

# Youth Volunteerism **TOOLKIT**

Using Volunteer Programs to Enhance Youth Employment Services



Volunteer Youth in the Millennium

Produced by:





## What is OAYEC?

The Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres (OAYEC) is a not-for-profit, umbrella group of over 70 youth employment centres throughout Ontario.

Through supporting the work of local youth employment centres across Ontario, OAYEC aims to help young people find and maintain meaningful employment that will help improve the quality of their lives.

Since 1988, the Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres and our network of youth employment agencies have been committed to delivering accessible, high quality, outcomes-based employment services to young people to assist them in reaching their employment and life goals.



## What is VYM?

Volunteer Youth in the Millennium (VYM) is a program originally designed in 1998 by the former Executive Director of OAYEC, Kay Eastham. It matches young volunteers between the ages of 14 and 29, many of them at-risk, with not-for-profit and charity organizations in their community. Its main goal is to encourage more of Ontario's young people to engage in volunteering, both as a means of fostering caring communities, and as a means of improving school-to-work transitions through career exploration and preparation.

There are ten participating youth employment centres (also known as "VYM sites") throughout Ontario that administer the program and work collaboratively with their local volunteer bureaus, high schools, youth serving organizations and voluntary recreational /cultural sector agencies. Over the past three years of the program, over 2,600 youth have been registered with VYM.

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***Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,  
committed citizens can change the world.  
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.***

- Margaret Mead

## Why we wrote this toolkit

After three years of creativity, hard work and dedication, the original VYM “pilot phase” is being transformed into what will be a more permanent, independent program managed solely by youth employment centres in Ontario. The results of the VYM program, including the number of youth placed in volunteer opportunities, the knowledge they attained on the job, as well as other benefits enjoyed by youth volunteers, were more than impressive.

Yet the VYM program is doing much more than providing meaningful volunteer opportunities and working experiences for youth. It is helping the OAYEC network develop stronger community linkages within and between youth, youth-serving agencies, schools, and funders like never before. More importantly, the VYM program will serve as a model for future volunteer programs run by not-for-profit organizations. We hope this toolkit can be used to help them develop an efficient, results-based volunteer program of their own. In addition, just as it is important to understand what worked well in VYM, it is just as valuable to understand some of the unexpected challenges and barriers that were faced in the program as well.

This toolkit will first discuss the planning phase of a volunteer program, including such activities as goal-setting, fundraising, staffing and program structure. It will then examine the implementation phase that consists of staff orientation, statistical reporting, building partnerships with community groups and host agencies, the placement of volunteer youth and evaluation, concluding with a look at youth volunteerism in the future.

## Why volunteerism?

Why should a youth employment centre start a volunteer program in their community? Youth can also use meaningful volunteer opportunities as a place for career exploration and employment preparation.

Volunteerism in Canada has also been a large part of the fabric of our society, and youth volunteerism has played a tremendous role in creating and sustaining vibrant caring communities. In fact, between 1993 and 2000, the fastest growing demographic group of volunteers were youth. Young people in Ontario, with their creativity and energy, are burning with a desire to change their world for the better, and it is volunteer programs that allow them to do just that.

In this era of economic restraint and an increased awareness of the individual’s responsibility to their community, volunteer opportunities for youth play this dual role.



## How volunteerism will compliment other services of your youth employment centre

**(Volunteer programs) play a vitally important role in helping youth develop job skills and explore career options, which better prepares them for the world of work and reduces some of the burden on other services of the youth employment centre.**

The VYM program is complimenting many other services provided by the youth employment sector. As reported in an independent study commissioned by OAYEC, VYM is the first volunteer experience for most of the youth registered with the program, and that most enjoyed the personal satisfaction of having contributed to a worthwhile cause. It also found that many learn personal or technical skills they believe will be important later in their working lives. This brings us to one of the more obvious benefits of a volunteer program: they play a vitally important role in helping youth develop job skills and explore career options, which better prepares them for the world of work and reduces some of the burden on other services of the youth employment centre.

A successful volunteer program can also raise the profile of the youth employment centre to new heights. The OAYEC study illustrated that the VYM program is expanding the traditional client bases of the VYM sites through the interest generated by focusing on youth volunteerism. It is also creating bridges between schools, school boards, teachers and parents with the youth employment centre that previously did not exist.

