

## Spreading the word of youth volunteering

**Six young people, all active volunteers in their local communities, took part in Rhubarb and Custard, a three-day media training course in August 2006 organised by Youth Action Network.**

The young people, from across the UK, were training to become Youth Ambassadors; meaning that they would be the first port of call if a media organisation wanted a young person to talk about volunteering.

Part of the training was run by three members of Headliners, who travelled to Birmingham to help the Youth Ambassadors learn about journalism and media skills. One of the sessions was about doing interviews, and each young person took part in an interview to talk about their experience of being a volunteer.

**Rashmi** started volunteering with the [Family Planning Association](#) when she was 15. "I was in the youth section" she says. "We used to plan and organise a lot of events regarding sexual health, abuse, HIV, STDs and anything that's related to young people and exploitation."

"After that, when I was doing my A Levels, I did some volunteering with some cancer students, in their own college. I'd sit and play with them because they were going through a very difficult phase in their life. Often they were in chemotherapy and it was really really horrible to look at them and they were really wailing and crying all the time because it was really painful for them."

Rashmi says the best thing about volunteering is when someone says thank-you: "that makes your day and you smile and it gives you the feeling which nothing else would do."

It's something that the other volunteers feel – the best reward is the recognition of what you are doing. **Ted**, a volunteer football coach from Malvern says "even that one thank you card or 'cheers boss', that makes your day. That can set you up for a month."

He got involved because of his passion for football. "I wanted to share the love with the kids," he says, "I really like working with kids, they've got so much energy - it's brilliant. They come up with the best things; you can be talking about something really boring and somebody makes a farting noise and everyone bursts into laughter – it's so much fun."

Now 16, he is the coach for Malvern Town Wanderers. "It's a huge part of my life now. It started off as being just an hour every week and I just helped train the boys and then it went three hours on a Saturday morning and then it's two hours where you are discussing the team, and then you are washing the kit or getting the bibs ready, and then you are planning training sessions and it sort of takes over."

As well as coaching the team, he also was involved in [Youthcomm Radio](#), and through that became the Hit Squad administrator at [South Worcestershire Millennium Volunteers](#).

**Scott**, who got involved in helping some conservation work through Millennium Volunteers, reckons there are lots of reasons why volunteering has helped him. "Being a volunteer for me; that means gaining new skills and meeting loads of people."

Like all the volunteers, he wants other young people to get the positive experience that he has gained. "I think it's important for young people to volunteer because it gets them new skills and it also helps them to learn about different things like conversation as well as making new friends. I haven't looked back on it since."

University student **Hannah** has lots of different volunteering experiences. Currently she is helping to run a drama club at a local primary school and helping people with disabilities learn to ride horses. She organised social events for international students at her university, and once a week goes to a drop-in centre for homeless people and works with young people to help them find accommodation.

Hannah says her faith is important to her volunteering. "I'm a Christian, and I think that has an impact on me in terms of part of being a Christian is just living that out and showing love to other people. That's not to say all Christians volunteer because that's not true, but I really enjoy being with people, meeting new people and one of the best things is when people like you, and when you volunteer people appreciate it and it's so rewarding it makes you want to do it more."

She says: "One thing volunteering does is that it takes you from a place of darkness to a place of light, if you like; whether that's something that you couldn't do before, that looks so daunting but now you can do it, or whether it's in terms of being ignorant of something, say of someone's opinion, and getting to know people by volunteering you get to know a new way of looking at the world. Whether or not you agree with it, you see that other people think differently and I think that is really valuable."

Challenging prejudices and learning about other people in their community is a theme that other volunteers picked up on. **Adam**, who volunteers through Birmingham Millennium Volunteers, says it makes you more flexible and changes your view about some issues. "For example if you are working with disabled people you come to know more about them, and their needs and what they experience and face in everyday life. And if you are working with elderly people you get to know them, and what they are facing, and maybe what you are facing in the future."

He has been involved in a variety of volunteering projects through Millennium Volunteers. "We have different projects to do with young people or we can go out and learn more about the environment or how to keep our cities clean or we could go into old people's homes visiting them."

"I feel I owe much to society – I have to give back a little bit of my time. If everyone can do that it will not only benefit me or the next person but the whole society. "





His friend **Robert**, also volunteers through [Birmingham Millennium Volunteers](#), as well as other projects. "We've been down to Kent for a weekend where we made a playground for children to play in and have fun. We made a bird sanctuary down at Sandwell. Last weekend I went to the NEC to raise money for ChildLine: we collected funds from people."

Robert says volunteering can help with your job prospects: "You can build up your CV because an employer will look at your CV and from that will see what you've done and it'll be an advantage to you to get employed."

He says volunteering can also be a great place to meet new friends and stop you getting bored. "They say an idle mind is the workshop of the devil – so just making yourself busy and volunteering that is very helpful because it helps you to grow intellectually, spiritually and everything."

The overall feeling from the group was that volunteering was a hugely positive experience, and each person really wanted to spread the message to encourage other young people to volunteer.

### About this article

Interviews in this article were carried about by Sonti Ramirez, Tara Brown and Benji Avro-Owiriwa, who also ran the training sessions in Birmingham.

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