Their Volunteering to be Recognised**



Noticeably, there was little support among 17-25 year olds for financial recognition of volunteering in the form of gift vouchers. This finding concurs with that of an earlier study by the Institute for Volunteering Research (Gaskin, 1998) which found that while young people were keen that volunteering should offer the incentive of a reference, certificate or qualification, there was very little support for the idea of financial reward. However, it is at odds with the approach of Young Volunteer Challenge in England and Wales and with the approach recommended for the recently launched Project Scotland (Working Group Report Into a National Youth Volunteering Programme, 2004).

The survey explored young peoples' awareness of a range of volunteering opportunities available to them. Chart 5 shows that nine out of 10 17-25 year olds had heard of the Prince's Trust, a UK charity that helps 14-30 year olds realise their potential and transform their lives, focusing in particular on those who have struggled at school, been in care, been in trouble with the law, or are long-term unemployed. One quarter of young people (24%) had heard of Voluntary Service Overseas, but just 6% had heard of European Voluntary Service.

**Chart 5: Volunteering Opportunities Heard of by 17-25 Year Olds**



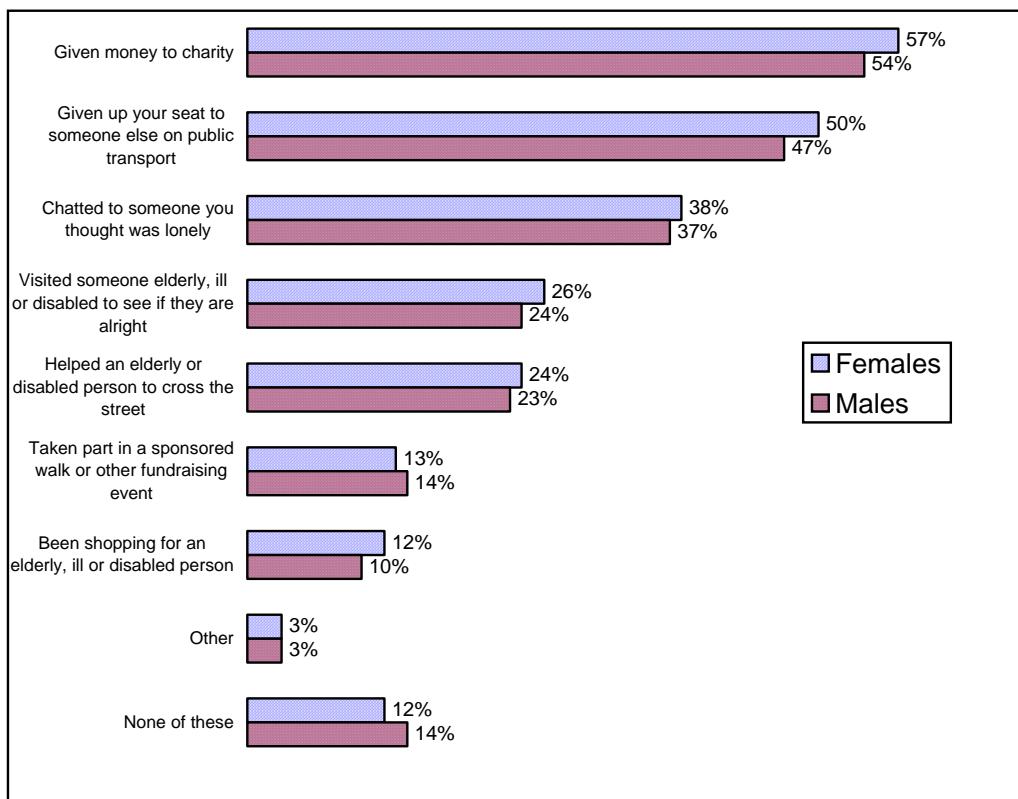
As with the younger age group, volunteering does not feature highly in 17-25 year olds' information needs – just 12% of this age group said they would find it useful to have advice or information on volunteering.