In addition, the VYM program is spawning entirely new initiatives out of ideas that were originally generated under the auspices of VYM. The program is creating relationships between the participating employment centres and donors in the community which are leading to future funding grants for other existing programs.

The long-term benefits of a youth volunteer program are found in the development and collaboration of community organizations. These organizations are involved in some way with youth but which historically have tended to operate in isolation. This collaborative work can better focus on the needs and interests of youth and heighten the importance of youth issues in the community.

It remains to be seen what other benefits that VYM or other volunteer programs will bring to youth employment centres throughout the province. One thing is clear: youth volunteer programs can move the employment services sector in positive directions that were not even previously considered.

## Assessing the volunteering needs of your community

One of the most important steps towards a successful, results-oriented youth volunteer program is determining the specific needs of your particular community. Ontario is a province with diverse regions. You will want to ask yourself some important questions:

- What are the age groups represented in my community? Are there a large number of young people? Are there a large number of people reliant on volunteer-based supports (i.e., senior citizens).
- What are the unemployment rates in my community, for both adults and youth?
- Are there any colleges or universities situated in my community (as a source of young people and outreach)?
- What non-profit organizations and youth groups are based in my community?
- Are there any volunteer programs already in operation? Is there a volunteer organization umbrella group?
- How is the community as a whole involved with young people and school boards?
- Is my community a large tourist destination (where special events during summertime, for example, would be a prime volunteering opportunity for youth)?

From these questions will come a set of answers that will forge the kind of volunteer program that would be most successful for your particular locale. For example, if there are a large number of senior citizens in your region, your volunteer program may want to specifically reach out to seniors groups or retirement homes. If there is a major college campus near by, building a strong working relationship with the school's administrators to advertise your volunteering opportunities to the students would be prudent.

Understanding what makes a good volunteer program comes from understanding your community first.



## Setting goals and a vision for your program

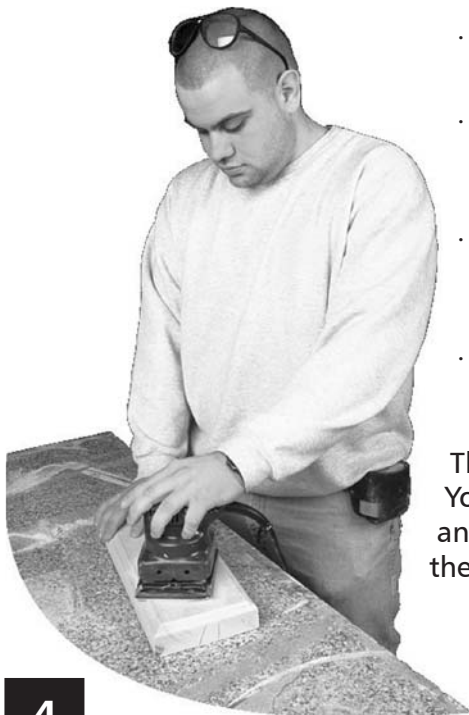
Before creating the structure of your volunteer program, it is critical to develop and articulate a set of core values for the program, as well as concrete program goals.

OAYEC's Volunteer Youth in the Millennium was based on values that would later guide almost every aspect of the program. Generally speaking, these included partnership, equality, learning, obligation and compassion.

OAYEC also set goals for the program. The following were some of the goals originally designed for the participating VYM sites throughout Ontario:

- Recruitment of youth that reflect the diversity of the community, with an emphasis on both disadvantaged out of school youth (40%) and in school youth (60%).
- Referral to and creation of meaningful volunteer opportunities for youth in the community, targeted at 80 youth in year one, 100 youth in year two and 120 youth in year three.
- The hiring of a full-time, qualified volunteer coordinator to operate the program year round.
- Provision of leadership development opportunities for youth, including involvement in the local advisory groups and summer internships.
- Building community participation and life/career skills among youth participants, especially at-risk youth.
- Increasing the capacity among a range of institutions for youth engagement in volunteer activities.
- Development and ongoing growth of partnerships in the community around the VYM initiative, including youth, community, corporate and appropriate government sectors.
- Ensuring project sustainability through fundraising of matching dollars, \$20,000 in year one, \$30,000 in year two and full project costs in year three and beyond.
- Having VYM coordinators actively participating in the program reporting and evaluation process.

