A Volunteer Model of Good Practice

For

Merthyr Tydfil Youth Service

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Contents

Section 1: Introduction

<u>General Overview</u>

This document aims to provide the Youth Service in Merthyr Tydfil with a volunteer model that allows the participation of people with learning disabilities living in the Borough. The Youth Volunteer Corps approach (YVC), originated in the USA[1] and provides the framework for the model. Not only does the approach fit well with the directives, values and aims of the Welsh Assembly Government and the Youth Service in Merthyr Tydfil, but it has the potential to bridge a divide that exists between volunteering services on the one hand, and their accessibility to young people with learning disabilities on the other. Although the YVC model as it exists currently in North America is an accepted model of good practice it is not specifically aimed at people with learning disabilities. The approach in Merthyr will be the first YVC specifically aimed at the inclusion of people with learning disabilities.

In essence the approach aims to develop a corps of volunteers, comprised of typical non-disabled teenagers, and develop these to become supportive and accessible to those with learning disabilities. The approach also has many of the elements that make it a 'model of good practice'. For example, it is already apparent that there is a 'Peer Support' element, bringing together teenagers within the same age groups and increasing the social networks and normative learning experiences of teenagers with a disability. Within Merthyr, the Youth Supported Employment Project Evaluation showed that using similar age non disabled peers to support disabled teenagers from Greenfields Special School to get paid jobs, reduced stigmatization, encouraged peer relationships, and provided a positive role model for the teenagers with disabilities.

The wider Welsh Assembly Government's plans and strategies for youth in Wales are underpinned by a 'strong commitment to social inclusion, consultation and participation'[2] and two recent reviews in Merthyr Tydfil [3][4], aimed at progressing local services for people with learning disabilities in the Borough, identified the need to enable people with learning disabilities to access the same opportunities that exist within the local community, as their non-disabled peers. Set against this backdrop the youth service in Merthyr Tydfil has recently undertaken an extensive review of it's existing provision, and has identified improvement of it's current service offer to people with learning disabilities as one of it's priorities for this year.

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[1] Battey, D et al 1987 www.yvc.org
[2] Extending Entitlement: Making it Real 2004 - Commissioned on behalf of and published by the Welsh Assembly Government
[3] Kilsby, M. Report on the Situation of People with Learning Disabilities and/or Mental Health Problems in Relation to Lifelong Learning Opportunities in Merthyr Tydfil, 2005; Allan, J. Kilsby, M.
[4] Allan, J., Kilsby, M. Review and Recommendations for Modernising Services for those Attending Sandbrook House Day Centre, 2006

The youth service would like to offer a youth service-volunteering programme aimed at supporting young people with learning disabilities to enjoy a more 'enriched and active life'. Whilst the current service offers a myriad of programmes and projects aimed at engaging young people in the locality in a variety of social, leisure and educational pursuits, there is currently no specific intent with regard to the inclusion of young people with disabilities. If the aims of local strategies are combined, then this creates the potential for people with learning disabilities in the Borough, to access local voluntary activities. The youth service has already identified the major advantages that volunteering can play in peoples lives. As the discussion paper on extending entitlements states:

'*Young people also have a right to play in its widest sense. This includes the experiences and opportunities that are so important in their development. Extending Entitlement, together with the Assembly Government's Play Strategy, includes the expectation that all young people will have the opportunities to engage in activities appropriate to their age and maturity which allow them to test boundaries and enable them to explore their potential in a supportive environment.*'[5]

As a result of a recent Youth Service review the aims of the service have been updated and are as follows**:**

1. To support young people's active participation in the development of services

2. To develop employability skills of young people through challenging and stimulating opportunities

3. To increase young people's awareness and ability to make informed decisions on a range of health related issues that affect their lives

4. To increase young people's personal and social skills enabling them to lead productive lives as active and responsible community members within a local and global society

5. To ensure young people have access to information and advice within a supported environment appropriate to young people's needs

6. To ensure that the quality of youth work across the service achieves a desired standard, uses the required method of engagement and meets the needs of the young people, the community and the organization.

This document aims to provide the youth service in Merthyr with a model which will harmonize many of the priorities identified by the local youth service within the context of volunteering. The model intends to provide a framework and a set of procedures that utilise volunteering opportunities for young people with learning disabilities living in

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[5] Extending Entitlement, Working Together to Provide Young People's Entitlements Discussion May – July 2005

Merthyr, promoting the potential for their fuller inclusion in mainstream community activities, and increasing their potential to lead meaningful lives as contributors in our society, rather than, as so often is the case, the recipients of charity, financial assistance and local social services. This makes it a 'Reverse Inclusion approach', the aim being to set up mainstream activities with a specific eye on enabling accessibility for people with learning disabilities.

Section 2: Volunteering and Youth with Learning Disabilities

<u>The Volunteering Approach</u>

One way of developing an approach that fulfils the aims of the Youth Service and those of volunteerism in general, and the aims of local strategies for people with learning disabilities is to describe and then compare the respective approaches. All population groups have a long history of volunteering,[6] even if they use different vocabulary to describe their service to others. Stereotypes about volunteering as white, wealthy women's work may be erroneous, every individual, regardless of gender, race, ability, religion, creed, or background has the potential to be engaged in making a difference about something that matters to him or her. The word volunteering is used for a range of activities such as community services, self-help groups and charity work, these often being focussed around the virtues of neighbourliness, citizenship, public service and community action. To some people it is an act of kindness to others it is a means of achieving a personal goal or putting something back into society.

