



THE UNIFORM YOUTH WORK HUB



VOLUNTEER
RESEARCH
REPORT



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Background and Context

The uniform youth work hub is made up of the six uniform organisations with headquarters or regional Headquarters in Northern Ireland. The organisations are:

- **Girlguiding Ulster**
- **Boys' Brigade Northern Ireland District**
- **Scout Foundation NI (Scouting Ireland)**
- **Scouts NI**
- **Catholic Guides of Ireland**
- **Girls' Brigade**

All six organisations work with young people aged 4-25 years old and are open to all children and young people.

BBNI

Anchor Section	4-8 years old
Junior Section	8-11
Company Section	11-15
Seniors	15-18



GBNI

Explorers	3-7 years old
Juniors	8-10
Seniors	11-13
Brigaders	14+



Girlguiding

Rainbows	4-7 years old
Brownies	7-10
Guides	10-14
Rangers	14-18



CGI

Cygnets	5-6 years old
Brigins	7-10
Guides	10-17
Ranger	14-19



Scouts NI

Squirrels	4-6 years old
Beavers	6-8
Cubs	8-10.5
Scouts	10.5-14
Explorers	14-18
Network	18-25



Scouting Ireland (SFNI)

Beavers	6-8 years old
Cubs	9-11
Scouts	12-15
Ventures	15-17
Rovers	18-25



The uniformed youth work organisations are made up almost entirely of volunteers with small staff teams supporting the volunteers through regional Headquarters organisations. They are all connected to national organisations in either the UK or Ireland. In addition, all the organisations are part of global movements involving millions of members worldwide.

Between the six organisations
in Northern Ireland there are



10,315

volunteers

who work with



51,797

young people



4-8 Years

22,910

+



9-13 Years

19,990

+



14-18 Years

7,822

+



19-21 Years

578

+



22-25 Years

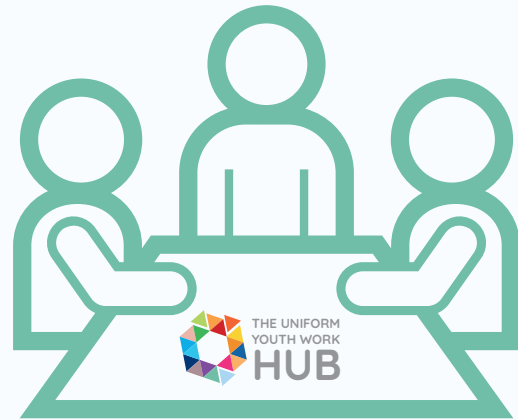
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Purpose

This research was carried out to give an insight into the experiences of volunteers across the six organisations with a specific focus on examining the benefits, support and enabling factors as well as challenges faced during their time volunteering with a uniform organisation.

As it was seeking the views of volunteers on their experience members of staff did not participate in this survey.

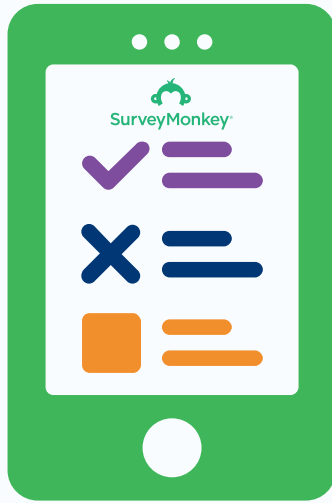


Methodology

The research was carried out by the interim facilitator of the Uniform Youth Work Hub. A questionnaire and focus groups were carried out between September and November 2019.

Hub members acted in an advisory capacity throughout the process. Their role was to influence the design and the methodology of the research. Members of the Hub were instrumental in gaining participation from their own organisation's units/groups.

Both a qualitative and quantitative methodology was used comprising of an online survey and five focus groups.



1. Online Survey for Volunteers:

The survey was completed by **2346** volunteers, **23%** of the total number across the six organisations. The survey was available online via survey monkey for a period of five weeks. Each headquarter organisation distributed the survey link to their individual units/groups whose responsibility it was to forward the link of the survey to their volunteers. The link was also distributed via social media. The survey was available in hard copy by request.

