

Placing youth in a volunteer  
framework

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# Placing youth in a volunteer framework

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## Abstract

Volunteering Auckland faces an encouraging challenge: it has more youth volunteers than it has organisations willing to place them. As a nonprofit that helps other nonprofits find and maximise a volunteer base, Volunteering Auckland wants to discover what hinders and what might help organisations to effectively engage and retain volunteers between the ages of 10 and 19. Most research related to youth volunteerism is youth-focused – encouraging youth to participate and pointing out the benefits they receive in terms of social capital, work experience and personal achievement. But here we look at this from the organisational perspective, seeking to discover why few organisations choose to accept youth volunteers, their challenges and prejudices, and proposing ways Volunteering Auckland can equip organisations to overcome these. Even organisations that have vulnerable clients or unsafe environments may find tasks that youth are capable of carrying out safely. Examples from those that have both high-needs clients and a thriving core of young volunteers demonstrate how that can be accomplished. For nonprofits that do not have the margin to invest in the staff needed to nurture a volunteer base, strategic training and supervision may enable them to incorporate volunteers. Furthermore, some youth may not find a fit within an organisation, or may wish to take more of their own initiative. Volunteering Auckland has the tools to help them create their own community project and recruit other young people to pitch in, both for one-off projects and initiatives that participants take further.

“Young people bring a different perspective to problems. They may be more creative, may see the easier way to get something done, may be more direct. The easiest way to find out what they may be able to contribute is to ask them and to listen to their answers.”

— *Families Volunteer* by Kerry Kenn Allen and Sarah Harrison, 1983, p. 35

## Introduction

Volunteering Auckland is receiving a growing number of youth applicants. According to its database, to the year ending 30 June 2012, 208 15-to-19-year-olds applied; in 2013, that number rose to 229. Then, in 2014, it more than tripled – 803 youth applied. The 10-to-14-year-old segment experienced an even greater increase percentage-wise, from five in 2012 and ten in 2013, to 45 in 2014.

The organisation has more than 400 nonprofits registered, but the majority prefer to use volunteers over the age of 18. A Volunteering Auckland survey found that the most common reasons are the vulnerable nature of clients, the level of training required, and the time commitment expected (see Appendix 1).

So the question is, what obstructs and what enables successful involvement of youth in voluntary organisations? And how can Volunteering Auckland help organisations overcome obstacles and leverage the benefits of hosting youth volunteers? We look for answers in Volunteering Auckland’s interviews with its partners, stories of success at home and abroad, Statistics New Zealand’s census data, and research conducted by nonprofits, government agencies and academic bodies.

There is no shortage of discussion on the importance of mutually beneficial relationships between youth and their communities. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory of development suggests that when there are more strong, positive relationships within the microsystem (household or family) and mesosystem (community contacts, from workplaces to friendship circles), it strengthens both broader communities and individual wellbeing (Lewton & Nievar, 2012). However, current research on youth volunteering primarily addresses the benefits to youth as individuals, discussing how best to mobilise young people and not necessarily why organisations should consider creating places for them. Many of these discussions confirm the stereotypes that dissuade organisations from inviting youth on board, such as the fact that training and supervision is more intensive for those who have yet to finish formal education and have little work experience (Lewton & Nievar, 2012).

The common assumption that young people contribute less to their communities than older generations is not entirely unwarranted. Statistics New Zealand’s 2009/10 Time Use Survey reports that 12-to24-year-olds spend the most time of any demographic on personal care, sports and hobbies, and social entertainment, while spending the least time on household work

and unpaid work. However their combined hours for labour-force activity and education/training are equivalent to working-aged people's labour-force activity, indicating that they are as productively occupied as older generations (Statistics NZ, 2011).

A number of sources do express optimism about the freshest crop of volunteers. According to one, "In countries on every continent, young people are coming together to lead campaigns, run projects, start new organisations – all aimed at improving their communities, their nations, their world" (Adair, 2011, p. 6). In 2005, the Russell Commission report in the UK also recognised a demand from young people to volunteer that wasn't matched with opportunities in their communities (Russell, 2005).

As with any demographic, organisations will find advantages to employing young volunteers as well as challenges. As one rest home's volunteer coordinator observed, "One of the most beautiful things about youth volunteers... is that younger people often don't see the disability in someone – they see what is still there, what is still possible and what a person is capable of doing" (Appendix 2).

In the UK, vInspired, a youth-focused equivalent of Volunteering Auckland, is mobilising this demographic in unprecedented ways. Organisations that wish to tap into these advantages could begin by following their methods or by replicating the approach of local organisations that are successfully employing young volunteers. Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital in Auckland, for example, has a well documented, intentional approach to recruiting and retaining youth. Not every organisation will be able to afford a dedicated volunteer coordinator, but the systems Knox and others have put in place can constructively inform other programmes.

#### WHY YOUNG VOLUNTEERS VOLUNTEER

As Volunteering Auckland has discovered, many youth are willing volunteers. The benefits to both young people and their neighbourhoods include greater community involvement, increased confidence, sharing social resources, gaining social capital and work experience, and building respect between youth and communities (Family Strengthening Policy Center of the National Human Services Assembly, 2006)

A German study on youth who completed a year's voluntary service found two keys to their commitment: "They must regard the work as being really useful and specific, and it must have an element of fun" (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2000, p. 25).

Immediate incentives for young people to volunteer include the demands of education and award programmes – some schools in Auckland suggest students undertake a volunteer component, and a number of students in New Zealand also participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Hillary Award (Appendix 3) that necessitates involvement in volunteer work. The Bronze award requires practical service for a minimum of three months and the Gold award between 12 and 18 months (Duke of Edinburgh Award, 2018).

A strong social component also contributes. More than any other demographic, teenagers tend to take initiative if they are doing so with friends (Allen & Harrison, 1983). They often volunteer because their friends have, discovering the benefits by word of mouth.

Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital in Auckland has a programme for high-school volunteers. Responses to the questions of why they volunteer and what they have learned include, "I gained more confidence", "I could build a relationship", "I want different types of interactions than I have at school", "To do something meaningful", and even "I have too much free time" Some students already have careers such as nursing or hospitality in mind, and a number said they appreciated the opportunity to learn skills ranging from serving tea and coffee to giving presentations (Elizabeth Knox Home, 2014a).

#### WHY ORGANISATIONS PREFER OLDER VOLUNTEERS

Several organisations Volunteering Auckland works with say that the vulnerable nature of their clients necessitates older volunteers, suggesting that they don't see younger ones as mature or reliable enough to fulfil the roles (Appendix 1). This echoes reports and research that teem with suggestions for keeping participants interested, providing adequate training and supervision, and finding tasks for unskilled helpers.