These are only a few of the goals that are associated with VYM. Your youth employment centre will have to create a set of values and goals specific to youth that meets the needs of young people in the community.



## Fundraising

Before speaking about program staffing, volunteer screening and building partnerships and host agencies, we will first have to deal with the task of raising funds.

The first step in developing a strong fundraising method is creating a sound plan. Good fundraisers understand that only looking at the long-term picture can bring results. This includes creating effective strategies, objectives and timelines.

There are some tested strategies that have generally shown to be successful under any fundraising plan:

- Review and solidify your values and vision. Only when fully understanding the reasons for your volunteer program can you determine a deep connection with a donor and form a long-term relationship with them.
- Research your potential donors, whether they are private-sector corporations or donor foundations. Understand what their values and objectives are and compare them to those of your youth volunteer program. Create a list of them for your entire youth employment centre to use for future funding proposals.
- Building and maintaining personal relationships with potential donors is key. New relationships can be a high cost (in time and effort) and a potentially low return. It is important for fundraisers to exhaust all avenues with previous donors before reaching out to new ones.
- Along these lines, try to find donors that may be willing and interested in providing funding for other projects or activities administered by your employment centre.
- Be open and up front with a donor about money. Never be afraid of asking for everything that a corporate donor may be willing to give and what your program and vision require.
- As Albert Einstein once said, "Insanity occurs when you do the same thing over and over and expect a different result." This is where evaluation becomes necessary. If something is not working, re-evaluate your fundraising plan and start over.
- Appreciation is critical. Thank your donors again and again.

Many of the VYM sites have already successfully developed their own fundraising strategies. The VYM program in Thunder Bay, Ontario, for example, has recently raised \$25,000 from the Clerica Life Insurance Company. Their proposal was one of the more than four hundred that were submitted to Clerica. With good planning, objectives, research and creativity, your employment centre can do the same.

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## Staffing your volunteer program

We now have the goals and objectives written down and some funding coming into our volunteer program. What we need now are the personnel to administer it.

A key staff role to understand is that manager of the youth volunteer program: the volunteer coordinator. He or she should have a specific set of duties clearly defined by your employment centre, which may include:

- Raising public awareness of the volunteer program.
- Recruiting, screening and retaining young volunteers.
- Providing information, support, resources and feedback as needed by either the youth volunteer or the organization in which the youth is serving, also known as the “host agency”.
- Monitoring the satisfaction of the youth volunteer and the host agency.
- Monitoring the safety of the volunteer.
- Intervening and providing conflict resolution or mediation when appropriate.
- Obtaining regular feedback from youth volunteers as to their satisfaction with their volunteer positions.
- Conduct exit interviews with volunteers to complete program statistical reporting, measuring program outcomes, providing closure to the youth volunteer.
- Obtaining suggestions for improving volunteer placements.

Employment centres should not underestimate the importance of finding energetic and creative individuals to act as their volunteer coordinator. Beyond specific experience with and commitment to youth, successful coordinators must have the personal capacities required to work in a team, but plan and execute independently; to establish objectives and approaches, but also to learn and listen and adjust. A successful volunteer coordinator also spends about half of her or his time “in the field,” making and maintaining contacts, supporting volunteers and advocating for youth volunteerism.



In addition, successful implementation of a youth volunteer program depends on the implementing agency providing the coordinator with an adequate level of logistic and moral support and efforts to include the coordinator among program staff, with a mandate to promote youth volunteerism within the centre and across programs. Successful start-up of a youth volunteer program is best assured when the person responsible has the requisite organizational status. The coordinator must be empowered to represent and champion the program to management and staff, and promote it among the employment centre and their partners. Making youth volunteerism an agency-wide, cross-cutting theme will ensure an effective and cohesive working team and a high-quality youth volunteer program.

If turnover is to occur, every possible effort should be made to maintain "corporate memory" and carry over important information, including networks, contacts and linkages, to the incoming volunteer coordinator. This includes writing down all aspects of the volunteer coordinator's job and ensuring complete files are kept in areas open to all youth employment centre staff.