2. Focus groups.

Five focus groups were conducted with volunteers across Northern Ireland in Enniskillen, Derry/Londonderry, Antrim, Belfast and Portadown, in total **53** people attended. The focus groups allowed for more in-depth questions and an opportunity to focus on specific themes emerging from the results of the online survey. A participative method was used to allow volunteers to share as much information as possible using a series of questions, small group and large group discussions.¹

¹ Survey and focus groups questions are available upon request.



Introduction

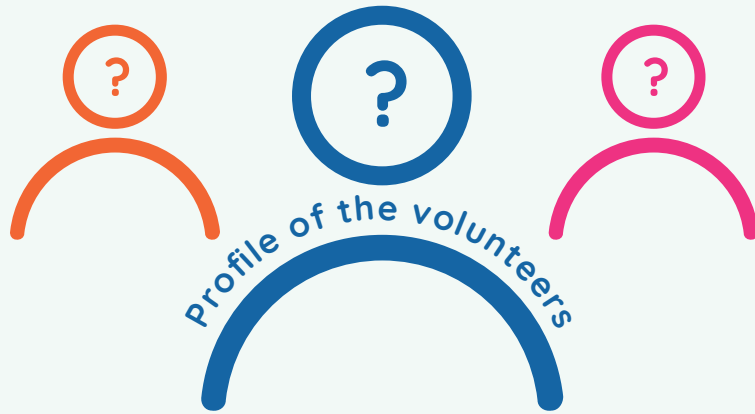
This report is an analysis of the findings from the questionnaire and the focus groups. The researcher has identified nine areas which reflect the overall experience of volunteers. The final section of the report presents insights that have been drawn from the findings of the research.



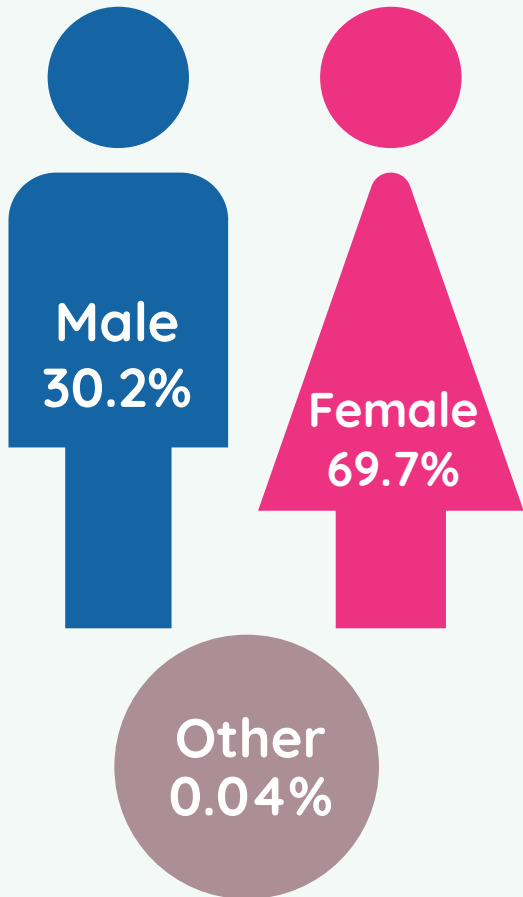
Respondents cited a range of motivations for volunteering and for remaining or returning after a period of absence. The reasons for starting to volunteer are not necessarily the same as those they gave for their continued involvement in the movement.

There was a mixture of reasons for their involvement including contributing to the community, supporting children and young people as well as enhancing their own personal capabilities and opportunities. There was a recognition of the part that family and employers play in supporting their volunteering activities as well as discussion on the challenges that volunteering can present.