Many people cite the development of friendships and relationships with like-minded individuals as a benefit and reason for taking up a voluntary role. It is also a way of gaining new skills and improving job prospects. Volunteering comes in a variety of forms, from visiting elderly people, stuffing and delivering envelopes for the Cancer Society, sitting on a magistrates' bench and governing local schools, to performing in a local play, or helping to beautify the local community and supporting those considered to be amongst the most vulnerable members of our society.

According to the Institute for Volunteering Research, the types of volunteer experience can be divided into four basic categories. These are: *Education* for example, giving children support, skills, and services they'll need to become successful students and develop adult roles, or teaching English as a second language; *Public Safety* such as engaging in crime prevention, reducing violence in communities, helping police and providing assistance to victims, being an active member of a neighbourhood watch; *Human Needs* such as helping people live independently, increasing home and community based health care, rebuilding neighbourhoods and helping the homeless; *Environmental,* for example reducing environmental hazards; conserving, restoring and sustaining the natural environment.

A person may choose to volunteer as an individual assisting another person on a one to one basis such as teaching English as a second language to a new immigrant or

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[6] The Institute for Volunteering Research UK

volunteering at a local nursing home. Group volunteering such as helping out at the London Marathon, or removing garbage from an area of countryside working alongside many other volunteers with a group purpose in mind is another popular format. Volunteers offer their service, time and talents freely for the betterment of society. Generally speaking voluntary action occurs in the non-profit sector, it would be most unlikely for instance, that a large commercial conglomerate such as MacDonald's would be seen as a place where volunteers would be likely to be found. Young people or older people preparing for a career change may do work experience in an unpaid capacity in a for-profit business or organization, but these work experience placements would certainly be time limited and time certain, and not be ongoing. This is an important distinction to be made, especially when thinking about and acting on behalf of people with learning disabilities whose time and talents are often not recognized or valued.

It is this variety that presents the potential for volunteering to provide young people with disabilities, with a range of opportunities and experiences beyond those they currently have through segregated school and leisure activities. Parents of teenagers attending special schools, frequently report that their sons and daughters have no social network of same age friends, outside of those they meet at school. The diversity in locations and types of volunteer opportunities as well as the utilization of a peer support model increases the potential for disabled teenagers to meet their non disabled peers in areas of mutual interest to undertake activities that suit their particular abilities, and increase their potential to develop wider social networks and increase their skill base.

Youth who volunteer are more likely to do well in school, graduate, vote, and be philanthropic[7]. Research indicates that many young people, while disliking the term 'volunteering', believe in the value of voluntary work both for society and for themselves.[8] It indicates that volunteering provides young people with a variety of personal benefits. In a recent study by the Institute for Volunteering Research more than 8 in 10 youth volunteers reported gaining such interpersonal skills as 'understanding people better', 'learning to motivate others', and 'learning how to deal with difficult situations.' About three-quarters developed communication skills such as public speaking, writing, conducting meetings, and public relations. Approximately two-thirds increased their knowledge on such matters as health, women's issues, political issues, criminal justice, and the environment, or developed organizational and managerial skills.[9] Moreover, the majority cited an increase in confidence and self-esteem which had a positive impact on all other aspects of the youth volunteers' life.

In this context, the advantages of bringing disabled and non-disabled volunteers together, is that these virtues, skills and attributes are not only learned by both sets of peers, but also extended across to each other. Recent government initiatives have created unprecedented opportunities to expand youth volunteering and make it more attractive to young people. **"Extending Entitlement"** [10] is the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship

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[7] UCLA/Higher Education Research Institute, 1991
[8] Institute for Volunteering Research UK
[9] Government of Ontario Youth Volunteering Millennium Project 2005- Canada
[10] Extending Entitlement – Making it Real, Welsh Assembly Government, 2004

policy for youth support services in Wales. It includes all services, support and opportunities for young people between 11 and 25, "wherever they happen, whoever is delivering them and wherever the funding originates." It sets out to make a significant difference to young people's lives, recognizing all the services and support, which might contribute to their development, and all the experiences and opportunities that have the potential to enrich their lives and their learning.[11] They list 10 Entitlements as follows:

1. Knowing your rights;
2. Being heard;
3. Feeling good;
4. Education and employment;
5. Taking part/getting involved;
6. Being individual;
7. Easy access;
8. Health and well-being;
9. Access to information and guidance;
10. Safety and security.

In order to extend these entitlements guidance and direction was provided to Local Authorities on the procedures for providing support across Wales. The main objectives of this are to unify and strengthen policy and practice for young people in Wales to create a "more positive focus on achievement and what young people have to contribute"; A "stronger focus on building the young person's capacity to become independent, make choices and participate in the democratic process;" and "improvements in the quality and responsiveness of the services available to young people;" and that the young people's involvement in all of these is seen as key.[12]

Section 3: Volunteering and People With Learning Disabilities

Although most voluntary organisations have no specific policy for enabling people with learning disabilities to access volunteering schemes, most would agree this is a desirable outcome (if not a human right), that these people should have access to the advantages provided through volunteering. These include: the development of new friendships and relationships with like minded individuals from varied backgrounds; the increased potential for career development; increased awareness of civic responsibilities; and simply feeling good about being a contributor to society.

Traditionally, people with learning disabilities have been pushed onto the fringes of our communities, congregated together in segregated locations such as our day centres and excluded from integrated community activities. As mentioned in Section 1, Welsh Office guidance and local reviews are specific around the aims for these individuals including increased social inclusion and the provision of greater access to mainstream learning, employment and leisure activities. It is apparent that these aims can potentially be addressed by the significant advantages of volunteering.