Limited availability also works against young volunteers. They may have more free hours than adults but they are constrained by school schedules, family commitments, and often part-time employment and extracurricular activities. They rarely have their own transport, and because their schedules and commitments change frequently they are less likely to settle into a long-term role.

Organisations must also consider liability, and some are restricted by legislation. Habitat for Humanity, for example, cannot legally allow anyone under the age of 15 on its building sites. Because they have experienced what they consider to be a youthful lack of judgement, they have set their age limit for construction sites at 16 and have supervision requirements (Appendix 3).

Training and supervising people who have little or no work experience is a big ask for small organisations. The staff-to-volunteer ratio needed for smooth operations may prohibit teams that are already stretched thin from taking on young (or sometimes any) volunteers. Unless organisations know that the effort will be worth it, they are unlikely to start the process.

Youth may also be less efficient at completing tasks. Habitat for Humanity has found this is due not just to inexperience, but to lack of concentration and concerted effort. Unlike more mature volunteers, youth are more likely to be there for social as well as practical and altruistic reasons. They have also witnessed parents signing teenagers up in order to keep them busy outside of term time, so participation is not necessarily willing (Appendix 3).

#### WHO ARE THE VOLUNTEERS?

Females do unpaid work at twice the rate of males according to both international trends and Statistics New Zealand's latest Time Use Survey, where 'work' is unpaid for females 65 per cent of the time but only 37 per cent for males (Statistics New Zealand, 2011). Females between the ages of 15 and 19 are more than three times as likely to register with Volunteering Auckland: 619 applied in the year ending 30 June 2014, compared to 186 males.

Statistics New Zealand reports that youth are the least voluntarily engaged demographic, with lower levels of unpaid work for those 12-24 years

of age than other age groups, averaging 1 hour 46 minutes per day (Statistics NZ, 2011). The rise in applications to Volunteering Auckland suggests that this may not be due to an unwillingness to volunteer, but actually a lack of opportunities.

In a breakdown of ethnicity, Statistics New Zealand reports that European and Māori rates of unpaid work for any organisation were the highest, with 34 per cent and 32 per cent participating, respectively, and Asian rates were among the lowest at 21 per cent (Statistics New Zealand, 2011). However the applications with Volunteering Auckland follow the opposite trend, with rates for Asian youth exceeding their percentage of the Auckland population and European youth underrepresented (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: ETHNICITY OF 15-TO-19-YEAR-OLDS REGISTERING WITH VOLUNTEERING AUCKLAND TO THE YEAR ENDING 30 JUNE 2014.

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>2013/14 applicants</i>	<i>Per cent of applications</i>	<i>Per cent of Auckland population</i>
Asian/Indian/Sri Lankan	347	43%	22%
NZ European	239	30%	48%
Pasifika	69	9%	10%
European	57	7%	
Māori	37	5%	4%
Other	18	2%	
South African	17	2%	
South American	6	1%	
North American	5	1%	
African	3	0%	
Australian	3	0%	
Middle Eastern	2	0%	
	803		

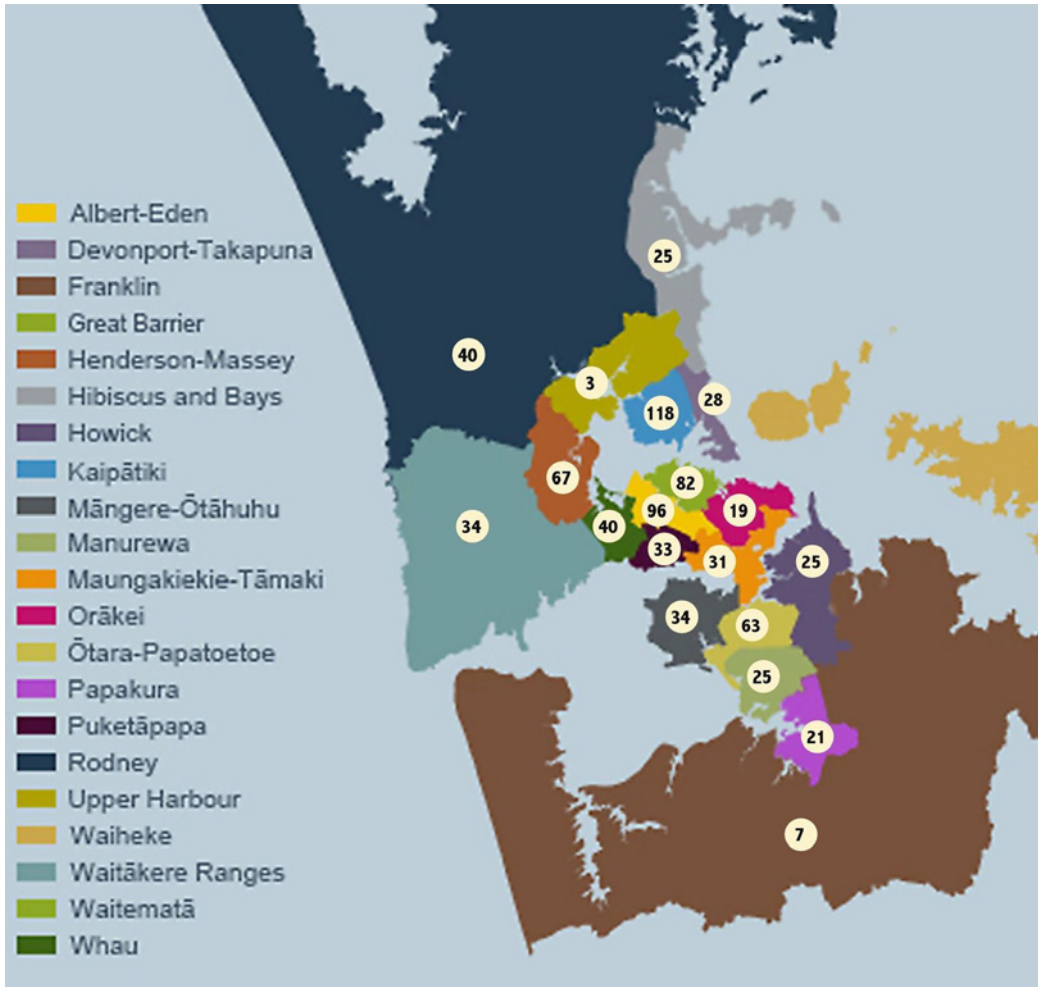
Sources: Volunteering Auckland, Statistics New Zealand, 2014

The population percentages represent those who identified as only one ethnicity on the census – there are other categories including combinations – however, Volunteering Auckland applicants must identify as one of these or ‘other’. As a result, the application percentages are likely to be higher because there are fewer categories. Still, the growth in youth applications to Volunteering Auckland is largely fuelled by Asian youth, who make up 43 per

cent of all applicants despite representing less than a quarter of the population.