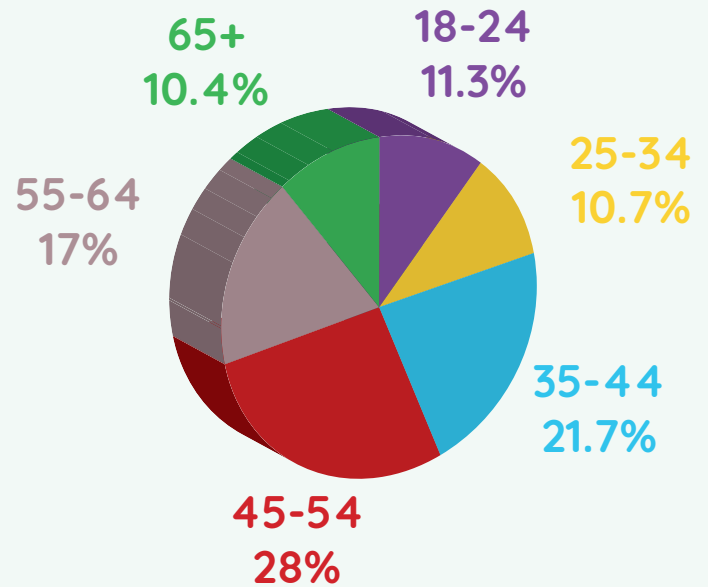
The figures and tables presented are drawn from the survey and included to illustrate the findings from the focus groups. There was a high level of consistency between the findings from the survey and the focus groups.



Gender



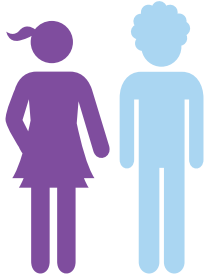
Age



Do you volunteer in an Urban or Rural area?



Primary volunteer role



Leaders

67% leaders

9% leaders in training

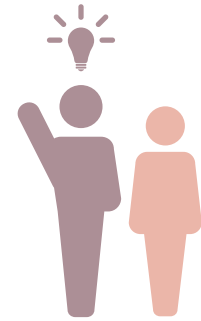
Youth leaders who work face to face with the young people and have completed organisational training and gained qualifications.



Helpers

14%

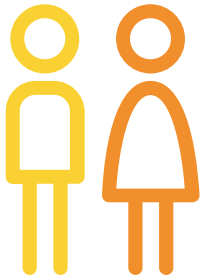
Helpers either come regularly or occasionally to support the leaders. They have completed basic training and qualifications e.g. safeguarding.



Commissioners/ Battalion Officials

3%

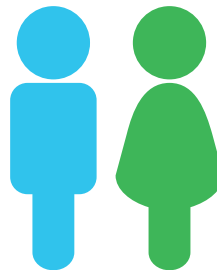
Those with management/support responsibility for areas. They ensure that policies and procedures are communicated and followed as well as supporting leaders and groups/units to deliver to the highest standard.



Trainers

1%

Volunteers who are qualified trainers for their organisation and ensure quality training for new volunteers and continued development for all volunteers.



Committee Members

5%

Trustees of the groups/units. Committee members lend their support and expertise in the governance of groups/units.



Other

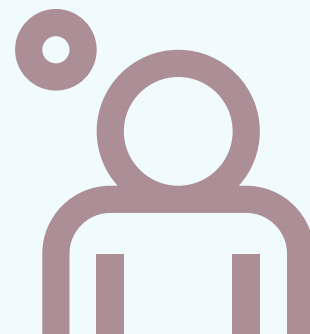
1%

Support from Churches, Chaplains, parents etc

Why become a volunteer?