One in ten 17-25 year olds said that they hope to work overseas as a volunteer, a higher proportion than among 11-16 year olds. Young people in further or higher education were significantly more likely than others to have this aspiration, as were young people who were single.

One in five 17-25 year olds (19%) thought that 'volunteering to do things' is one of the most important things that make someone a good citizen, a slightly lower proportion than among 11-16 year olds. This suggests that the perceived importance of volunteering as a measure of good citizenship decreases with age. However, this perception is not confined to volunteering – fewer 17-25 year olds than 11-16 year olds regard 'respecting others'; 'having a say in what goes on'; 'voting at elections' and 'looking after the environment' as being important aspects of good citizenship.

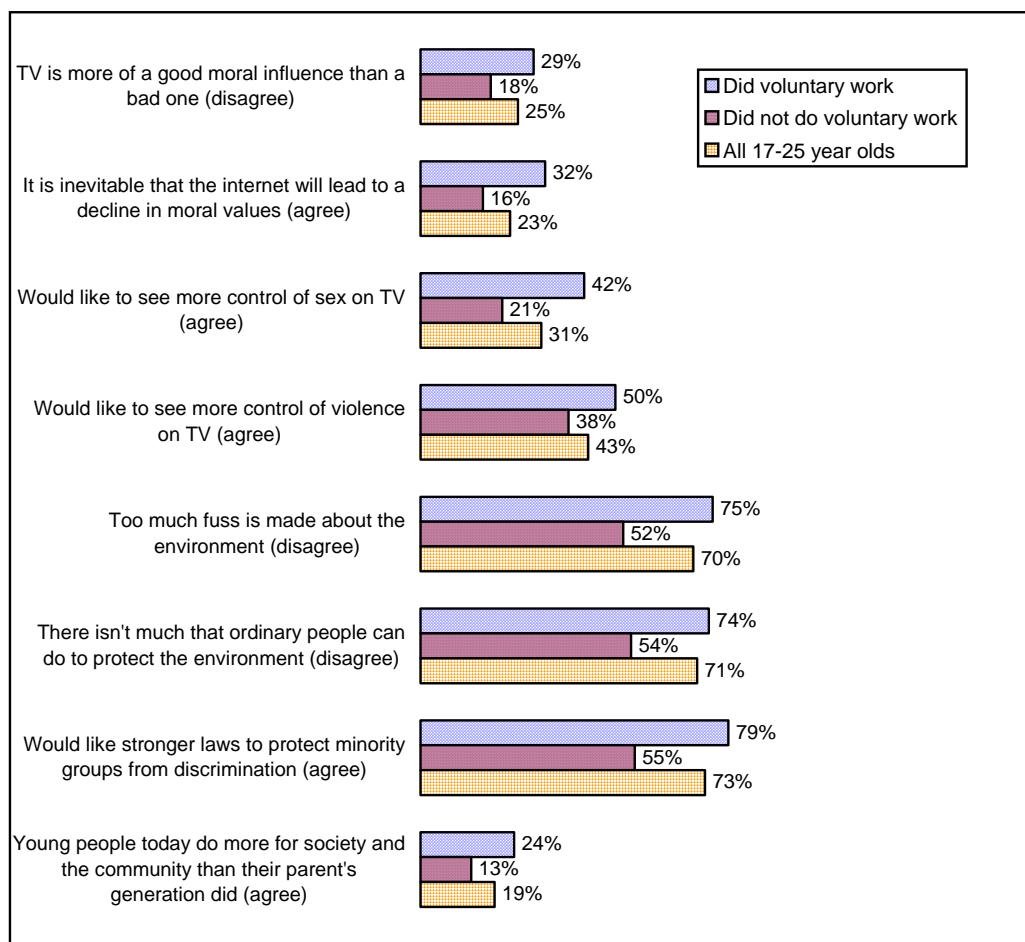
The survey shows that over half of all 17-25 year olds (55%) had given money to charity in the past six months. The proportions of 17-25 year olds who said they had undertaken direct action to help people outside their family are lower than the proportions of 11-16 year olds. However, the greatest decline is in respect of fundraising activities – just 13% of 17-25 year olds said they had taken part in a sponsored walk or other fund-raising event in the previous six months, compared to 31% of 11-16 year olds. Clearly this particular type of voluntary activity is more attractive to young people at the younger end of the 11-25 year old age spectrum. Information from other surveys, however, indicates that interest in this type of activity may pick up again - the Scottish Household Survey shows that almost half of adults who volunteer in Scotland (45%) are involved in fundraising (Dudleston et al., 2002). Overall, 13% of 17-25 year olds said that they had not taken part in any activities to help others in the last six months, more than twice the proportion of 11-16 year olds. Chart 6 below shows that males were more likely than females to have not done any of the things mentioned, a trend that continued from, but is less pronounced than among 11-16 year olds.