The highest concentration of youth applicants is in the central suburbs – Kaipātiki on the North Shore, and Otara-Papatoetoe in South Auckland (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF 15-TO-19-YEAR-OLDS REGISTERING WITH VOLUNTEERING AUCKLAND IN EACH OF AUCKLAND'S BOARDS TO THE YEAR ENDING 30 JUNE 2014.



Sources: Auckland City Council, Volunteering Auckland, 2014.

#### ORGANISATIONS' LIMITATIONS

Of the nine organisations interviewed, seven would not consider taking youth volunteers (Appendix 1). Both Refugees As Survivors (RAS) and Red Cross Refugee and Migrant Services listed their clients' traumatic backgrounds as a reason for only using volunteers over the age of 18. RAS also reported that immigration requirements restricted who they could use as volunteers. In addition, incorporated nonprofits can be sued, so they must take reasonable means to ensure the safety of those both receiving and providing assistance (Department of Internal Affairs, 2005).

Those who work with minors or families with children have a similar rationale for their age limits. Island Child, Brothers in Arms, and Thrive Teen

## International examples of youth-led initiatives

Indigenous Communities Education & Awareness Foundation (ICEA) in Western Australia is a youth-led organisation. A high-school student set it up in 2007 to “promote reconciliation, unity and mutual respect for all Australians by creating experiences, relationships and understanding between young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous Australians” (Adair, 2011, p. 10).

Youth PATH (Poverty Alleviation through Heritage Tourism) operates in St Lucia. It involves more than 150 youth and student organisations in providing training and business-development skills for young people, especially the unemployed and recent graduates. They receive ICT training, training in business development and in running cultural and natural heritage sites. Then they receive the opportunity to start up small businesses operating and maintaining heritage tourism sites (Adair, 2011).

Every three years, Pacific Youth & Sport Conference (Oceania Football Confederation, [www.oceaniafootball.com](http://www.oceaniafootball.com)) gather 1000 16-to-25-year-olds to talk about health, education and social issues. Young people are encouraged to develop their ideas, own projects, and present these to their Minister for Youth and Sport. They work with the ministers to implement, monitor and evaluate these projects within their communities.

Africa Youth Trust ([africayouthtrust.org](http://africayouthtrust.org)), based in Kenya, is a youth-led approach to development, promoting democratic dialogue and ensuring young people are engaged in national and regional affairs (Adair, 2011).

Mayibuye, in South Africa ([mayibuyesouthafrica.org](http://mayibuyesouthafrica.org)) “is a youth-led organisation that’s using dance, performing arts and life skills workshops to build a generation of young people who are equipped to lead their community and act as positive role models” (Adair, 2011, p. 18).

Parent Support all have a minimum age of 18 years due to the young age of their clients. Big Buddy also seeks long-term commitments, which is one reason they have a higher age limit of 21 (Appendix 1).

Tough Love reported 18+ a requirement due to their desire for long-term commitments, however they see potential for placing younger volunteers in social-media roles. Similarly, Thrive Teen Parent Support will not place teen volunteers in roles with teen clients, but could have youth assist in their koha room (Appendix 1).

Pakuranga Howick Budgeting Services does not accept volunteers under the age of 18 because they require extensive training to work with clients. They did not suggest any other roles that volunteers could fill.

Wilson Home Trust takes volunteers from the age of 13, and welcomes them for peer friendships. The charity works with children who have disabilities, but despite the vulnerable nature of their clients it sees young volunteers as an asset and finds art projects a good way to involve them (Appendix 1).

Habitat for Humanity could restrict youth volunteering due to the dangerous nature of construction sites. However it has developed partnerships with trade schools and high schools, offering hands-on experience for students who need it. They also offer youth opportunities to do office work, babysitting and help in the op shop. For one-off projects, students have also painted murals, helped with community events, and even created a radio advertisement (Appendix 3).

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERS

Projects available through partner organisations generally fall into one of the following categories:

- Direct service (assisting clients)
- Indirect service (helping in op shops, raising funds, etc.)
- Internal administration (office-based work)
- External administration (creating posters, theatrical displays, etc.)

(Lewton & Nievar, 2012, pp. 695)

Many of Volunteering Auckland’s organisations have a lower age limit because of direct service



demands. However, all have administration needs and either have or could create indirect service projects if they allowed for training and oversight.

Projects that are well suited to under-18s include work in:

- Animal shelters
- Arts and performances
- Athletic events
- Community events
- Practical tasks
- Cooking
- Clean-up
- Fundraising drives
- Office duties
- Media and marketing
- Sports clubs
- Tutoring
- Wildlife care
- Care of the elderly
- Youth-led initiatives

(Lewton & Nievar, 2012; Volunteer Spot, 2008; Adair, 2011; Inspired, 2014; Allen & Harrison, 1983)

Not all volunteering must take place within the structure of an organisation. Given the benefits of involvement in one's community and the transportation limitations students have, opportunities that are geographically close will be the most successful. Public institutions like hospitals, schools and leisure centres, and public amenities such as parks and beaches could benefit from their time and initiative. Local sports clubs are likely to have open doors for youth interested in volunteering. The UK's 2005 Russell Commission recommended such venues as both good matches for youth volunteers and ones with "tangible community benefit" (Russell, 2005, p. 17).

There are also examples of youth-led initiatives, where they have driven each phase from the idea to the recruitment and implementation. The Russell Commission report led to the founding of vInspired in the UK. Its purpose and strategy are similar to Volunteering Auckland's, but with an exclusive focus on youth. It has channelled more than 1.25 million youth into voluntary outlets since 2006, and not all have been through established nonprofits. Team V campaigns provide a platform for youth to come up with their own community projects, recruit local volunteers and implement them. vInspired provides the hub and coaching, much like Volunteering Auckland does for registered organisations. Here, youth-led projects may themselves tie into established programmes, and their organic, one-off nature suits young volunteers, allowing them to use their initiative, take ownership and learn as they go.

## A success story: Elizabeth Knox Home

Amongst Volunteering Auckland's partners, Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital in Auckland stands out as an effective manager of youth volunteers. It has recruited and placed dozens of high-school students over the past year and a half. A key factor is its dedicated volunteer coordinator. Before Knox created the role in May 2013, most of its volunteers were retirees. Within six months, the coordinator had recruited 50 high-school students, making up a quarter of their volunteer pool. Volunteer Manager Kristen O'Reilly's role is not just about recruitment and training, but also retention (Appendix 2).

