Growing your Summer Reading Challenge Volunteering programme: Best Practice Guide

This best practice guide is aimed at library authorities hoping to increase the number of young people (aged 12-24) taking part in Summer Reading Challenge volunteering. It also provides advice on developing quality experiences for volunteers. The guide comprises suggestions from ASCEL members, based on current experience, as well as ideas drawn from proposals made by over 100 library authorities as part of the 2014 Social Action Fund local application process.

The guide is for library authorities who have some initial experience of running a Summer Reading Challenge volunteer programme. If you are setting up youth volunteering for the first time, or would like more background information, please see our guidance handbook Introduction to working with Volunteers on the Reading Agency website for advice.

www.readingagency.org.uk/young-people/resources-for-librarians

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1. Growing your programme – basic principles

1.1 Ensuring staff support

‘This project will enable us to come together through SW ASCEL, to share good practice, ideas and resources, while still retaining the flexibility to operate individually and respond to local needs’ Bath & North East Somerset Council

Recommendations:

- Win the hearts of staff. Make sure you help them see how positive the experience of having volunteers can be. Provide evidence of the difference volunteers make, for example, the impact on staff and participating children, and the benefits for young volunteers themselves. Use evidence including quotes from staff and young people from last year’s Challenge to support your argument. Give staff the opportunity to air concerns and discuss solutions drawn from previous activity locally. A simple advocacy card or flyer can help raise awareness of the benefits among staff, although these are most impactful when they quote staff or volunteers who have had positive experiences, or are shared by staff who can also advocate in person. Getting staff to advocate is the most powerful way of winning hearts and minds, for example at team meetings.

- Roll out training locally. Design your SRC training for young volunteers so it can be delivered in local settings by local staff. You can also use the Reading Agency’s training presentation, available from the website, to up-skill staff locally.

- Share best practice within the authority, or even regionally. This helps ensure a consistent approach, as well as effective sharing of knowledge, with library staff champions cascading learning through training sessions and interactive workshops.

1.2 Recruitment Marketing

‘The challenge for us has been to demonstrate the value of the programme. We know it – and so do children who take part in the SRC – but we need to demonstrate value to secondary schools and teachers. To this end we plan to make a presentation – using film from previous years.’ London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Recommendations:

(i) Recruitment in Libraries
• Put recruitment posters in all libraries
• Make use of press releases, websites and social media
• Tailor the message appropriately whether you are targeting young people themselves or parents
• Visit volunteering fairs, e.g. in Volunteer Week and Student Volunteering Week
• Broaden the age range to work with younger volunteers (12-15 years). However make sure you have the resource in place to support younger volunteers, who may be less confident than older volunteers.
• Run appealing recruitment events (with appropriate refreshments) where young people can find out more about SRC volunteering in an informal atmosphere, and where you can conduct group briefings/ interviews to set up their volunteer placements.
• Make a short power point presentation that can be played on library plasma screens
• Use short films of the young volunteers talking about the benefits of volunteering to feature on library websites, plasma screens and in schools
• In collaboration with young volunteers, develop networking opportunities to enable them to come together and learn from each other.

(ii) **Existing contacts**

‘*Over the last few years, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of students using our libraries so we will be interacting more with them to specifically promote SRC volunteering.*’ **London Borough of Havering**

Recommendations:

• Contact previous volunteers who have indicated they may want to do it again and highlight opportunities when visiting schools or network meetings.

• Keep contacts on file which have been made during the year and contact them if not already working with them

• Encourage all staff to talk to young people who might be interested

• Encourage work experience students to take up further opportunities in the summer

Some library authorities also highlighted the importance of targeting areas of opportunity:
'We will ask libraries to identify a maximum number of volunteers that they can take so we can identify where there are pockets of opportunity to grow. This might also include identifying areas of the county where school participation in the volunteering programme is limited in order to commit some staff resources to visiting these schools and promoting the volunteering opportunity intensively to them.'  Essex County Council

(iii) Recruitment in schools and colleges

Recommendations:

- Send posters to all secondary schools and colleges
- Contact the School Librarian network
- Get to know the names of careers advisors or work experience coordinators or school librarians in schools and work through them
- Post on the schools extranet
- Review participation levels from previous years, making personal contact with schools that are not supporting SRC, or in areas of low engagement. Make them feel part of a special push for this year
- Visit school assemblies – taking last year’s volunteers with you
- Run a staffed promotional stall if your library has the capacity – or run a stall in a targeted manner i.e. for a few hours at an event in a targeted area
- Write directly to secondary head teachers and 6th form colleges, and informing them about the opportunity to volunteer in libraries over the summer
- Work with teachers who are planning the school’s volunteering programme
- Engage one year group firstly, e.g. Year 9, to develop ideas about how to promote SRC to pupils in their feeder schools, and to volunteer in their local library during the summer
- Work with local and regional partners who may have links with schools you haven’t traditionally got into (e.g. via the Cultural Education schools network or via regional Arts Council ‘Bridge’ organisations.)

(iv) Local Partners
‘We are exploring a partnership with Northamptonshire Association Youth Clubs (NAYC) to offer top volunteers a free place on their “Emerging Leaders” course, to underpin and support ongoing volunteering.’ Northamptonshire County Council

Local authorities have a duty to involve young people as part of the government’s policy, Positive for Youth. There may be local strategic priorities for raising the participation of young people, and by feeding in SRC volunteers, you can contribute to these priorities which will support partnership working. For example, West Sussex work in partnership with a local, charitable youth-volunteering agency (West Sussex Outset Youth Action) who provide support for promoting the opportunity to young people, and also accreditation/recognition through rewarding hours volunteered with certificates or reward vouchers. In Essex, the Youth Services offers a local I Will award for young volunteers.

The following partnerships (not exhaustive) are being developed by library authorities to increase their reach:

| Children in care | Duke of Edinburgh Award | Guides and Scouts, possibly tying in with their badge schemes. |
| Home educated networks | Young People’s Well-being Action Group | Community student action groups at universities |
| Young mums in partnership with Sure Start | Sixth Form Colleges | Local Voluntary Development Agency |
| Traveller communities by working with local youth centres | The Challenge Network (National Citizen Service) | Youth Offending Team |
| Council apprenticeships | MyPlace | Urban Futures |
| The Princes Trust | InTo University programmes | Youth Service |
| Education departments of universities (for education) | | |
undergraduates to build a portfolio of practical experience.)

(v) Online and working with your Communications team

‘Our local authority communications and marketing teams will support a recruitment drive through press releases to the local media featuring a call to action to volunteer. Staffordshire Communications and Marketing team will produce a feature on a new site, ‘Let’s Talk Jobs’, a website area on the County Council website that focuses on skills for work, apprenticeships and jobs. Regular e-mails highlighting key new topics with a reminder link to the site are currently sent to 14,000 young people.’ Staffordshire County Council

‘Articles promoting volunteering will also be offered to the corporate communications team for inclusion in newsletters to residents and to Islington’s umbrella organisation for the voluntary sector, Voluntary Action Islington.’ London Borough of Islington

Recommendations:

- Advertise on national volunteering websites. Vinspired and Do It have been successful in generating interest in the past
- Promote volunteering alongside the webpage coverage of the SRC
- Post details on the library Facebook page, via Twitter and on the ‘Do It’ volunteer website
- Send information out to press and local radio outlets

1.3 Selling the message to young volunteers

Recommendations:

- Make sure that you sell the benefits of participating to young people in terms that will be meaningful to them. Develop a clear message to show how SRC volunteering contributes towards students’ development e.g. increasing skills and confidence, or offering customer-focused work experience
- Use quotes/small case studies from other young people
• Consider using a variety of formats to sell your message – e.g. short films, audio clips, advocacy posters
• Think about how to sell the benefits to parents who might encourage their children to volunteer. Be careful not to put young people off in the process though

1.4 Giving volunteers a good experience

Volunteers who have a good experience will want to come back the following year. They will also sell the opportunity to others. This means good training is needed to skill staff in looking after volunteers, making sure that accessibility issues have been considered, and ensuring enough for volunteers to do during their sessions.