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## Partnerships and outreach: building relationships with others in your community

**Each of the VYM sites have their own unique approach to building partnerships. This is one of the strengths of the project and is consistent with the apparent intent that VYM be highly flexible, able to adapt to the nature, dynamics and needs of the community.**

It is important to note that each of the VYM sites have their own unique approach to building partnerships. This is one of the strengths of the project and is consistent with the apparent intent that VYM be highly flexible, able to adapt to the nature, dynamics and needs of the community. Among the VYM sites, some focus primarily on developing linkages with the schools, with less attention paid to charitable agencies. Others focus on responding to the volunteer needs of social service agencies. Some VYM sites have focused almost exclusively on at-risk youth, while others have concentrated on students. Still others are strongly oriented toward employment preparation, with strong linkages to programs such as Job Connect and Ontario Works.

Some of the relationships between the VYM site and the community are influenced by their location. The VYM sites situated in rural settings, for example, tend to rely on strong relationships and a high level of involvement with schools and school boards. This may be because the VYM site is the only volunteer agency in the community and because it is easier to access smaller schools and school boards.

VYM sites in urban settings, on the other hand, have placed more emphasis on working in partnership with other youth service providers, primarily agencies that serve at-risk youth. There are efforts required to define and work with a specific community within the larger urban landscape.

Relationships with schools may be of major importance to your youth volunteer program, especially since the Ontario Government mandated a 40-hour community service requirement for secondary school graduation. Working with school boards to help facilitate a high school student's volunteer requirements shows great promise. In addition, the class of 2003 will be a double-cohort class, with both Grade 12 and OAC students graduating. Once again, youth volunteerism can offer many of these students, some of whom may have to postpone their post-secondary education for at least a year or so, with opportunities to improve their job skills and explore their career options.

## Bringing host agencies on board

The organizations which provide volunteer placement opportunities (also known as “host agencies”) are primarily the responsibility of the volunteer coordinator. Building partnerships with others in your community, as discussed in the last section, will radically increase your ability to successfully recruit host agencies.

### *Screening*

Screening is the process of deciding which host agencies should provide volunteer placement opportunities. The suitability of host agencies should be determined through the following requisites:

- Their ability to offer meaningful volunteer opportunities to young people.
- Their ability to provide adequate and appropriate support and supervision to youth volunteers.
- Their ability and willingness to follow the guidelines and requirements set by the volunteer coordinator.

The volunteer coordinator should personally interview the contact persons of all prospective host agencies in order to determine the suitability of the agency.

### *Orientation*

After this process has been completed and the host agencies have been chosen, the individuals supervising the volunteers at the host agencies (also known as “direct supervisors”) should participate in an orientation prior to the beginning of the volunteer placement. This orientation should include information on the following:

- The nature and purpose of the youth volunteer program.
- The volunteer recruitment and placement processes of the program.
- The requirements and expectations of the youth volunteer and host agency.



### *Host Agency Placements*

Volunteer placement descriptions for all positions must be filed by the prospective host agency and should include the following details:

- Position title.
- The name of the direct supervisor and his or her phone number.
- Hours and duties.
- Qualifications required.
- Training provided.
- Other relevant or necessary information about the position.

The direct supervisor is responsible for the management and guidance of the work of the volunteer and shall be available to the volunteer for consultation and assistance. The supervisor will also have the responsibility for providing feedback to the volunteer and volunteer coordinator.

OAYEC's independent study on the VYM program showed that the host agencies are generally very pleased with the energy and enthusiasm of youth volunteers. VYM is thus helping to make host agencies aware of the qualities and potential contribution of youth as volunteers, and in some cases, breaking down negative preconceptions of youth as volunteers. All of the host agencies that were contacted for the study expressed satisfaction with the results of their efforts to provide meaningful experiences for youth.

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## Recruiting and screening volunteer youth

Now that we have the host agencies in place, we need to register young volunteers. Youth volunteer programs are most effective when designed as job or career experience programs rather than social clubs. Young volunteers must see that what they offer the organization is valued and respected. Your volunteer programs may be competing with their need to work for money and must demonstrate that your program is offering them the opportunity to gain experience and skills beyond what they might receive working in paid employment

In order to successfully recruit youth volunteers, the volunteer program should focus on the following:

- Raising awareness to youth in the community of volunteering opportunities, which may include writing to local media, poster, organizing publicity events, visiting high schools, etc.
- Providing youth with an orientation to the volunteer program.
- Offering volunteer opportunities that are both suitable and interesting to youth.
- Opening up discussions of values: the vision that youth have for their communities and their desire to contribute to that vision.
- Providing an environment in the youth employment centre that is participatory, supportive and most importantly, fun.