The coordinator enacts the rest home's philosophy of care, which includes the presence of "children, animals and plants" and seeks to create "an environment where unpredictable and unexpected things take place (antidote to boredom)" (Appendix 2). Youth volunteers fit in well in this model; their energy and spontaneity, combined with their ability to provide companionship and meet practical needs, bring something unique to the role.

Volunteers must be at least 13 years old. The home recruits from local schools, church and community groups, universities, and via Volunteering Auckland. Commitments are intentionally flexible, with both short-term support roles and long-term companionship roles available (Appendix 2). The coordinator understands that few youth will commit long-term, and has adjusted its programme to recognise this reality. Kristen told Volunteering Auckland, "We try not to focus too much on turnover as a negative thing because it actually helps us to retain our volunteers".

The coordinator starts with a 15-minute interview with each applicant to gauge skills and interest, then runs a group orientation. Youth begin with task-oriented jobs such as serving drinks, caring for animals, and admin jobs. Staff make an effort to present these roles as professional ones, not simply checking off chores. After volunteers have had a chance to get comfortable around the residents, they transition into companion roles, befriending and helping residents. Staff have found that the younger students are more comfortable doing task-based jobs, but generally gain confidence as companions by the age of 16 or 17.

Workshops run by the coordinator also prepare volunteers to interact with residents, coaching them in listening and communicating well, respecting cultural differences, and identifying challenges they might face. Follow-up worksheets help them get the most out of the experience and ensure they are well equipped to contribute to home life.

The communications worksheets ask volunteers to reflect on the following topics:

1. Write about a recent highlight of your work as a volunteer. Write about who you worked with, what you did together and how it was rewarding.
2. What have you learnt from this workshop and how will you put this into practice when volunteering or in other parts of your life? What skills (listening/speaking/reading/writing)? How will you apply this? Be specific!

3. Do you have any questions for Knox staff about volunteering or about the communications workshops?

(Elizabeth Knox Home, 2014a)

The answers counter many of the stereotypes about teenagers. Students find satisfaction from engaging with the elderly, commenting on successes in striking up conversations, playing games together or gratitude received for assistance. Some felt privileged when residents shared personal stories with them, and one even looked forward to future conversations with a resident who shared her taste in jazz and rock music. "My friends have a completely different taste in music, so it was good to find someone who shared the same taste as me," Kartika wrote (Elizabeth Knox Home, 2014b).

Despite a lack of work experience, students may bring valuable skills with them. "Some of the residents are Chinese," student Terry Lin wrote on a volunteer feedback form. "They talked to me in Mandarin and I explained the meaning to Victoria in English. The 'language exchange' is really good!" And even teenagers' less-valued skills can be an asset in some situations; in engaging with elderly residents, Sophie Lim wrote, "I learnt that maybe my over-talking can be useful for once!" (Elizabeth Knox Home, 2014c).

The responses also show appreciation for the time Kristen O'Reilly spends training them, praising both the content and the presentation (Elizabeth Knox Home, 2014b). By helping youth volunteers with aspects that might be challenging right from the start and welcoming feedback and suggestions, Knox increases their odds of success and leaves an open door for youth to seek help when they encounter difficulties. With that support in place, the home's staff also trust students enough to leave them with residents suffering from physical infirmities and dementia.

Knox's success shows that vulnerable clients may not preclude the use of youth volunteers. In fact, Knox has trained and retained some stellar examples of young volunteers, developing a volunteer base with a potential for growth both amongst present peer circles and over time, as some volunteers get hooked.

Two cases in point are those of Katie Beyer and Lucy Bean, who began volunteering in their first year of high school in 2013. A year and a half later, they still worked at the rest home. On 9 October 2014, at the Volunteering Auckland launch of a display in Revo Café to celebrate their organisation's partners, the 14-year-olds gave a speech:

"We keep going back every week because the atmosphere is relaxed and friendly," Katie said. "Volunteering doesn't feel like a job and there is no pressure to do something you don't feel comfortable doing – setting up the tables for dinner or watering the plants is always appreciated if conversations with strangers isn't your thing. ... It is wonderful to visit Knox each week and realise that over the past 18 months, the huge influx of volunteers has brought many residents who may have been shy, or lonely, or forgetting things because there was nothing to bother remembering, out of their shells. Some of them are dancing at the annual resident and volunteers' ball.

"The most rewarding thing that has happened in 18 months of coming to Knox almost every week, was when a woman we spend almost all of our time

with, who we have to re-introduce ourselves to each time, remembered us," Lucy said. "Not our names, but the fact that the three of us had been coming to see her every week, talking or just sitting quietly in her room for hours – and occasionally going for a walk up the road to get a choccie ice cream.

"Age gaps aren't a big issue often, in fact it is amazing to hear what many of these people have achieved in their lifetimes. ... You even see current Epsom girls like us chatting about how school has changed with EGGS old girls."

Katie concluded by saying that they volunteer "because a little of our time means a lot to others." (Beyer & Bean, 2014, n.p.)

## Recommendations

Volunteering Auckland is well placed to increase youth participation in volunteering. It has a network built up over a couple of decades, comprehensive institutional knowledge, and already advises hundreds of organisations on volunteer management.

The UK's Russell Commission report, which led to the successful vInspired initiative, recommended setting up an implementation body that is similar to what Volunteering Auckland had already been doing for years – raising awareness; improving quality and usefulness of volunteering experiences; building volunteering capacity; providing a point of contact; maintaining a database of opportunities; working with local volunteering bodies to deliver opportunities, advice and guidance for practitioners; and providing a feedback mechanism. Volunteering Auckland could focus these efforts more intentionally on its youth demographic, and conduct ongoing research into trends of youth participation and the community benefits of youth action and engagement (Russell, 2005, pp. 9-11).

### RESOURCE EXISTING VOLUNTEERING AUCKLAND INITIATIVES

Even before the steep rise in youth applicants, Volunteering Auckland was considering ways to better integrate youth into its partners' programmes. In 2004, it proposed two methods to accomplish this.

The first is a youth ambassadors programme. This would involve selecting ambassadors between the ages of 16 and 18 from local schools and community organisations. Those youth would come together once a month to work on community projects at different organisations. They would then offer feedback on their volunteering experience to the organisations, and take ideas for further community involvement back to their peer groups (Volunteering Auckland, 2004a).