Recommendations:

(i) Training

• Provide training to empower young people to be confident advocates of books, reading and libraries
• If you have lots of volunteers, agree a minimum and maximum number for libraries so that young people and staff don’t have a poor experience
• Run extra group induction sessions enabling more volunteers to feel part of a group
• Run different sessions customised for new and returning volunteers
• Organise smaller sessions your in largest libraries – making the sessions more valuable and personal, and enabling staff to focus on needs
• Work closely with your returning volunteers to enable them to develop new skills which add value to their CVs, including opportunities to ‘buddy’ with new volunteers and model best practice

An induction training session might include some of the following:

  o An introduction to the Library Service
  o A guide to the Summer Reading Challenge
  o The ‘summer reading level dip’, transition issues and why libraries run the SRC, and the difference that their input makes to children’s literacy
  o Customer care skills
  o Skills folder to keep throughout the SRC and beyond
  o Workplace skills for the summer placement.
  o Time to look at the SRC resources and materials
You might also consider running an hour’s session at the end of the summer, giving feedback, both verbal and written, as part of an informal session.

(ii) Recognition

Many Summer Reading Challenge volunteers are also keen to gain recognition for their volunteering directly from the library service. This provides significant motivation for participation. Recognition might include:

- ‘Thank you’ certificates
- A focus on personal outcomes for young people
- Letter for their school/college portfolio outlining skills gained/hours contributed
- Celebration events to recognise achievement
- Securing an author visit from a celebrity author as a ‘thank you’ to those who pledge their time.

Celebration events can also be used as sign up events, providing an opportunity for volunteers to pre-register for next year’s Summer Reading Challenge, and to learn about other regular or timed volunteering opportunities in libraries (e.g. World Book Night book giving, supporting baby bounce and rhyme sessions).

Volunteers can also become part of a ‘recruitment team’, extending their volunteering role by becoming actively involved in recruiting volunteers in their current or former schools.

You may find it useful to develop a form for year-round use to promote volunteer opportunities at the point of engagement with young people, and to capture their contact details.

(iii) Ensuring clear roles

‘Well-defined volunteer roles are essential. Reviewing our experience in 2012, we put a lot of thought into this for 2013 and have a SRC volunteer role which, importantly is distinct from a staff role and has ‘stand-alone’ features (e.g. our volunteers were the experts in encouraging children to use the SRC website.). This gave clarity both to volunteers and to staff with everyone knowing what was expected of them. We also have structured interviews for all applicants (these are carried out by all grades of staff, giving
them valuable experience they would not otherwise have). Participating children value the volunteers very highly – as do our staff. Our end of SRC volunteer celebration ceremonies, attended by volunteers and parents are already legendary – and very moving.‘London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Role profiles could include: reading buddies, activity assistants, leadership roles and reading choices advisers. Please see the Reading Agency volunteering handbook (Introduction to Working with Volunteers) and templates for more support in developing volunteer roles. You can also take a look at West Midlands calendar for year round volunteering (see Appendix) for an example of how a library authority is developing SRC volunteering into a youth volunteering offer available all year.

(iv) Rewards and Incentives

Library authorities plan to use the following incentives to encourage and reward participation:

‘We would like to offer small expenses for the young people (covering bus fares/ tea money/refreshments etc.) Although a small gesture we feel this will help the young people feel valued and appreciated for their support of the service.’ Calderdale MBC

1.5 Getting the timing right

Timing can often be problematic. Recruit too soon and young people may forget or change their minds. Recruit too late and there may not be enough time for CRB clearance and training. Libraries that don’t have to do CRB tend to start just after Easter

2. Developing an enhanced volunteer offer for young people

2.1 Accreditation

We are looking to expand our volunteer base by offering the Arts Award as a way of recognising our Volunteers’ achievements.’ South Tyneside MBC

Many authorities will already be linking SRC volunteering with locally run accreditation schemes that young people are already part of. If you aren’t already doing this, it pays to find out which schools/colleges/youth centres/uniformed organisations and other partners are already running accreditation/awards and actively promote them.

Awards that authorities are involved in include:

• Duke of Edinburgh’s Award
• ASDAN Activities Award
• Youth Achievement Award
2.2 Youth-led focus groups

Consulting young people on developing progression routes and developing the volunteer offer is a powerful way of creating a year-round youth friendly offer for your library service. Young people will know what works for other young people, and focus group members will have a chance to express their views, and gain more experience for their CV.

