**APPG on Charities and Volunteering: Youth in voluntary action**

16.00-18.00, 12 October 2016, Committee Room 20, Houses of Parliament

**Chair:** Baroness Pitkeathley

**Rosalyn Old, young trustee at Girlguiding UK**

- Girlguiding believes Guiding should be girl led; Guides themselves should be in leadership roles and designing projects. Guiding supports girls to grow in confidence and become leaders, challenging them and teaching them the skills that create future leaders. These experiences set girls up to be leaders in all areas of life, as demonstrated by their alumni.

- They updated their governance to ensure a diversity of ages are brought into top level decision making; 3 of their trustees are under 30 and 50% of national council are aged 14-25. Girls are involved in many different ways; influencing the work of the whole organisation. This is meaningful youth participation; working for young women, showing them that they can lead.

- It is important that involvement isn’t tokenistic; trustees of all ages are appointed on skills and experience, and given full training and support. **Young trustees have unique experience to add, and should be listened to more widely across the sector.** They speak out about what matters to them, leading national campaigns that influence the lives of women across the country.

- Only a third of women age 17-21 believe women have the same chance to succeed as men. **Guides are supporting generations of girls and young women to change their community together, and develop themselves at the same time.** Our members show that girls and young women have the power to change the world, every day.

**Matthew Linning, Strategic Performance Manager, Volunteer Scotland**

- Scotland has high youth volunteering rates, but there is a significant decline in adulthood. The rate for adult volunteering in Scotland is 27%. It is 45% at age 11-18, up from 33% in 2009.

- **Reasons for higher youth volunteering rates include incentives and targeted support for young people** through programmes such as the Saltire Awards, Project Scotland and Scotland’s Urban Past. The government’s policy focus on young people volunteering has also been important.

- Age specific push and pull factors must also be recognised. **Young people at school are influenced strongly by parents, teacher and friends.** However, for older pupils there are also important **pull factors driven by self-interest in developing their skills, e.g. for building CV or gaining work experience.** As the age of university/college approaches the proportion of young people volunteering jumps to 72% for those age 16-18 (from 48% for those age 11 – 13).

- Volunteering rates are much lower in deprived areas. Volunteering can be costly, and young people in poverty can have undermined confidence, fear discrimination and lack networks that encourage volunteering. **Providing opportunities to a disadvantaged young person can have a much bigger impact on their life than to someone from an affluent background, and can help them develop life skills that they may not have otherwise had the opportunity to gain.** To improve the life chances of disadvantaged young people, and to enable them to become fully engaged members of society, we need to engage them in volunteering as part of an integrated support package.
Michael Lynas, CEO, NCS Trust

- Young people want opportunities to engage and are volunteering more than any other age group, including the recently retired. Access to volunteering opportunities is traditionally unequal - the well-off volunteer 1/3 more. **It is important we reach those who will benefit most from the programme; the current social mix is representative, but slightly skewed towards the most deprived decile, those on free school meals and the Muslim community.**

- **NCS participants have carried out 8 million volunteering hours in local communities. 16 months later they are still volunteering in greater numbers directly because of NCS.**

- NCS aims to increase social cohesion, mobility and engagement. Groups of young people that wouldn’t normally meet are mixed. **Participants learn skills outside of the classroom that have a large impact on social mobility, increasing their job chances and lowering anxiety. NCS is looking at how to encourage voting, to make social engagement a habit of a lifetime.**

- NCS combines advantages of national and local; **a national standard and support network, locally delivered by organisations with local expertise.** NCS wants to bring organisations along as they grow, to deepen impact, e.g. working with St John Ambulance to teach lifesaving skills to participants, and looking to involve businesses, arts organisations, sports clubs etc. Also looking to grow ‘the journey’ - routes in to NCS through groups like the Guides, and routes out to continue engagement through projects like City Year, giving back to communities instead of gap years.

- The NCS Bill was published today. **It covers NCS governance and accountability, creating the royal charter body and formalising the relationship with parliament.** NCS will have to produce annual reports for parliament and will be audited by the NAO. **The bill allows the Trust to send information about the programme to parents and young people, through HMRC – people need to know about NCS and that they can take part. The bill covers ages up to 25 as a way of future proofing – wouldn’t want to inadvertently rule anyone out if NCS branched out later.**

Keji Okeowo - Participation Consultant and former Leadership and Programmes Manager at the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services

- Programmes like NCS and Girlguiding give young people increased opportunities to expand their horizons and leave their area. Young people are increasingly aware of their strength and power to effect change. They are identifying problems in their areas and finding solutions. Social media allows them to voice their opinions and challenge things that happen to them on a daily basis.

- Government’s commitment to volunteering and social action has affected what funders are now asking for. **We need to consider whether youth volunteering has increased because they have decided to volunteer, or because of changes in funding priorities?**

- **NCS needs to provide stronger acknowledgement and partnership with smaller organisations.** There were reservations about how NCS would be delivered locally, and whether it would mean resources are pulled from great local projects. **To some extent resources have been pulled, but it is welcome that NCS Trust have said they will work to support small organisations.**

- NCS aims to be a rite of passage for young people, but there is a chance we are missing the most marginalised and hard to reach young people. NCS recruits in schools, but what about those out of school, without family support?
All-Party Parliamentary Group on Charities and Volunteering
Youth in voluntary action, 12 October 2016

- Young people living rurally are disengaged because it feels too urban, and they don’t have access. Rural young people may not be able to afford to leave their families if they are needed on the farm. NCS is a 3-4 week programme, there needs to be various models available if it is to have a wider impact on young people.

