

Involving Young Volunteers

The Benefits of Involving Young Volunteers in Children's Ministry Classes

1. Introduction

It has long been recognised that volunteering has many benefits, not just for those whom the volunteer serves, but also for the volunteer themselves and for the organisation offering volunteering opportunities.

This equally applies in a church context, in fact it is not a case of volunteering for personal benefit but a way of serving God himself and can lead to specific gifts being brought to notice that may otherwise have been hidden.

To this end, encouraging young people to volunteer can play a significant part in their own development, both naturally and spiritually.

However, there are specific things to consider when encouraging the young to volunteer; certain caveats, processes, procedures and safeguarding measures need to be addressed.

This paper seeks to lay a foundation as to how your church can encourage, use and support young volunteers in children's ministry, looking at the benefits to be had and also the measures of support and protection needed by all involved.

2. The benefits for the young volunteer:

- Experience
- Develops skills
- Develops confidence and interest
- Opportunity for them to serve
- Opportunity for them to contribute to the church family
- Gives a platform from which to develop faith

3. The benefits for the church:

- Provides an opportunity to engage with children and families
- Opportunity to share what we are all about, the good news of Jesus and how that works out on a practical level
- Provides life skills and resources to support the work of the ministry

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- Very young children love engaging with young people older than they are, who can bring fresh ideas and energy to the work
- Creating a culture of volunteering
- Provides opportunity for young people to find a place in which they fit
- Equips the next generation in church life and the work that takes place behind the scenes
- Develops servanthood
- May bring specific gifts to the forefront which can be nurtured and developed, as well as used to contribute to the work.

4. Providing a Safe Context

Encouraging young people to volunteer also needs the church to provide a safe place from which they can do so and also a safe place for the children in our care generally. The following are thoughts on how we keep both young volunteers and children safe.

- It will be a requirement for the young person to serve on the same team as their parents
- It will be agreed with parents that they will take responsibility for the young volunteers
- Training will be offered to parents and young volunteers, with an outlining policy
- We will ask young volunteers to sign a Code of Conduct, outlining the behaviour we expect from them, to which they will agree to work.

5. Code of Practice for Young Volunteers

The Code of Practice (draft of which see Appendix) the young volunteer will be expected to sign, will cover:

- What the young volunteer will be doing
- The purpose of their role
- Expected time commitments
- The context in which they will have opportunity to volunteer
- Skills and experience they will develop
- With whom they will be working

6. Support

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It is to be expected that young people with little or no experience in the context of volunteering and/or in children's ministry as a volunteer, will need support. The following outlines the support to be provided:

- Parents will be the primary support for the young volunteers;
- We will also appoint a Young Person Volunteer Co-ordinator;
- Offer some training specific to young people.

APPENDIX – THE (DRAFT) CODE OF CONDUCT FOR YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

Thank you for your generosity in volunteering to help with children's ministry classes and our younger children. It is so appreciated. As well as being a great help to the church, parents, families etc, it is our hope that you will find great benefit in volunteering for personal development and for learning new skills, and perhaps even finding some skills you didn't know you had.

By becoming a Young Volunteer you agree to follow this Code of Conduct at all times:

- The 'golden rule' of working with children is that you are never alone with a child, either in class or out of class when class is finished.
- Never give your home address, telephone number, email address or other social media information to any child, parent or visitor.
- Mobile phones are not to be used when volunteering in the classroom (please switch your phone off or to silent)
- Do not develop any nicknames or call the children by any other name than the name given on the register.
- Do not make any jokes or speak unkindly to the children you are working with.
- Arrive on time.
- Physical contact can be misinterpreted by children. Do not initiate (or start) any physical contact with a child, including hugs. If a child comes to you and hugs you, you can hug back. If a child climbs on your lap, limit the time they are sitting there. Do not take a child onto your lap. Remember to be cautious about physical contact, if unsure ask your parent or team leader. If you are uncomfortable about physical contact a child is initiating, let the child know, kindly and gently.
- If you feel uncomfortable or worried about something you have seen or heard please tell your parent who is with you in the group or the Young Person Volunteer Co-ordinator.
- Support, and get involved with, the activities of the class.

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- Ask questions about how you can help to assist the children, (e.g. if you think a child is struggling with something, ask them if they would like help; if team leaders or adult workers are trying to support a number of children, ask the adult if they would like you to help).
- Get involved in praying at the start of the session. Share any ideas or feedback with your parent or team leader.

Remember – as a volunteer you are seeking to be a good role model to the children, this includes being respectful to others and being ready to serve with any task.

Lastly, have fun! Model to the children how they can have fun while still being caring to others.