2.3 Leadership Roles

‘We will recruit a volunteer co-ordinator/mentor from the target age group who has previously volunteered for the Summer Reading Challenge. They would go into the target venues and actively recruit volunteers for the scheme. The co-ordinator would also act as a mentor for the volunteers to assist and advise them with their new roles.’ South Tyneside MBC

Developing an enhanced role for volunteers, such as a ‘mentor’ or ‘leader’ role, can help libraries with outreach work and recruiting other young people. They can play a central role in the recruitment, training and retention of new volunteers. By acting as mentors and co-ordinators, they will be able to develop further their confidence, experience and skills. They might also support staff with SRC promotional work at school assemblies in May and activities during Children’s Book Week. Young people who have volunteered before could also be powerful and effective peer motivators, bringing in other young people they know.

2.4 Workshops

Workshops for and with volunteers

Workshops are an opportunity for young people to gain new skills in fun out-of-school activities. Some libraries, such as Stockton libraries, will offer volunteers the opportunity to run workshops with their peers, working with a freelance Creative Practitioner. This will help promote ownership of an event, as well as the opportunity to learn new skills. The volunteers will also benefit from working with professionals, learning new skills and getting experience for planning and delivering their own sessions for the future.

In Calderdale MBC, the training will include an opportunity for young people to work with the children’s librarians and an outside trainer, such as Imagination Gaming, to develop an
additional activity club related to reading and language. This will offer themed activity related to the Reading Challenge, and be mentored by the children’s librarians.

3. Sustainability

‘We will aim to embed our successes into future target setting and strategy mapping, raising the profile of young volunteers across our County Council, the locality and even nationally.’

Northamptonshire County Council

‘In the last 2 years we have seen approximately 50% of young volunteers offering their services in subsequent years.’

Cumbria County Council

Recommendations:

- Higher numbers of volunteers can help sustain an experienced volunteer base, especially for recruiting volunteer champions to do outreach work on the library’s behalf.
- Higher levels of staff involvement at an earlier stage can help embed the model for future years.
- Support young people to set up an Ambassador group in order to sustain young volunteers’ effective involvement with the Library Service. Support staff to streamline processes and ensure best practice is shared to maximise efficiency.
- The use of multiple volunteer profiles can enable existing volunteers to access new roles and new volunteers will have a wider choice for their time with the programme.
- Recognition of volunteer contribution and achievements will make young people feel valued and encourage them to stay involved for longer.
- Evaluation enables the library service to improve the experience for future years. This can include consultation with existing volunteers in order to inform planning.
- Build relationships with the careers/work experience adviser in schools and the young people so that they have a good experience and are motivated to remain involved.
Appendix: ASCEL West Midlands Work on Volunteer Opportunities for Young People, March 2013.

West Midlands’ calendar hooks for year round volunteering is an example of how a library authority is developing SRC volunteering into a youth volunteering offer available all year.

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<th>JANUARY</th>
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<td><strong>National Storytelling Week</strong> – Storytelling Champions: Saturday activity telling stories</td>
<td><strong>Young Volunteers Week (TRA)</strong></td>
<td><strong>World Book Day</strong> – Reading Champions: displays, helping at events, designing publicity, tweets, Facebook</td>
<td><strong>World Book Night</strong> – Reading Champions: 16+ years apply to be book gifters, tweet, Facebook</td>
<td><strong>Adult Learners Week</strong> – IT Champions: how to use IT, including tablets, mobile ‘phones, tweet, Facebook. Assist with activities.</td>
<td><strong>National Bookstart Week</strong> – Early Years Champions: assist with events, support with rhyme times and Tot’s Times</td>
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<td>500 Words Competition – writing workshops</td>
<td>500 Words Competition – writing workshops</td>
<td>Announcement of Carnegie and Greenaway shortlist – Reading Champions: promotion of the shortlist, displays</td>
<td>Promotion of C&amp;G short list – Reading Champions</td>
<td>Compilation of activity sheets/word searches etc for the children.</td>
<td>SRC Champions – planning events, helping with displays, putting packs together</td>
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<td>World Book Night – IT Champions: how to use IT including ipads, mobile ‘phones</td>
<td>SRC Champions – planning events, helping with display material</td>
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