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[11] Extending Entitlement, Working Together to Provide Young People's Entitlements Discussion May – July 2005

[12] Welsh Assembly Government 2000: 22.

An approach that seeks to do this also has the potential to increase the diversity of day alternatives open to young people with learning disabilities. Transition policy for this client group begins at age 14 inline with the National Services Children's Framework[13] by identifying the potential need for social service support, and potentially the support that will be required from adult day services. At age 16/17 a review takes place to determine the best service for the client on leaving school and the responsibility for planning future care lies with Social Services Care Managers. The plans generated are fed into the care procedures. However, the options available to school leavers are more often restricted to attending segregated college courses or those activities taking place within local ATCs. Research has indicated that the lack of options effectively undermines transition planning for this group, as the aspirations of those leaving school are restricted to the limited options available[14]. This is not only disheartening for those entering adult day service provision, it also acts as a powerful disincentive for teachers, parents and carers, in developing long term transition plans based upon individualism and personal choices and a variety of community based activities. Clearly, any volunteering activities introduced into the transition stage for this group would be of immense benefit, both in terms of increasing individual choice and experience and in achieving the aims of Extending Entitlement Policy.

Models of Good Practice
Although there are models of good practice for volunteering organisations, there are as yet few examples of this that links volunteering and people with learning disabilities. However there are good practice indicators that suggest a way forward when developing the approach in Merthyr. These were summarised in the Life Long Learning Review in Merthyr and are reflected in The 'Meaningful Day' approach that has recently been adopted in Merthyr to improve the life quality of those with severe learning disabilities. These comprised of the use of strong values system based on the principles underlying 'Social Role Valorisation',[15] the use of 'Reverse Inclusion'[16] and 'Peer support'[17] methods and the utilisation of Natural Supports, rather than service staff support.[18] The review also highlighted the use of 'Community Tasters' to increase individual experience and choice, and 'Person Centred Planning' approaches as a means for identifying and developing services that match each person's choices and support needs. A good model of volunteering, we believe, can fulfil many of the criteria set by these approaches.

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[13] National Service Framework for children, young people and maternity services (2004)
http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/ChildrenServices/
[14] Heslop, P., Mellot, R., Simons, K and Ward, L. (2001) Bridging the Divide: The experiences of Young People with Learning Disabilities and their Families at Transition. University of Bristol: Norah Fry Research Centre.
[15] Life long Learning Review
[16] Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act, Section 4512 of the Welfare and Institution Code, Part (e):

[17] Julie Allan (1996) IASSID
[18]

'Social Role Valorisation' employs the use of a 'Culturally Valued Analogue' (CVA). This is a representation of something that *most* ordinary valued citizens would *value.* [19] When applied to volunteering with people with learning disabilities in mind, then the model needs to reflect the activities and locations that are typically undertaken by non-disabled volunteers, as opposed to taking place in congregated and segregated sites. [20] This clearly challenges the traditional perception and stereotype that people with learning disabilities are receivers of voluntary services, rather than providers. As stated in Section 1, in the Reverse Inclusion approach services are established for mainstream users with an agenda in place to enable and fully include people with learning disabilities from the outset. One advantage this has is to keep the proportion of people with learning disabilities participating in a project proportional to the general population; this avoids problems associated with clustering people with disabilities together as in the enclaves approach.[21] For example where a day centre develops sports and leisure and/or cafeteria facilities that are offered for use to members of the local community in reverse inclusion practice, a new sports and leisure facility meant to benefit the mainstream community would include advocates for and the agendas of people with disabilities so that any new build would automatically feature aspects which make it accessible. This reverse inclusion approach lends itself well to voluntary activities because they are set-up and exist within local mainstream networks and organisations.

With the current aims within Merthyr to extend these opportunities to include people with learning disabilities in these activities, then there is potential to set-up a volunteer core, for mainstream participants, but especially tailored to support disabled people to volunteer, rather than create or develop a volunteering scheme in which once again people with learning disabilities are recipients of youth voluntary action. Developing a volunteer model through reverse inclusion provides an opportunity for young disabled people, who usually segregated from their communities, to gain invaluable experience of typical community activities. One of the biggest problems facing young people with learning disabilities is having adequate experience on which to base their choices. For example, in order to exercise control in selecting a career, people need to be aware of what is available to them in the job market and what these jobs entail, and be aware of their own abilities and limitations in fulfilling the demands of these jobs. It also implies that people will have a set of career aspirations and will apply a strategy for achieving these aims. However, the segregation of people with disabilities has hindered this goal, undermining their potential to make decisions about their careers based on their experiences and expectations and seriously undermining their potential to select jobs in a psychologically empowered and self-realising manner[22]. The lack of exposure to experiential learning opportunities through congregate and segregated service provision has left people with learning disabilities at a distinct disadvantage. In short, a person is not able to make a choice to go to work in a factory if they do not realise that such a job

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[19] Wolfensburger, W., Nirje, B., et al (1972) The Principle of Normalization in Human Services

[20] Wolfensburger, W., Nirje, B., et al (1972) The Principle of Normalization in Human Services

[21]

[22] Wehmeyer, M.L., Kelchner, K. & Richards, S. (1995). Essential characteristics of self-determined behaviour of individuals with mental retardation. American Journal on Mental Retardation, 100, 632-642.

exists, or, if they had never seen the inside of a factory. The same principles apply to choices around educational courses, as well as leisure and recreational activities.