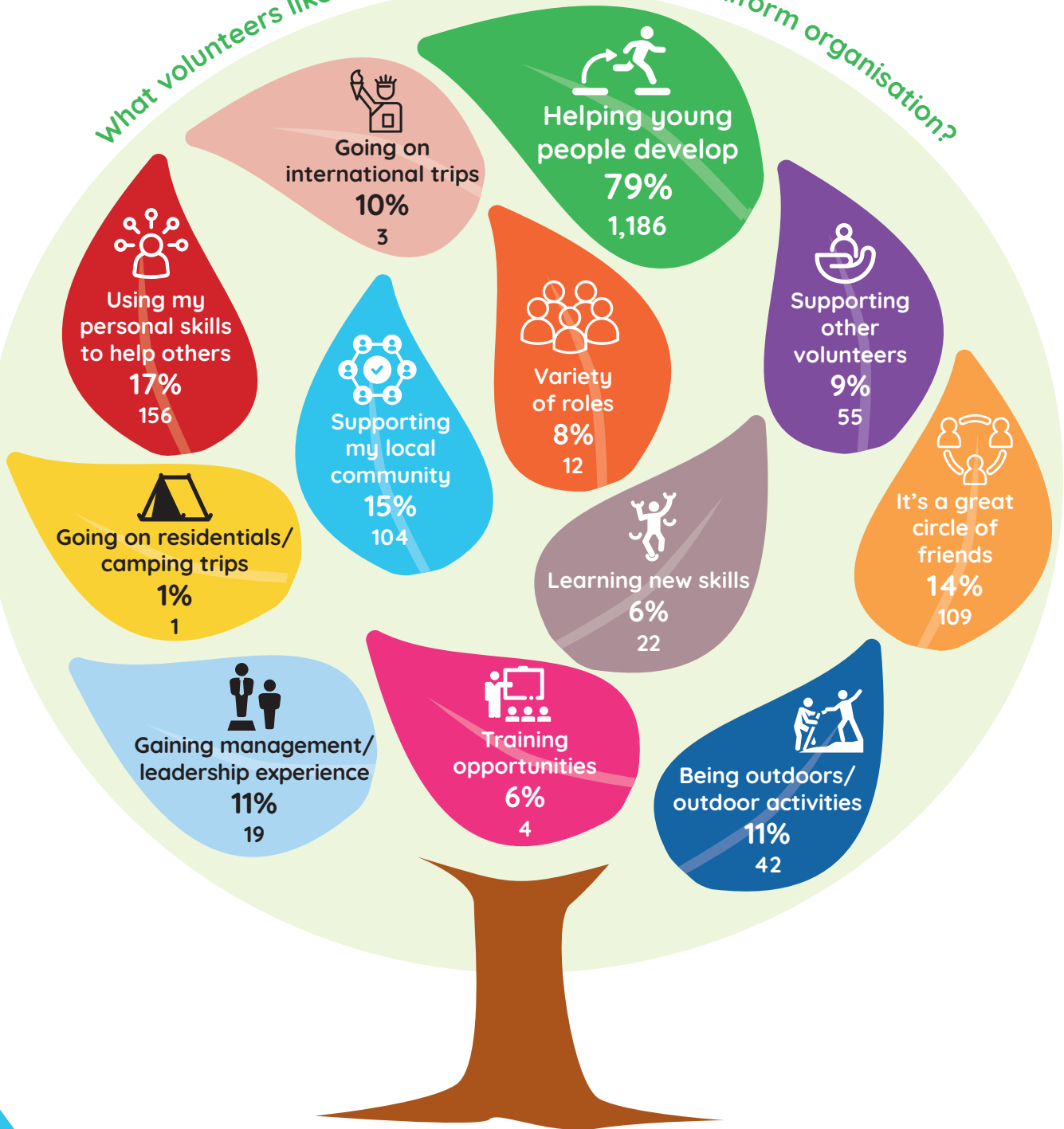
The largest group at **30%** have transitioned from youth member to leader. They reported a positive experience as a member and were encouraged by leaders to continue their involvement. Networks across United Kingdom and Ireland allow youth members to stay involved when they move for work or education.