**Chart 6: Things Done by 17-25 Year Olds to Help Others Outside Their Family in the Previous six Months**



The survey sought to explore the attitudes of 17-25 year olds on a number of social issues. Analysis of the data shows that those who had done voluntary work in the last six months appear to be more conservative in their views and have a stronger environmental conscience than those who had not done voluntary work and than all 17-25 year olds. Chart 7 shows that 29% of those young people who had volunteered either tended to disagree or strongly disagreed that 'on the whole television is more of a good influence than a bad one'. This compares to 19% of people who had not volunteered and 25% of all 17-25 year olds. Those who had volunteered were more inclined to agree that the Internet will have a detrimental effect on moral values and that sex and violence on television should be subject to greater control. They were also more inclined to disagree that the environment is the subject of too much concern and that there is little ordinary people can do to protect the environment.

**Chart 7: Social and Environmental Attitudes of 17-25 Year old Volunteers and Non-volunteers**



### Conclusion

The Being Young in Scotland survey shows that 24% of 17-25 year olds have undertaken voluntary activity in the past six months. It is not clear from other data available on Scotland whether this is a healthy proportion or not – the Institute for Volunteering Research 1997 UK Survey of Volunteering found that 43% of 16-24 year olds across the UK and 50% of adults in Scotland were engaged in formal volunteering; however, data from the Scottish Household Survey showed that in 2001 25% of adults in Scotland had volunteered through a group, club or organisation in the previous year. Research commissioned by Volunteer Development Scotland in 2002 showed that 20% of the adult population in Scotland had volunteered in the past year, but a subsequent survey (that used different wording in the questions) put the proportion at 38%.

It is clear, however, that the proportion of 17-25 year olds who say they have actually volunteered, is substantially lower than the proportion of 11-16 year olds who say they would be willing to consider volunteering (61%). The Scottish Executive launched a new Volunteering Strategy for Scotland in May 2004 and one of its four key strands focuses on young people. The Strategy aims to ‘increase the range of young Scots aware of volunteering and the benefits it brings to volunteers, communities and organisations, as well as improving awareness amongst young people of how to access volunteering’. The results of the Being Young in Scotland

survey suggest that many 11-16 year olds are already aware of volunteering. What appears to be of greater importance for the future of volunteering in Scotland is ensuring that we capitalise on the willingness of young people to volunteer by enabling them to readily access appropriate volunteering opportunities, and retain their interest and involvement in volunteering as they make the transition to adulthood. The Scottish Executive's newly launched 'Project Scotland', based on the AmeriCorps model, aims to encourage 16-25 year olds to undertake one year of full-time voluntary work on a modular basis by providing quality-assured placements of three to four months duration, for which volunteers will be paid basic living expenses. The Project will make 'a concerted effort to attract those from traditionally under-represented groups' into volunteering (Working Group Report Into a National Youth Volunteering Programme, 2004). Future sweeps of the Being Young in Scotland survey will provide an opportunity to explore whether Project Scotland has impacted on young peoples' volunteering at a national level.

## References

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