Person centred planning has a battery of methods including the use of Circles of Support[23], MAP and Path[24] and other methods to enable individuals to make self determined choices.[25] If the person centred plans that are generated can be translated into day service practice, then this leads not only to a more diverse experience for the users it also increases the potential for a seamless transition approach where individual choices have real and tangible outcomes. More recently WAG initiatives have made funding and guidance available to apply PCP approaches. [26] Clearly, it is important to ensure that close attention is paid at enabling the experiences of volunteering to filter into any Person Centred Plans that are being developed for the disabled youngsters.

Section 4: The Youth Volunteer Corps (YVC) Model
The suggested model of delivering inclusive volunteer opportunities to youth offers many linkages with the various National, regional and local initiatives, including extending the ten entitlements, enhancing and expanding learning pathways for the 14 to 19 groups as well as opportunity for international links and exchanges and utilise the models of good practice discussed in the previous Section. Through the engagement of young people in a variety of fun, co-operative, community based and enhancing learning opportunities, they may develop skills, habits and responsibilities which form the basis of citizenship and all the responsibilities and benefits that derive from, what for many, provides their first context for lifelong learning and career routes. The approach fits well into the broader policy guidelines aimed at developing transition strategies for both the disabled and non-disabled peers, through the learning of new skills and the development of long and short term career aspirations. The current political emphasis on the disaffection of young people and the potential role of voluntary work in promoting training for employment and citizenship has placed youth volunteering high on the policy agenda[27]

First launched in 1987, the Youth Volunteer Corps (YVC) model developed by David Battey[28] has been established in numerous communities across the US and Canada in partnership with community-based organizations, school districts, and municipalities. Funding is provided through Foundations, lotteries, corporations, individuals, and various Government funding mechanisms. More than 40 YVC programmes are operating in 22 Provinces and States in Canada and the USA. If Merthyr Tydfil Youth Service adopts this model it would establish the first YVC in the UK, and become one of the first volunteer organisations with an affirmative action plan to include young people with learning disabilities in a team based volunteering model. Furthermore, establishing links with the

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[23] O'Brien, C; O'Brien, J and Mount, B (1997) Person-centred planning has arrived ... or has it? Mental Retardation, 35, 6, December.

[24] O'Brien,J & Pearpoint J. (2006) Person-Centered Planning with MAPS and PATH, Inclusion Press http://www.inclusion.com/inclusionpress.html

[25] Wehmeyer, M.L., Kelchner, K. & Richards, S. (1995). Essential characteristics of self-determined behaviour of individuals with mental retardation. American Journal on Mental Retardation, 100, 632-642.

[26] Welsh Office - ?

[27] Institute for Volunteering Research – Bulletin/What young people want from volunteering -2007

[28]

US and Canadian YVC affiliates would afford opportunities for summer youth exchanges between the countries, which the YVC directors in the US are eager to pursue.

<u>Basic Components</u>
The strategy is set solidly in the values based ethos adopted by the locality, embedded in SRV principles and will provide opportunities for more of the localities young citizenry to learn about and develop the same ethos at a highly age appropriate time in their development. This has management and set-up implications with the strategies adopted being geared towards 'typical' outcomes for the disabled volunteers in line with the Culturally Valued Analogue for volunteering. This means that typical volunteer opportunities alongside typical peer volunteers will occur in typical volunteering placements. This has implications for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the approach: If voluntary placements occur in enclaves, or in segregated or congregated teams, then they fail to meet the standards and success criteria set for the approach.

The approach has a number of fundamental components that are presented below. These include a summer and school year component with different activities associated with each, and some principles surrounding the management, set-up and delivery of the project. The target group are young people with and without a learning disability with a suggested age range of 11 to 21 years. This fits within the Merthyr Tydfil 14-19 pathways initiative. The fundamental aim of the approach is to set up mainstream volunteering teams (corps) with a specific remit of including young people with learning disabilities. The peer support aspect of the approach encourages peer support across the team. For example, it is possible that a 21 year old provides support to a younger teammate, but it is also possible that those supporting each other could be same age peers.

<u>Summer and School Year Components</u>
Volunteering through the model is continuous and has summer and school year components.

- **Summer Component:** In the summer, young people volunteer on teams supervised by trained team leaders, who are generally of college age. Volunteers work on their projects full time Monday through Friday for two or four weeks at a time. It is hoped that the intensive design of the summer component reinforces teamwork skills, appreciation for diversity and civic responsibility.

- **School Year Component:** During the school year, YVC Programme Directors and staff work closely with teachers to design and implement age-appropriate service projects that tie school curriculum to community service. In addition, young people from throughout the community work together on service projects after school, on weekends and during school breaks.

Summer Youth Volunteers generally work in six- to nine-member teams, from approximately 9 am - 3 pm, Monday through Friday, for the duration of their 2 to 4 week project. The intensive nature of this design allows volunteers to concentrate on their chosen project, learning about the social issue addressed and the role they can play in serving their community. The extended period over the summer also allows time for the

volunteers to try out a number of voluntary activities, giving them greater opportunities to develop and build upon their personal interests and aspirations. In The USA this has been shown to increase ownership and team group cohesion. The School Year component provides opportunity for student volunteers to link their experiences in volunteering with the academic curriculum at school or college. Setting the YVC programme up in this way over an extended period has positive resource implications, reducing the set0up costs associated with setting up multiple short term projects (eg, transport, recruitment and basic operating costs).