The second, dubbed 'Flying Teams', proposes creating trios of young volunteers who would audit and then advise organisations on their volunteer systems from a youth perspective. Volunteering Auckland would train the youth so they would be aware of youth participation matters and know how to approach board members with their observations. Those could include policy suggestions, matters of recruitment and retention, procedures, explicit or implicit prejudices, and plans for practical action (Volunteering Auckland,

2004b).

Volunteering Auckland never secured funding to trial these plans, so nothing has eventuated. There is still potential to develop these plans further and, with sufficient resourcing, to implement them. Potential partners include local boards – Volunteering Auckland identified the Albert/Eden Youth Board, which had earmarked \$5000 to further youth volunteering.

#### GET THE WORD OUT

Volunteering Auckland regularly communicates with registered organisations through its newsletters. As part of its resourcing role, it can publicise the number of young volunteers looking for roles and highlight the opportunities best suited to youth. A targeted campaign could also include case studies (such as the programme at Knox Home) that may inspire replication and break down negative stereotypes of youth. Volunteering Auckland could mobilise its own youth volunteer base, commissioning media students to produce short videos that tell these stories and provide helpful pointers.

Volunteering Auckland also offers workshops to upskill its partners. As part of this campaign, it could provide pointers on training and retaining youth volunteers. This could be the most direct means of sharing successful models, breaking down stereotypes by sharing the stories of motivated youth, and finding creative ways for under-resourced organisations to commit to investing in volunteers.

The static information on Volunteering Auckland's website could be updated to include successful youth projects, videos promoting those programmes, and stories of youth volunteers. A stronger social-media presence – perhaps managed by youth volunteers – could also reinforce this message.

#### PROACTIVELY ADVISE MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

Volunteering Auckland would like to employ someone in a membership services role, but that is dependent on funding. Among other things, that person would be able to find out what each organisation's lower age limit was and why, and provide information about the potential for youth to fill both current roles and ones that had previously not been considered. This would be particularly useful at the induction stage with each new organisation, getting youth volunteers on the agenda from the start.

Along with publicising the potential for youth to benefit organisations, Volunteering Auckland could offer a framework that minimises concerns around youth capabilities. The framework will vary according to the context, but the following may be helpful for those who are willing to develop their capacity for youth volunteers:

- Clearly communicate the process for becoming a volunteer from the start, including the type and timing of initiation
- Offer adequate training, so youth are prepared for each new role and gain confidence despite being challenged
- Create clearly defined roles, and give them titles
- Involve youth in defining their jobs whenever possible, incorporating their own interests

- Provide clear objectives and a personal appraisal system
- Consider how buddy systems and team setups might provide support
- Provide a staff member or trained volunteer who is easily accessible to answer questions as they arise and provide coaching
- Provide a means of feedback from youth, and task a staff member with considering and implementing improvements to the volunteer programme
- Capitalise on opportunities around school holidays and short assignments

(Russell, 2005; Allen & Harrison, 1983)

### MEASURE SUCCESS

The ongoing feedback that Knox House collects is also important for gauging the long-term effectiveness of its efforts. Volunteering Auckland should encourage registered organisations to collect specific and regular feedback from both young volunteers and any clients they deal with. In areas that have outcomes that can be measured, such as fundraising or community projects, the Russell Commission recommends tracking impact through longitudinal studies, recording the impact on the community and identifying cost-effectiveness measures (Russell, 2005).

## Opportunities for further research

### LEARNING FROM YOUTH

Interviews with students may shed light on the reasons for the boom in youth applicants for volunteer roles. School curricula, extracurricular activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and other educational and social contexts may be fuelling the interest.

Feedback that organisations such as Knox receive would also be useful for Volunteering Auckland as it seeks to educate others further down the learning curve. When someone takes on the member services role, they could encourage organisations to solicit feedback and share it with those who plan the training seminars.

### LEARNING FROM VOLUNTEERING AUCKLAND'S PARTNERS

Volunteering Auckland could further refine the way it meets the needs of registered organisations by asking member organisations the following questions – both for gathering information to fine-tune its training and support, and to prompt innovation within those organisations:

FOR THOSE THAT DO NOT USE ANY VOLUNTEERS YOUNGER THAN 18 OR 20:

1. Do you ever have one-off projects (fundraisers, community events, working bees, etc.) that do not involve interaction with vulnerable clients?

2. Do you have administration, IT or social-media roles in your organisation that a regular volunteer who is under 18 may be able to take on?
3. What specific reservations about underage volunteers are behind your policy? (For instance legal liability, lack of work/life experience, higher training/supervision needs, lack of regular time commitment, etc.)
4. Is there any potential to buddy up younger volunteers with established ones?
5. What practical type of support or training might make you consider volunteers who are 18 or younger?

FOR THOSE THAT ALREADY USE VOLUNTEERS YOUNGER THAN 18:

1. What roles in your organisation do youth volunteers excel at?
2. What strategies do you use to overcome challenges youth volunteers present? (For instance lack of work/life experience, higher training/supervision needs, lack of regular time commitment, etc.)
3. How do youth volunteers benefit your organisation?
4. How could Volunteering Auckland help you overcome the challenges and accentuate the benefits of using youth volunteers? (For instance, are you interested in training for supervisors, learning about other organisations' systems, etc.)