It is important that each volunteer coordinator develop appropriate recruitment strategies that ensure participation from youth both in and out of school, young people classified as “at-risk”, and from youth that reflect the diversity of their communities, based on age, gender, ability, economic class, educational attainment, sexual orientation, colour and race.

After youth learn of the opportunities offered by your volunteer program and want to be registered, they will have to be screened. All youth volunteer applicants should be screened through a multi-stage process that includes the application form, a screening interview, and a reference check.

The application form should obtain basic information about the applicant, including availability, interests, previous experience and personal preferences that allows for an initial assessment of suitable volunteer placements and provides a springboard for further questions at the screening interview, which in turn provides the opportunity to assess their suitability for and interest in a given position. The interview should determine the qualifications of the volunteer, their commitment to fulfill the requirements of the position, and should provide the young person with answers to any questions they may have about the volunteer program.

The reference check completes this process by providing previous employment and educational information about the applicant. This check is important for certain volunteer positions where a higher degree of experience, skill or ability is required to perform the duties of the position adequately. Questions should relate to the relevant duties the volunteer is being considered for and whether the reference has any reservations about the volunteer performing these duties.

In addition, criminal record checks are also required for volunteers in certain placements (for example, for those in which the volunteer is working with children).

## Placing and retaining volunteer youth

Although placing young people in volunteer positions with non-profit organization sounds straightforward, there are some very important regulations which should be followed. When placing a volunteer, close attention should be paid to the interests and capabilities of the volunteer and to the requirements of the volunteer position. No placement should be made unless the requirements of both the volunteer and the organization can be met. No volunteer should be placed in a "make-work" type of position and no placement should be given to an unqualified or uninterested volunteer.

In order to ensure that youth volunteers have the information necessary to make a commitment to their volunteer position and carry out their duties in an informed manner, all volunteers should receive a general volunteer position orientation. This orientation should include information on the nature and purpose of your volunteer program and the host agency where applicable, the nature and operation of the activity for which they are recruited, and a specific orientation on the purpose and requirements of the position which they are accepting. Orientation typically includes such information as:

- The history, mission, vision and values of the host agency.
- Its organizational structure.
- Reporting relationships and supervision requirements.
- Volunteer program policies and procedures.
- Health and safety concerns and a volunteer's human rights on the job.

Orientations should be provided by the volunteer coordinator and, where applicable, the direct supervisor at the host agency.

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### *Youth Volunteer Retention*

After volunteers are screened and placed, retaining them becomes important. The volunteer coordinator can promote the satisfaction of youth in the program through several means:

- Valuing the unique role and contributions of youth volunteers.
- Ensuring that all volunteers are interested in and challenged by their work.
- Being creative in making maximum use of each volunteer's time availability (short assignments, flexible hours, team volunteering, leave of absence).
- Recognizing volunteers' accomplishments and contributions.
- Responding to specific volunteer needs (burnout, the demands of extra school work such as exams, travel to and from their volunteer work, time off).

Volunteer coordinators can also provide an effective youth volunteer with letters of recommendations, promotions to more responsible positions, and even awards and recognition receptions.

### *Volunteer Files*

Finally, the volunteer coordinator should keep volunteer files for every placement. The following is a list of information that should be included in each volunteer file:

- Emergency contact information.
- Copies of all completed and signed forms, including the application, the oath of confidentiality (which is taken by the volunteer coordinator to assure that the personal information of the youth volunteers is not revealed to the public), and the volunteer contract.
- A record of training in which the volunteer has participated.
- The service record of the volunteer, including dates of service, placements accepted, positions held, duties performed, and awards received.
- The results of any evaluation process the volunteer has undertaken.
- Copies of all correspondence to the volunteer, from the volunteer and regarding the volunteer.
- Copies of all reference letters written for the volunteers and notes from all verbal references given.