YVC Co-ordination and Management.
Within Merthyr, the project has the potential and flexibility to be embedded in the local Youth Service, with Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil (VAMT) or a combination of both in co-operation with local schools. The YVC recommend creating an 'Advisory Council'. This should comprise a representative cross-section of the community e.g., representatives from voluntary services employment and educational organisations, local government officials, self-advocates, those receiving or delivering local voluntary schemes, and parents/carers. Some YVCs mix the Advisory Councils with youth and adults, others develop separate adult and youth advisory councils.

The YVC model employs a project Co-ordinator (referred to as Programme Director in the North American projects). The role of the Co-ordinator is to develop an organizational plan, manage the budget, inform community leaders, liaise with local schools and colleges around school vacation dates, develop a newsletter, set up and deliver orientation training to the recruited corps, recruit and supervise team-leaders and youth volunteers, and to establish volunteering sites within the locality. Other responsibilities include reporting progress to the steering group, promoting the project within the local community, and establishing and running an advisory council. It is strongly recommended that the programme hire a full time co-ordinator to establish and oversee the programme.

Another important aspect of the YVC model is youth leadership development through regular meetings where young people are encouraged to identify and choose the volunteering sites; these sites are regularly updated by the young people at the meetings. The youth themselves (along with the team leaders and programme co-ordinator) decide which sites they wish to continue with. This is important since young people will typically choose volunteering at sites that offer opportunities for enjoyment, which increases motivation. Section 4 provides more detail about the role of the co-ordinator presented in the context of timelines.

The Role of the Team-leaders
A trained Team-leader who serves as the liaison between the Program Director and the volunteering site leads each group of volunteers. The co-coordinators recruit the Team-leaders. Team-leaders generally are usually college age (19-23 years old) who are either paid or youth service practicum students from the college/university. They are responsible for the attendance, motivation and development of the volunteers in their groups. Team-leaders should be carefully screened and selected on the basis of their

ability to serve as role models and supervise a diverse group of young people. The Team-leaders act as the primary point of contact for the teams, the volunteer site and a source of feedback to the co-ordinator. Over time it becomes possible to recruit Team-leaders from the volunteer cohort, providing a leadership pathway.

Establishing Project Sites

While Merthyr Tydfil has one of the highest poverty rates in Wales,[29] it also boasts a variety of local community non-profit organizations, which the project could develop partnerships with to provide a variety of opportunities for volunteering activities. For instance the already established portfolio of sites within VAMT, the Borough's own recreation, leisure and community environmental beautification activities, and other potential partners such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the British Lung Association, the Three G's community Project, Merthyr Tydfil Institute for the Blind (MITB), and any number of local non profit human service facilities for both young and old. The projects should be of varying length to suit both the summer and school term components and should include both human e.g. care and physical service e.g. working on a locally sponsored restoration of the Canal.

The establishment of sites geared towards assisting people with learning disabilities would be inappropriate because this may result in enclaves of supported disabled people (which goes against the CVA) and perpetuates the perception of people with learning disabilities as receivers of voluntary action rather than, as this project endorses, equal providers of it and will have a negative impact on the sites potential for social integration.

Recruitment of Volunteer Corps

Overall responsibility for recruitment lies with the co-ordinator. Each YVC team consists of between 6 to 12 male and female volunteers with ages ranging from 11 to 21 years. It should be ensured that the diversity of recruits reflects the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the local community. Within Merthyr this could include (but not restricted to) different language groups (eg; Welsh and English speakers and other prevalent languages) with differing abilities (eg; people with Learning, Physical or Sensory impairments) from diverse socio-economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds. In line with reverse inclusion approach the authors strongly recommend that each team includes no more than one young person with a learning disability in each team in order to maximise opportunities for peer support and social integration and perhaps even friendships through natural means. The approach is flexible enough to be adapted for the affirmative development of other initiatives such as, for instance, the development of a team based specifically around promoting the Welsh language through immersion based volunteer opportunities. The team could be comprised of several youth who have Welsh language skills but the majority of the team would be made up of young people who wish to develop or practice Welsh language skills. The non-profit sites would necessarily need to be purely Welsh language speaking in order to deliver the language immersion aspect.

Recruitment is a year round activity utilising different approaches including contact with local schools, colleges, youth services, civic and religious organisations. Recruitment of

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[29] National Assembly for Wales, 2005, http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubstatisticsforwales/

those with learning disabilities requires contact with schools, colleges offering specialised provision (e.g.; Greenfields and Merthyr College), Local Day Centres (e.g.; Sandbrook and Comfort House). Although it is not recommended to gear sites towards assisting people with learning disabilities, local initiatives such as the Youth Supported Employment Project are also possible recruitment areas for both typical and disabled teenagers. Just as the recruitment procedures allow for non-disabled recruits of differing abilities to volunteer, so the recruitment policies surrounding people with learning disabilities need to ensure that opportunities are provided to those with a range of support requirements. This includes those who have mild, moderate and severe learning disabilities.

Clearly, the number of recruits with learning disabilities will be restricted by the number of YVC teams operating in the Borough. The number of teams depends upon recruitment levels and the availability of Team-leaders. If 24 volunteers are recruited, then this holds the potential to deliver 4 teams of 6, or, 2 teams of 12 depending on the project, therefore supporting 4 and 2 people with learning disabilities respectively. The number of teams reported to be operating in the US and Canadian projects vary considerably depending on the financial resources allocated to the projects. Currently there are eleven wards within the Borough Of Merthyr Tydfil and the number of co-ordinators, Team-leaders and, therefore, teams within each Ward will depend upon the resources allocated and the flexibility of current youth services (both financial and human) to accommodate the approach.