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## Appendices

### APPENDIX 1: VOLUNTEERING AUCKLAND FEEDBACK FROM SELECTED ORGANISATIONS

<i>Agencies</i>	<i>Youth Availability</i>	<i>Description</i>
Refugees As Survivors (RAS)	No, 18+	As RAS works with refugees, migrants and asylum seekers who have come to New Zealand generally from countries affected by war, they do not employ volunteers under the age of 18 years. The clients may have come from traumatic backgrounds and there are specific programmes in place to help this which do not require the assistance of volunteers, especially volunteers of such a young age. There are also immigration requirements for working with the clients and on the facilities, so volunteers must be over the age of 18 years.
Red Cross Refugee and Migrant	No, 18+	Red Cross Refugee Services works with migrant and refugee families. Volunteers buddy up with a family in teams of up to six and offer support to a migrant or refugee family. The volunteers are required to be 18 years or preferably older to work with the families. The clients may have come from traumatic backgrounds and the support they need could be demanding. Volunteers need to be over 18 years to take on this responsibility and to connect with adults in the family.
Tough Love	No, 18+	Tough Love works with parents and their children. They do not seek volunteers through Volunteering Auckland for the programme. There could be room for volunteers in the social-media field, however for commitment's sake the volunteers would preferably be over 18 years.
Island Child	No, 18+	Island Child works with homeless families. Due to the sensitive nature of the work, volunteers need to be over the age of 18 years.
Wilson Home Trust	Yes, 13+	Wilson Home Trust have children from the local schools such as Takapuna Grammar come in to volunteer with the youth in social settings to offer peer friendship. They have also utilised young community youth in art projects throughout their premises. Although they have not had any youth volunteers referred to them through Volunteering Auckland, they do welcome youth into their trust.
Brothers in Arms	No, 18+	Brothers in Arms volunteers are mentoring youth, therefore need to be above the age of 18 years to take on the responsibility and commitment.
Big Buddy	No, 21+	Big Buddy volunteers are 21 years and older, as they are working with young fatherless boys and need their volunteers to be responsible and mature enough to take on the sometimes challenging role. Big Buddy volunteers also need to be committed to the role for extended periods of time.
Pakuranga Howick Budgeting Services	No, 20+	Pakuranga Howick Budgeting Services offers budgeting advice to the community. To become a volunteer budgeter there is extensive training to undergo which can at times be difficult. Pakuranga Howick Budgeting Services would be interested in having volunteers from 20 years and over.
Thrive Teen Parent Support	Currently no, but potential for youth volunteers	Thrive Teen Parenting at this stage doesn't take volunteers younger than the age of 18 years. This is due to the nature of their work and that the clients are teenagers. Volunteers younger than the age of 18 years could conflict with the ages of clients. However, they are looking into having volunteers to assist in their koha room, which has potential to have volunteers under the age of 18 years working there.

APPENDIX 2:  
STRATEGIES AROUND YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN  
VOLUNTEERING AT ELIZABETH KNOX HOUSE AND  
HOSPITAL (SUMMARY FROM KIRSTEN O'REILLY,  
VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR, 2014)

### Recruitment strategies and procedure

This programme was established through a number of recruitment strategies and involved around 50 of our 200 volunteers in 2014. As the Eden Alternative principles state, we need to have the community involved in life at Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital (Knox Home) and daily life must include plants, animals and children (see edenalt.org/). Therefore, with the expansion of the volunteer programme, a significant emphasis was put on seeking youth volunteers. A number of relationships revolving around youth were established in the local Epsom community:

- Gateway programmes with Epsom Girls Grammar and Mt. Roskill Grammar school, where students come once a week (9am-3pm) over the course of ten-week programmes, a few times throughout the year. Kristen put an advertisement in local school newsletters, and the local library, and went to St. Cuthbert's Girls school to give a speech to interested volunteers (100+ in attendance).
- A St. Cuthbert's teacher, Ms. Wong, set up a programme with the Volunteer Coordinator (VC) to provide the opportunity for college students to volunteer with the physio team's daily exercise circuit (1:00-1:45pm) during their lunch breaks. The programme established that Ms. Wong does the initial orientation/health and safety and registration-form sign-up and then brings the students over on their first day. The students then come four times (once a week for a month), and then the student groups switch. They can then contact the Volunteer Coordinator if they're interested in long-term volunteering, which many of them have done.
- Another St. Cuthbert's teacher, Ms. Yardena, and the VC set up a programme with a Year 9 English class who wrote poems introducing themselves – 'Where I'm from' – along with videos which they shared as a presentation to Knox residents. A visitation programme was set up from the relationships established, in which students interviewed elders for their class projects – an opportunity for residents to give care as well as receive it.

### Interview and orientation process

- Step 1: All interested volunteers contact the VC for an interview, which lasts 15-30 minutes.
- Step 2: After the interview and "role placement" (see roles below) all volunteers attend a weekly Volunteer Orientation which lasts 1.5 to 2 hours, before they begin

their volunteer role.

- Step 3: On the first shift, all volunteers are buddied up with another volunteer, until they feel comfortable to volunteer independently (if their role requires that).
- Step 4: To attend additional (monthly) training opportunities if desired.
- Step 5: To switch to a different volunteer role after a few weeks (if desired) i.e., switch from staff support to companionship (see below).

### Training programmes

- Mandatory – Orientation
- Optional – Eden Sessions, communication workshops and open communication sessions
- Orientation: The original orientation covers the following:
  - Knox Home – Who are we? Who are our volunteers?
  - The Eden Alternative – The caring philosophy of the home
  - Code of conduct for volunteers
  - Health and safety
  - Confidentiality
  - Registration process

### Weekly or monthly Eden sessions

Knox residents and staff hold weekly Eden sessions (discussing the ten Eden Alternative principles) every Monday afternoon.

The VC holds an optional monthly session for volunteers who wish to learn and understand more about the Eden Alternative principles.

### Communication workshops

This is a seven-part series which focuses on communication with residents, developing personal confidence and social integration of volunteers. The first four workshops (each two hours long) talk about cultural differences in communication, introducing ourselves, sharing anecdotes, communicating with people of a variety of ages and medical conditions, and more. The last three workshops revolve around public speaking, interview skills and vocabulary – as a way for us to 'give back to volunteers', we'd like to support them in their communication outside of Knox, too.

We noticed immediately the benefit that these workshops have on youth volunteers, as many of them haven't volunteered in this environment before, may not have relationships with many elders and/or are less confident in developing new relationships with others. As some volunteers cannot commit to coming fortnightly over a few months, we've created 'open communication sessions' where we condense a few of the workshops into two-hour sessions.

## Open-communication training

Volunteers can sign up for a monthly open-communication training (two hours) to support volunteers in establishing relationships with residents.

The key to training and retaining youth is that they feel supported and ready for their role. Having a Volunteer Coordinator on site, or someone responsible for supervising them, guiding them and supporting them is critical. Giving clear instructions and starting off with specific tasks is also very important so that volunteers are clear in their understanding of their roles. As we initially developed a very flexible programme, we realised that we needed further role development for younger volunteers so that they feel they have a place amongst volunteers that is valuable, clear and supported.

## Roles for youth at Knox

Many younger volunteers want clear directions and task-oriented roles, at least to start off with. It's our procedure to start off most volunteers in a 'staff support' role, i.e., serving morning tea, helping in physio or helping over the dinner hour to set up and assist residents with their meals. As they get to know residents, they may want to move on to a companionship role, where they simply sign in and visit residents that they know.

If volunteers are particularly outgoing, have experience communicating with residents or feel very comfortable doing so, they are allowed to sign up for a companionship role right away. We don't want volunteers to feel 'restricted' to certain tasks, but they must also feel supported. Therefore it's encouraged that all companion volunteers attend Eden sessions and/or communication training so that they have the best possible understanding of what it means to join the rhythm of the elders' day.