These files should be maintained by the volunteer site for the duration of the time a volunteer is active and retained in storage for five years after the volunteer is no longer placed in the project.

## Evaluating your program

It is important to chart the strengths and weaknesses of your youth volunteer program through the recording of statistics and their comparison to the original goals and targets. It is best to collect them on a regular basis. There are many different variables that should be collected, including but not limited to:

- Number of youth registered with the program.
- Number of youth placed in volunteer positions.
- Total hours of volunteer work hours performed.
- What kind of host agency volunteers are placed with (charity, health organization, environmental group, women's group, etc.).
- Profiles of the volunteers registered and placed (age, gender, ethnicity) in order to increase equity within the program and seek out youth groups who have historically faced discrimination.
- Number of hours the volunteer coordinator has dedicated to outreach and program profile raising.

Yet it is not enough to simply measure the program every month in numbers. We cannot forget that the quality or the volunteer work is just as important, if not more important, than its quantity.

Therefore, every volunteer should receive regular feedback and periodic evaluation of his or her work. The evaluation session is an opportunity for both the volunteer and the organization to examine and improve their relationship.

The position description for the volunteer position should form the basis for the evaluation. A written record should be kept of each evaluation session. The evaluation session will review the performance of the volunteer, suggest any changes in work style, seek suggestions from the volunteer on ways to improve the enjoyment of the experience, convey appreciation to the volunteer, and determine the volunteer's continued interest in serving in that position.

The evaluation should include both an examination of the volunteer's performance of his or her responsibilities and a discussion of any suggestions that the volunteer may have concerning the position. Volunteer evaluations can be performed either by the volunteer coordinator or the direct supervisor, or both, as is appropriate to the volunteer position.

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**(A proper evaluation) allows for constant improvement of the program, but also supports re-investment by facilitating fundraising, public relations, profile-raising and increased communication.**

Additionally, the executive director of the employment centre and the volunteer coordinator (as well as anyone else working on the program) should meet on a regular basis to review statistics, decide on future program endeavors, and discuss ways to improve and expand the volunteer program.

There are other stakeholders who will want to review the evaluation as well. These include program funders (to ensure their resources are being used in accordance to their own values and are helping the program meet its objectives) and host agencies (to ensure their participation is furthering their organizational goals and is beneficial to the volunteer).

Seeking input from all those involved (volunteers, host agencies and the volunteer program personnel) is key to sustaining, and later benefiting from, a proper evaluation. This allows for constant improvement of the program, but also supports re-investment by facilitating fundraising, public relations, profile-raising and increased communication.

## Program procedures and policies

This final segment deals with some of the proper procedures, legalities and policies that youth volunteer programs should consider. Liability insurance, the volunteer coordinator oath of confidentiality, the volunteer and host agency contract, and parental consent forms are just a few of the issues that should be taken very seriously before creating your own youth volunteer program.

Along with this toolkit are information attachments that can be downloaded from the VYM website, located at [www.oayec.org/vym\\_home.html](http://www.oayec.org/vym_home.html), which includes model forms, oaths and contracts as well as helpful internet resources that can provide you with additional information on youth volunteerism.

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## Looking to the Future

One of the great advantages of that Volunteer Youth in the Millennium had in its program were the creative, dynamic and dedicated coordinators who managed the program at each of the ten VYM sites throughout Ontario. They also deserve special thanks for the development of this toolkit.

Over the last three years, the OAYEC network has learned a lot about youth volunteerism from the VYM program, both from its strengths and successes, as well as its weaknesses and some of the struggles faced by the program's coordinators. This toolkit is by no means a final word on developing a successful youth volunteer program, but it does act as a guide to those entering the volunteer management field for the first time. Once again, these proposals must be adapted to the specific kind of volunteerism you wish to bring to your community.

From VYM, we have learned of the benefits of youth volunteerism both for the community and for the youth employment services sector. Your youth employment centre can also benefit from the results of a successful youth volunteer program, which leads to a raising of your profile, stronger links with other organizations in the community, and greater fundraising opportunities.

The needs of young people have changed dramatically over the years. The youth of today want to be participants, not observers, in positively changing their world. Volunteerism is an opportunity for young people to express their creativity and energy and prepare themselves for the world of work.

Now is the time to give them this opportunity.



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