Engaging YVC Recruits
An important aspect of the model is the opportunity for young people to take an active role in identifying community needs. Youth within the programme have a voice in programme management and governance charting the course for expansion and enhancement of the programme model. By involving youth in the project design and site selection process, programmes enhance their learning component by exposing youth to a spectrum of social and community concerns and enable them to volunteer in areas that match their interests. YVC's engage youth through Youth Advisory Councils (YACs) comprised of youth volunteers and some team leaders to suggest, investigate, discuss and decide which volunteer sites will be chosen. Young people with particular interests and hobbies may introduce volunteer suggestions that ordinarily may not be considered. The YAC also affords opportunities to volunteers for appointments to leadership positions, spokesperson roles, features in local publications, participation in conferences and other forms of recognition which all reinforce youth initiative. Another integral part of the model is reflection activities designed to involve youth in a close examination of their service experience. It is even possible that the young people may influence the development of projects which somehow enhance the community, for example a YVC affiliate organization in the US suggested a series of murals would enhance and beautify their community. They presented the idea to the town council who adopted the idea, paid for supplies and along with other members of the community and the YVC set about enhancing their town with a series of historically based murals. Other youth based influences have seen the development of recycling schemes and other environmentally focused initiatives.

Linking to Existing Awards/Certification

As well as links to local community projects the programme has the potential to link into local award systems. The potential and importance of non-formal and informal learning is recognised widely, not least in the 14-19 Learning Pathways agenda. Opportunities for learning within the context of voluntary action are many and varied. They can be obvious (e.g.; formal learning routes) or discreet (e.g., non formalized), informal (e.g.; occurring during play and leisure activities), and through experiential learning (e.g., learning in the practical setting).

The model offers great potential for the delivery of personal support for learners and non-formal qualifications as part of flexible learning pathways in meeting individual learners' needs. Therefore it is imperative that the learning and skill development the young people gain from their voluntary action should be recognised and translated into award schemes and qualifications as often as possible. Therefore the team-leaders and co-ordinator of the YVC need to be well versed in all awarding and qualification schemes locally, regionally and nationally, and that each young person develops a learning 'portfolio' for his/herself. Awarding schemes could include (but are not limited to) the Duke of Edinburgh Award, SKILLS, National Vocational Qualifications and Welsh Baccalaureates.

The youth service can assist young people in identifying opportunities for learning pathways and subsequent qualifications and awards based on their volunteering experiences. So, for instance, if a young person volunteers frequently in elder care facilities with the YVC programme, s/he have many opportunities to attain social care qualifications or elements of it based upon their volunteer activities. These qualifications, therefore, have the potential to be transferable to accredited college and university programmes and courses. This potential to tap into elements of a learning programme provides opportunities for young people, including those with learning disabilities, who are not academically oriented, to gain accreditation towards qualifications.

Team Training

The programme Co-ordinator should receive training from the host agency (e.g., the Youth Service, or, VAMT) relating to the principles, ethics, values and service systems that they operate. In addition, YVC provides programme specific training that will be made available to the host agency. Where required these materials may need to be adapted to take into account variations in local culture. Also, since the locality has adopted the 'Meaningful Day' approach for people with learning disabilities, all new staff should receive the values based training that this entails. The project Co-ordinator provides core training to the Team-leaders based on the YVC materials made available. In addition the Team-leaders will receive any specific training from the volunteer site (eg, health and safety regulations and/or the practical skills required to undertake the voluntary activities). A police record check and child welfare check are conducted for all Team-leaders and the co-ordinator(s). Additionally, some basic training or orientation to supporting people with disabilities may be required for the volunteer teams. Informal

discussions around values principles may be utilised to help youth consider how to support the young people who have disabilities on their teams.

Establish Transatlantic Links

Although the model could be adopted without any affiliation with the YVC programmes in North America, there are a number of obvious advantages in developing these links. Benefits of partnership include:

1) One of the primary benefits would be access to the numerous affiliates (and projects) throughout North America, the opportunity to learn from their experiences and exchanging ideas. This would include access to all YVC materials, including manuals, policy/procedures, job descriptions, hiring guidelines, blank documents, and brochures. Although these would have to be adapted for the UK, they would provide a valuable guideline for any new programme setting up. Other benefits of membership include access to and connection with other YVCs and their co-ordinators, and executives of YVCA who are keen to see Merthyr establish the first YVC in the UK.

2) Affiliation would also provide opportunities for cultural exchanges of youth between programmes, cities and countries. The statutory youth service has an excellent and strong history in the international context via international youth work development, exchanges and many other methods of working. The service also contributes to the important Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) agenda.[30] In their response to the National Youth Strategy for Wales the Welsh Local Government Association wrote that

> *"The strategy needs to reflect this international dimension and the role the youth service plays in developing individuals' understanding of the (increasingly important) international context and the relevance between themselves as individuals, their local community, the national and international context, as reflected (for example) in the Welsh Baccalaureate."[31]*

Youth volunteers are also encouraged to participate in YVC's annual International conference. Having this kind of association with other groups in other parts of the world would prove beneficial and motivating to all the young people involved on both sides of the Atlantic. A further benefit, therefore, includes the opportunity for volunteer exchanges and invitations to and help with billeting at the yearly YVCA conference.