## Which roles do we create for youth volunteers?

- Staff support: Serving morning tea, helping out in physiotherapy activities, supporting the activities team with games, serving dinner to residents, helping out with weekend brunch, assisting the laundry staff with labelling clothes and organising the residents' unlabelled clothing rack, running and operating the residents' café and store (on-site) and helping to feed the pets.
- Companionship role: we can 'structure' companionship by assisting in the set-up of games for residents and volunteers, encouraging volunteers to bake in groups, play musical instruments; and also support the companionship role by making helpful resources, like a photo album with all residents' photos and hobbies/facts about them.

## How do we support youth volunteers?

- Multiple training opportunities
- Continuous opportunities for feedback: feedback forms, surveys, journal writing after communication workshops
- Learning Circles – a chance to get together to discuss how things are going, any challenges, etc.

One of the big shared experiences from Knox volunteers is wanting to support youth in their roles, and giving them the opportunity to grow and care; however, we should limit the number of restrictions we place on them. We can't make it too hard to sign up or get started, or else we won't retain them. We must be flexible about the amount of the we require from them (i.e., to be more flexible around exam time, etc.).

## The benefit of youth – feedback from residents and staff

Staff and residents have fed back in multiple ways how beneficial it is having the younger generation involved. Residents feel that the youth energise them, share stories and relate to them as their own grandchildren would or do. Many residents don't have grandchildren or children nearby, or perhaps they have grown up and residents enjoy having children in their lives again. It's a chance to be re-anchored in the community, and an opportunity to meet new people, and to share experiences and skills. Having younger volunteers here really gives residents the opportunity to give care to that generation, and having the opportunity to continue to care for others is an opportunity to grow for everyone.

One of the most beautiful things about youth volunteers that we notice at Knox is that younger people often don't see the disability in someone – they see what is still there, what is still possible and what a person is capable of doing. Simply by seeing that possibility, we open up through the companionship to a world of opportunities – and allow a resident and volunteer to spend time in a way that is meaningful to them both.

## APPENDIX 3:

VOLUNTEERING AUCKLAND INTERVIEW WITH  
KATHERINE GRANICH, HABITAT FOR HUMANITY,  
TUESDAY 5 NOVEMBER, 2013

### 1. Where do you see your organisation in relation to successfully engaging young people as volunteers?

Presently, Habitat Auckland is not very successful at engaging young people as volunteers. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being 'not at all successful' and 10 being 'very successful', I would put us at about a 3-4. This is partly a self-limiting situation for reasons explained below.

### 2. If I was to ask you to think about the current volunteers you have in your organisation,

#### (a) What percentage are aged 14-18 years?

Perhaps five to ten per cent.

#### (b) What would you suggest has helped them most in engaging with your organisation?

Our staff and other volunteers are extremely encouraging and supportive of volunteers. I think this supportive, welcoming, encouraging, accepting environment that we are fostering for our volunteers promotes positive engagement with our organisation. The nature of the work, which is challenging but rewarding, also fosters positive engagement.

### 3. What (if any) is your organisation's current recruitment process in regards to youth volunteers?

We do not have a specific recruitment policy or procedure in place for youth volunteers for several reasons, which I will explain in following questions. Our youth volunteers generally come to us from these different 'streams':

a) Often, youth volunteers come to us because they either have community service to fulfil as part of their schooling (some high schools in the area encourage or require community service of some kind as a curriculum element for senior students). In these cases, supervising teachers or school staff contact us to arrange volunteer days. We have ongoing relationships with a few local schools which have developed from this.

b) We have had some students get in touch with us directly with the intention of setting up a volunteer programme for their school, but this is rare.

c) We also have Gateway and other work-experience coordinators contact us to arrange construction-site work

experience for students undertaking pre-trade qualifications or needing work experience prior to undertaking trade qualifications.

d) We sometimes have church youth groups contact us wishing to volunteer.

e) There are special volunteering experiences organised through schools, one of which is successfully running for the first time this year and will run again next year, and another of which is still in the negotiation process. This has come through relationships and partnerships between local trade schools/tech schools and high schools who wish to give their students an even more targeted and meaningful work experience prior to graduation. One has successfully run at Onehunga High School, whereby the students in the construction school have built a Habitat home on their school grounds during the school year. The house will then be moved to its 'home site' upon completion. This came through relationships between the high school, Onehunga-One Tree Hill Rotary, Habitat, and a few other partner organisations.

f) We also have some youth volunteers through our Habitat partner families, who are family members of those who will be receiving a Habitat house. Habitat partner families have to do 500 hours of volunteering with us, which we call 'sweat equity'. Family members of the homeowner are able to do these hours as well, and often we have partner family youth in our ReStore working as volunteers to help complete the sweat-equity requirement for their parents or other Habitat partner-family relatives.

g) Sometimes volunteers wish to bring their children along to their own volunteering experience, and are permitted to do so if they meet the age requirement (which I will explain in following questions).

### 4. Within your organisation what tasks do young people typically undertake?

When we do have youth volunteers, they are generally on our house-building site doing all manner of building tasks that are suited to their age and maturity level, as well as what is safe for them, and to their experience if they are coming from a building or trade background or are going into trade. It is hard to list the tasks, as they are so numerous and varied, but generally they relate to every stage of building a house excepting those which require professional certification such as electrical work or plumbing (although we do sometimes permit apprentice plumbers/electricians to work under direct supervision of qualified plumbers/electricians). We also sometimes have youth volunteers in our ReStore, which is our secondhand store, and their tasks may include serving customers, helping us to sort incoming donations, helping us to tidy the shop. Additionally, some of our youth volunteers babysit for other younger family members during the time that their parents are completing sweat-equity volunteering hours, and those babysitting hours also count as sweat equity and towards our volunteer hours. We have also had

youth volunteers in our office doing administrative tasks like filing, answering the phones and collating paperwork. Additionally, we have in the past had youth volunteers doing special projects, such as designing and painting a mural at our office, helping us to host a special community event, and even creating a radio commercial for us in one of their school classes. We are very open to different creative ways in which we can work with youth.

### **5. What strengths do you see within your organisations that are enabling successful long-term engagement with youth volunteers, if any? (Looking at both within your organisation and in general.)**

I think the nature of our work (building houses) is quite exciting and interesting to youth volunteers, many of whom relish the opportunity to use power tools and do something hands on. I also think our staff, particularly those who interact regularly with volunteers, are also a compelling reason our youth volunteers like coming along – they do make things fun and are great with volunteers of all ages. I also think that the fact our build site requires no prior experience or skills is very encouraging to all volunteers, particularly youth. We challenge our volunteers, but not in a negative way; more in a ‘give it a go and you might surprise yourself’ kind of way. The fact we also offer work experience for volunteers who are seeking trade qualifications is a bonus, as we want to make it easier for these students to enter the workforce with support and encouragement as well as appropriate instruction.