- If the links with the wider voluntary sector can be developed, and the sector can be resourced to support young people participating pre- and post-NCS, we are more likely to see continued engagement in social action. That won’t happen if local organisations disappear; funders and commissioners need to look at how to support those organisations. NCS graduates see the potential in social action, but they have no way to grow their actions- seed funding needs to be available for them to access.

Audience Q&A

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top - VSO’s International Citizens Service is another great programme- sending young people to volunteer at home and abroad. It is a fantastic programme, and when you experience volunteering when young you aren’t frightened to volunteering later in life.

Gerald Jones MP – There is greater awareness of democracy and civil society in school now, but how do parliament and society encourage volunteering to continue into adulthood?

- Michael Lynas: It depends what is around you at that time in life- you have more competing priorities in your thirties than when at school. We could set up structured programmes at the points volunteering drops off in a lifecycle. Mentoring at work can have a big impact, but it requires a lot of involvement from employers, so any government support is welcome.

- Rosalyn Old: At Girlguides you can attain leadership qualification from 14, setting you up to be a leader for life, we then offer further training opportunities for adults. Adults need volunteer opportunities to be flexible to their circumstance. It is a lot more effective to actually ask someone in person, though social media can be very influential for younger generations.

- Matthew Linning: Publicly funded bodies have the opportunity to provide leadership and demonstrate good practice. They should look at volunteering from the perspective of the volunteer, and should seek to make it as ‘customer friendly’ as possible; make it regular and bitesize, provide an opportunity on their doorstep and they are more likely to do it.

Susan Elan Jones MP: People don’t volunteer because they haven’t been asked- how do we fix that? How do we reach those students who aren’t good in school? The Welsh Baccalaureate also has a civic service aspect, and is being developed by the Welsh Government.

- Keji Okeowo: Currently NCS work with local authorities, which is a good model, as they know of all the young people, not just the engaged ones. But there needs to be better resources and better guidance on involving more kids. Signposting onwards should happen earlier in the volunteering experience, so participants know what next steps they can take, and who they can talk to.

- Michael Lynas: NCS focus most resources on where the most young people are- schools and colleges. People fall between the cracks, so we have other projects to catch them. There is a project providing urban NCS experience to rural kids, so they get to experience a different setting. We are also working with young people in the criminal justice system, as they won’t be able to participate in NCS straight away. Other organisations are able to reach small numbers who benefit disproportionately e.g. carers/care leavers. We also run an activity packed one week programme for those won can’t do a whole month.
Matthew Linning: In Scotland we use co-production to access hard to reach groups: for example, placing volunteering advisors inside the job centre to advise NEETs, and through liaison with the NHS and social services to support those affected by mild mental-health problems. These are high cost interventions though; you can put all your money into a national programme that will reach mainly ABC1s, who would probably have another opportunity to engage anyway, or focus your spend more narrowly on those who wouldn’t otherwise have opportunities.

Julia Stevens, Wildlife Trust: How are we best able to direct these youth volunteers to specific issues that society needs to step up and take action on?

Matthew Linning: We should provide the opportunities that meet the needs of pupils, not what we want them to do. Understand what they need and engage with them.

Charlotte Hill, Step Up to Serve: Starting volunteering young has the biggest impact on making a lifetime habit. Could we use the sugar tax to fund activities as part of a lengthened school day? How do we put volunteering high on the agenda for all, not just those with parents who volunteer?

Keji Okeowo: The sugar tax should definitely be used for enrichment activities, but longer school days could get in the way of families spending time with each other. Activities that allow families to volunteer together should be funded, to reinforce social action from a young age. One thing that is so often lacking is an understanding of the skills young people are gaining when they are active - we need to work to get them, and their families, to understand the potential.

Rosalyn Old: There are lots of opportunities for organisations to partner with schools, hospitals etc., which Girlguides do, though not necessarily as part of the school day. We help social mobility by building confidence and skills, bringing female CEOs in.

Michael Lynas: With automation of jobs, the skills we need now are not the ones jobseekers of the future may need. Schools haven’t caught up with this, and volunteering is a great way to provide the skills they will need. Many parents focus on academic attainment, but extracurricular activities can really develop skills.

Ben Sundell, Battersea Cats and Dogs Home: What mechanism would you use for involving young people in the strategic direction and policy formation of an organisation?

Rosalyn Old: Girlguiding rewrote their governance structure to commit to more youth involvement at the top level. 14-25 year olds make up 50% of the national council, where decisions on policy direction are made. They worked hard to make sure involvement is meaningful and important.

Matthew Linning: 2018 will be the year of young people in Scotland, and the government chose to let young lead the development of the programme. All across Scotland young people were engaged- it worked because the government had the confidence to say to young people “this is about you”.

Jessica Taplin, V Inspire: Employers need to better understand the skills gained from volunteering.

Michael Lynas: People don’t know how to use their experience- they may run a project but have no answer when asked about leadership skills in an interview. Employers would better recognise volunteering if we brought in the International Baccalaureate, which recognises social action.

Keji Okeowo: Young people pick up transferable skills through social action, and we need to ensure they understand that and are able to articulate them. Organisations need to explain to volunteers what opportunities they now have with the skills developed, to be able to translate experience to their life.