Potential Cost Implications

The most significant expense for local programmes is the full-time Co-ordinator. Additional major budget items may include paid college-age Team-leaders, transportation

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[31] Young People: Youth Work: The Youth Service – Towards a National Youth Service Strategy for Wales Welsh Local Government Association – January 2007

and meals, costs associated with establishing an office base and satellites. Also, there are costs associated with YVC affiliation costs (e.g., approximately £200 per year membership fee). The approach should produce a number of positive cost implications. Research has shown the human and financial cost advantages of investing in strategies that encourage participation in mainstream activities for people with learning disabilities at an early age. This can create life-changing experiences, leading them away from the traditional congregated activities that still shape the majority of local services,, towards full community participation and inclusion. The advantages of increased social integration, self-confidence and experience in volunteer roles, can lead not only to a decrease in the extent that the disabled participants are dependent on local health and social services throughout their lives, but also an increased potential for the clients to develop and shape their future aspirations and engage in mainstream career, educational and leisure activities.

Section 4: Set-up Schedule and Timetable of Yearly Activities

This section provides a suggested schedule for setting up and running the programme. Clearly, the time taken for set up will depend upon the infrastructure that is currently in place within the Borough. An interim Advisory Council could be established to look at steering the initial set-up phase of the project. This could comprise the following: a representative from the Youth Service, VAMT, and the host service (if not the aforementioned); a junior and senior youth service worker; representatives from local non profit service agencies (e.g. the volunteer co-ordinators); a young person with a learning disability; two non disabled young people; a parent/carer; a representative from the Learning Disabilities sector; as well as the appropriate funding and management functionaries needed to move the project along.

If the programme is to be developed in Merthyr decisions first need to be made about whether the locality wishes to pursue a partnership with YVCA (Youth Volunteer Corps of America) to establish and develop international links as mentioned in the previous Section. If so, the YVCA materials as well as YVCA personnel would be available for assistance with set-up schedules and advice. Alternatively the materials could be developed within the Borough based on the YVC approach. A further task is to decide on the 'host' agency for the programme, i.e. whether it would be housed within VAMT, the Youth Service, a partnership between the two or, another Merthyr based service.

At this time a co-ordinator needs to be hired and inducted in both the host service and the YVC programme. Once hired, the co-ordinator can set about establishing relationships with schools (if possible given the time of year), the college, youth groups, as well as community and religious groups or associations in order to reach potential volunteers and establish contact. Decisions also need to be made about housing the project: the host agency may be able to offer a base. Other decisions need to be made about satellite projects covering the Borough and where they will be housed. If the youth service adopts the programme, it can potentially offer space and administration support in each of the Wards if necessary. The co-ordinator can also set about establishing links with potential Team-leaders either through the Youth Service or through the local College or University Youth Worker programmes. The co-ordinator in conjunction with the Youth Service

could establish focus groups with young people currently attending youth clubs and other youth service groups to begin to disseminate information about the programme and to begin determining youth interest areas for voluntary activity and establishing sites.

The Timetable below provides a suggested (and by no means exhaustive) rolling yearly cycle of programme co-ordinator activities, beginning in October to allow the initial set up period.

Suggested Timetable of Programme Activities

October	• (Early in the month) Conduct Team-leader training (school-year component)
	• (Early in the month) Hold youth volunteer orientation
	• Initiate school year projects, visit sites and agencies
	• Call schools and colleges for summer vacation dates
	• Set Dates for Summer Programme
	• Contact Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme
	• Conduct site visits
	• Make presentations to schools
	• Conduct orientations with evaluation feedback from participants
	• Continue team-leader selection process
	• Enlist help of youth volunteers in recruiting other youth volunteers (YV's)
	• Recruiting YV's continues
	• Continue team-leader selection process
November	• Start making contact for Team-leader recruitment (summer component)
	• Advertise for Team-leader positions for summer
	• Continue site visits Invite funders, advisory council members, media and other VIP's to visit projects
	• Team-leader training
	• Begin organizing Christmas celebration
December	• Begin to develop presentation and informational materials
	• Site visits
	• Recruiting YV's continues
	• Develop newsletter for school year component
	• Continue developing sites
	• Christmas celebration
January	• Send summer agency project proposals to non-profits
	• Begin interviewing and selecting Team-leaders
	• Begin arranging summer transportation
	• Print summer youth recruitment materials
	• Continue Team-leader interview and selection process

February	• Host informational meeting(s) for agencies interested in hosting summer teams • Develop summer recruitment plan • Disseminate summer recruitment information to youth groups, churches, mosques, libraries, schools etc. • Contact schools to schedule classroom presentations • Begin finalizing summer transportation plans
March	• Convene Youth Council to review and select summer projects; make necessary site visits and confirm projects • Enlist help of youth volunteers in recruiting other youth volunteers (YV's) • Finalize the recruiting schedule at schools • Continue team-leader selection process • Continue site visits • Conduct regular Team-leader meetings
April	• Begin summer recruitment including recruiting in classrooms • Send summer registration materials to existing YV's • Secure local television, radio and newspaper time for YVC public service announcements • Make initial plans for Team-leader training • (Late in the month) conduct summer info and sign-up sessions for YV's and parent/carers • Finalize Team-leader selections; send confirmation letter and information to Team-leaders • Develop a YVC fact sheet or school year newsletter of YV's volunteer hours, schools, agencies helped, etc.
May	• Establish project and send confirmation/regret letters to YV's as appropriate • Continue recruiting of YV's as necessary through May, June and the summer • Finalize Team-leader training • Plan youth volunteer orientation • (Late in the month) Finalize transportation • Send out press release (three weeks in advance)
June	• (Early in the month) Conduct Team-leader training • (Early in the month) Hold youth volunteer orientation • Have youth attendees and Team-leaders evaluate orientation • Invite funders, advisory council members, media and other VIP's to visit projects • Conduct social event for first volunteer orientation session • Make any additional transportation arrangements and finalize