### **6. What obstacles do you see within your organisation that may be affecting successful long-term engagement with youth volunteers, if any? (Looking at both within your organisation and in general.)**

a) The first obstacle is age. Legally we are not permitted to have any volunteers under the age of 15 on our build site, as it is considered a working construction site. Our organisation’s policy, which has evolved from this, is that we don’t permit youth under the age of 16 on our construction site.

b) The second obstacle is the need for adequate supervision on our build site for health and safety reasons. Generally, we prefer to have one supervisor to every five volunteers. We have one supervisor onsite all the time, and another on call but whom we do not always have access to, so we do need to limit the number of volunteers we have onsite because of this. To help ensure adequate supervision, we require any 16- and 17-year-olds (and some 18-year-olds who are still in school) to bring supervising adults with them. The ratio of youth volunteers to adult supervisors is varied. For some youth we permit one supervisor to five youth; for others we require a ratio of one supervisor to two

youth. It depends on many factors, and we generally use our previous experience to determine the level of supervision we will require them to bring along with them. New groups of youth volunteers or volunteers require more supervisors; more regular groups of youth volunteers we might relax the supervision rule somewhat. Groups with whom we have had difficulties in the past may require more supervisors because we know that they have a tendency to misbehave or not listen to us. (However, we have one group of 16-to-18-year-olds from one particular high school who have proven themselves over many volunteering occasions to be very trustworthy, reliable, and mature, and we permit them to come in groups of up to five or six students without bringing an adult supervisor with them, but they are the one exception with regards to school groups. The other exception is our work-experience students, whom we permit to come onsite one or two at a time on a regular basis. Because they are there to learn skills over time and are working closely with our supervising builder, there is a level of expectation on both sides as to their maturity and capability, and they are allowed to come without supervision as long as they fulfill our and their programme’s expectations.) To sum up, the supervision factor is tricky on both sides. It’s tricky on our side because we don’t have enough of our own people to ensure the supervision ratios are adhered to, and often when groups of youth volunteers or even individual youth volunteers find out they need to bring supervision along, they balk and sometimes become annoyed, and may not come because they can’t/won’t find enough supervising adults.

c) Related to the second obstacle is that we have noticed a tendency for schools/parents to treat our volunteering options as a ‘school-holiday programme’, and wish to drop off their youth with us for the day to be kept busy, but they are not serious about wanting to volunteer with us. We are trying to work out a way to deter these occurrences; the supervision ratios we have introduced are helping to keep this from happening, but it still happens.

d) Another obstacle is what I call the horsing-around factor. Youthful exuberance is wonderful, but can be very dangerous on a building site. Groups of students who are not closely supervised can create or get into dangerous situations on our build site, where there are many potentially dangerous tools, materials, and situations for those who are not vigilant and serious. We like to have fun on our site, but we need to always think of safety first, and youth are generally not of this mindset.

e) A further obstacle is maturity. While there are many mature and exceptional youth volunteers, many of whom we have had the pleasure of working with, there are an equal number of youth volunteers who are simply not mature enough to work on a construction site. This is an awkward situation for us, as we find it difficult to explain to their supervisors or cooperating teachers that of a group of ten regular volunteer students, five are fine, but the other five really can’t come along as they are too distracted/on their mobiles/not interested/unreliable, etc.

f) Another obstacle is work ethic. Our outcome is finite – we need to build a house. We have a timeframe to do it in, and we need to get it done within that timeframe because we want to house a needy family and then build another house. We also have requirements set by our funders and our board which we have to fulfil in order to be sustainable. We find it difficult to host youth volunteers because, frankly, they take twice as long to get the work done. It's not a matter of inability or lack of capability, because our volunteering work is set up to be suitable for anyone of any skill level. It is more that youth volunteers tend to not have the work ethic to get stuck in and get done what we need to get done in order to fulfil our build schedule. In order to stay productive and sustainable, our volunteering options tend to be geared toward adults.

g) Because we can only host up to ten volunteers at a time on our build site, with the need for supervision numbers to be included in this limit, the number of youth volunteers who are able to come at any one time is also severely limited. This means that larger interested groups need to be split into smaller groups and come over several dates, which most youth groups are reluctant to do for a number of reasons.

h) The last obstacle is the feeling of entitlement, which is perhaps not the correct word. This is hard for me to explain. There can be a feeling among volunteers that because they are volunteering their time, we as a charity should be grateful and accept anything and everything they are offering us.

## **7. What do you see as fundamental principles when engaging and/or recruiting youth volunteers?**

I think the most important attribute is being able to relate well to youth and engage with them in a way that makes them feel respected and appreciated. I think openness, friendliness and kindness are essential when engaging with all volunteers, particularly youth.

## **8. What key characteristics would the 'ideal volunteer' have, from the perspective of your organisation?**

An ideal volunteer would believe in Habitat's mission, which is that everyone deserves to live in a simple, decent, healthy home, and that poverty in housing needs to be eliminated in New Zealand and around the world. They would be enthusiastic and interested in our work. They would be punctual and reliable, and willing to get stuck in even to tasks that aren't terribly exciting. They would be friendly and personable, and relate to our other volunteers well. They would be capable and perhaps have skills we could utilise that would help us in our tasks, especially those where we have little support or limited skill. They would tell their friends about us and spread the word about what we do. Ultimately,

they would feel that making a donation to support our work is a worthwhile thing to do.

## **9. How do you envision a youth-friendly organisation to function and what would it look like?**

A youth-friendly organisation would have a dedicated youth liaison to work with youth volunteers and to actively identify and organise youth-friendly volunteering opportunities. It would have ample opportunities available for youth, to engage them in a friendly and encouraging manner, to help harness and channel their natural exuberance in a way that will be beneficial to both the organisation and the youth. A youth-friendly organisation would have good relationships with sources of youth volunteers, such as schools and churches, and would actively maintain these relationships through mutual communication and feedback.

## **10. How can Volunteering Auckland assist your organisation to effectively engage with volunteers aged between 14 and 18?**

It would help us if VA understood that our organisation's parameters around youth volunteers are somewhat strict for a number of reasons, and to communicate this upfront to potential youth volunteer groups so that their expectations are managed and any potential disappointment limited.

Maryanne Wardlaw is a former journalist who has worked in the nonprofit sector since 2002 as a communications specialist. This paper was written in 2014 while interning at Volunteering Auckland, as part of her Master of Public Policy studies at the University of Auckland.