	• Notify agencies when Team-leaders will be visiting • Follow-up with media for coverage • Develop winter recruitment plan • Host informational meeting(s) for agencies interested in hosting school year teams
July	• Continue with orientation and get evaluations for participants • Conduct regular Team-Leader meetings • Make regular site visits • Plan recognition event for summer volunteers, Team-leaders, agency staff, funders, parent/carers, teachers, youth workers etc. • Begin making contacts and plans for school year component • Start making contacts for school year Team-leader recruitment • Advertise for school year Team-leader positions and speak with current cohort about applying • Send school year agency project proposals to non-profits • Begin interviewing and selecting Team-leaders • Begin arranging school year transportation • Print summer youth recruitment materials • (late in the month) Advertise for Team-leader positions for summer
August	• Send letter of recommendation to all deserving YV's • Mail recognition event invites • (Late in the month) Hold recognition event (this could also be in early September) • Develop a YVC fact sheet or summer newsletter of YV's volunteer hours, schools, agencies helped, etc. (include this info in press release) • Establish school year project Continue recruiting of YV's as necessary through May, June and the summer • Finalize Team-leader training for school year component • Plan youth volunteer orientation (winter component) • Send out press release (three weeks in advance) • Begin interviewing and selecting Team-leaders for school year component) • Send school year registration materials to existing YV's • Start making contact for Team-leader recruitment • Begin interviewing and selecting Team-leaders for school year component •
September	• Send Head teachers, teachers and school a list of YV's

	from their school with YVC fact sheet • Begin organizing a Youth Council to meet during the school year (with nominations from summer Team-leaders and team members • Begin summer recruitment including recruiting in classrooms • Send confirmation/regret letters to school component YV's as appropriate and continue to recruit through the winter months • Make contact with schools, teachers etc • Begin planning school component celebration event • Convene Youth Council to review and select school year projects; make necessary site visits and confirm projects • (Late in the month) Finalize transportation –school year component

Section 5: Project Aims

Although the timetable of Activities provides guidance around setting up and running the project, it does not provide the specific aims against which to monitor the progress of the programme. The Youth Service has set its own objectives reflecting the Ten Entitlements. These are ensuring active participation, developing employability, increasing potential for informed decision-making, the development of greater personal and social skills, making information accessible, and ensuring the quality of the activities undertaken. Aim 1, therefore, should reflect these objectives.

Aim 1 – To develop a programme of volunteering activities that reflect the criteria developed from the Ten Entitlements.

One main objective will be to establish a programme that compliments the aims and procedures of local Youth Volunteering initiatives, and meets the local priorities set out for people with learning disabilities in Merthyr Tydfil on the other. It is suggested that the YVC approach has the potential to fulfil many of these key strategy aims.

Aim 2 – To establish within Merthyr Tydfil the first Youth Volunteer Corps that specifically relates to people with learning disabilities.

In developing the model it is important to build upon the existing local volunteer infrastructure. It is also important to develop an approach that capitalizes on reverse inclusion and redresses the imbalance of people with learning disabilities being only recipients of voluntary action. This creates the potential for non-disabled young people to develop a greater understanding and acceptance of people with learning disabilities and to create opportunities for young people with learning disabilities to learn and work alongside their non-disabled peers.

Aim 3 - Provide increased opportunities for young people with learning disabilities to volunteer.

Aim 4 – To develop a programme that reflects the reverse inclusion approach

Aim 5 – To develop potential for non-disabled youth to gain a deeper understanding and acceptance of people with learning disabilities and to enable young people with learning disabilities to work and learn alongside non-disabled teens.

Therefore the composition of the volunteer corps teams will primarily consist of non-disabled youth from all walks of life.

Aim 6 – To develop volunteer corps teams that reflect the diversity of non-disabled people in the local community.

The volunteer corps teams need to be developed so they are accessible and supportive of young people with learning disabilities. This means targeting both mainstream and special needs schools, and the development of a strong link between the programme and the Learning disability sector within Merthyr. This also means developing within the teams a supportive environment that typifies the teamwork ethos of volunteering and reflects the principles of the natural supports approach.

Aim 7 – Develop volunteer corps teams to be accessible and supportive of young people with learning disabilities.

In order to expand learning pathways for all the participants including those with disabilities, the volunteering activities wherever possible, need to be linked to local accreditation schemes. These could include the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, the Welsh Baccalaureate and NVQ learning pathways.

Aim – 8 Programme co-ordinators should establish links with local accreditation bodies and develop the potential to include people with learning disabilities.

As a means of creating and developing volunteer opportunities and host sites in both the summer and school year components, the programme co-ordinator must establish strong links with the local voluntary and non-profit sectors, as well as local council departments to build upon already existing infrastructure and develop new sites. The development of new sites could include expanding upon existing opportunities by exploring new aspects within the sites.

Aim- 9 Programme co-ordinators and the Team-leaders should work to build upon existing volunteer opportunities and create new ones.