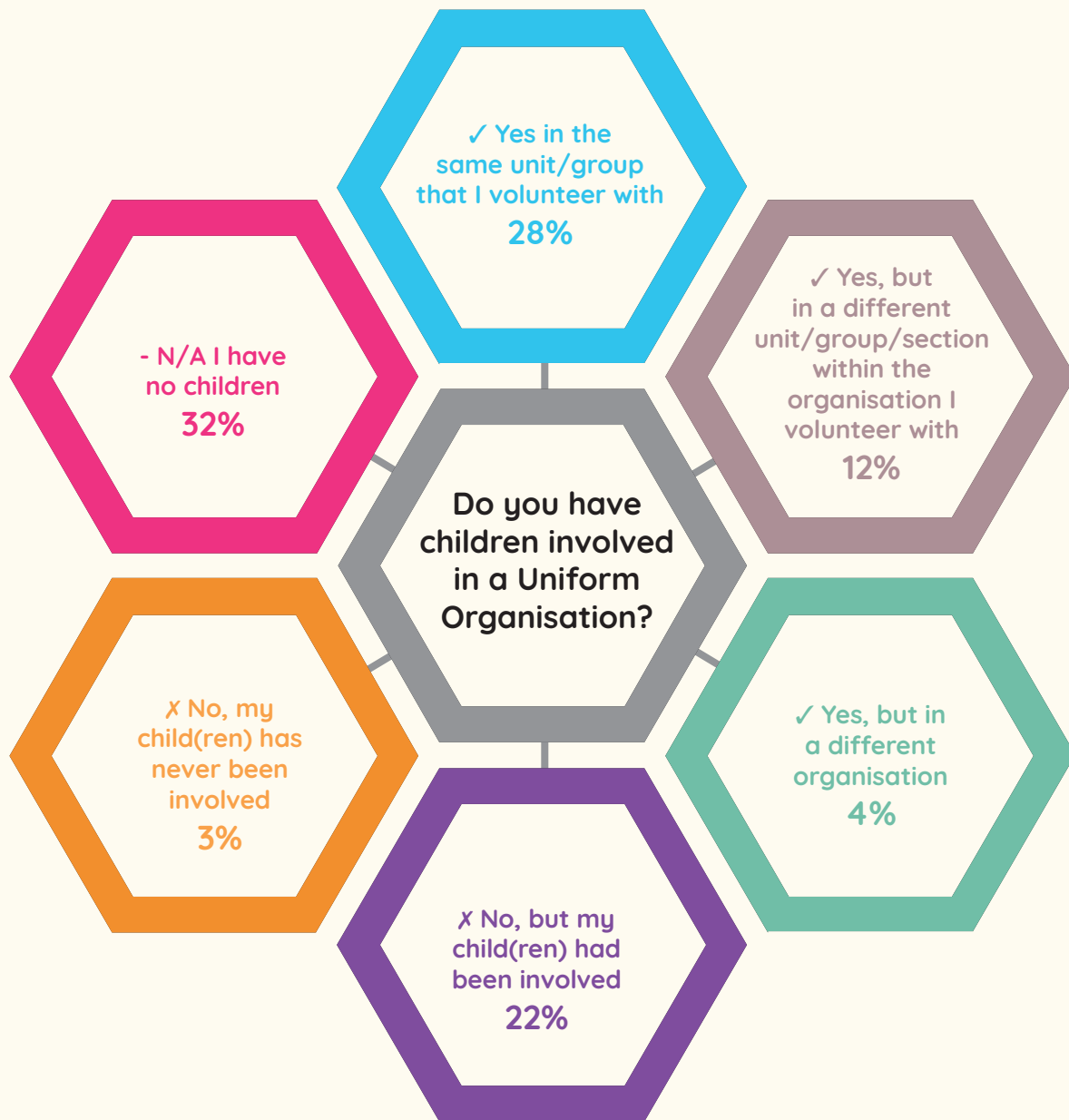
The overwhelming reason stated about what they liked most was the development of young people (**76%**). This was bore out in the focus group sessions were participants talked about their commitment to supporting children and young people to grow and develop. Young people articulate an increase in their confidence, personal development and skills was a motivating factor for participants and seeing the difference they make to young people's lives through their sustained involvement in the movement.





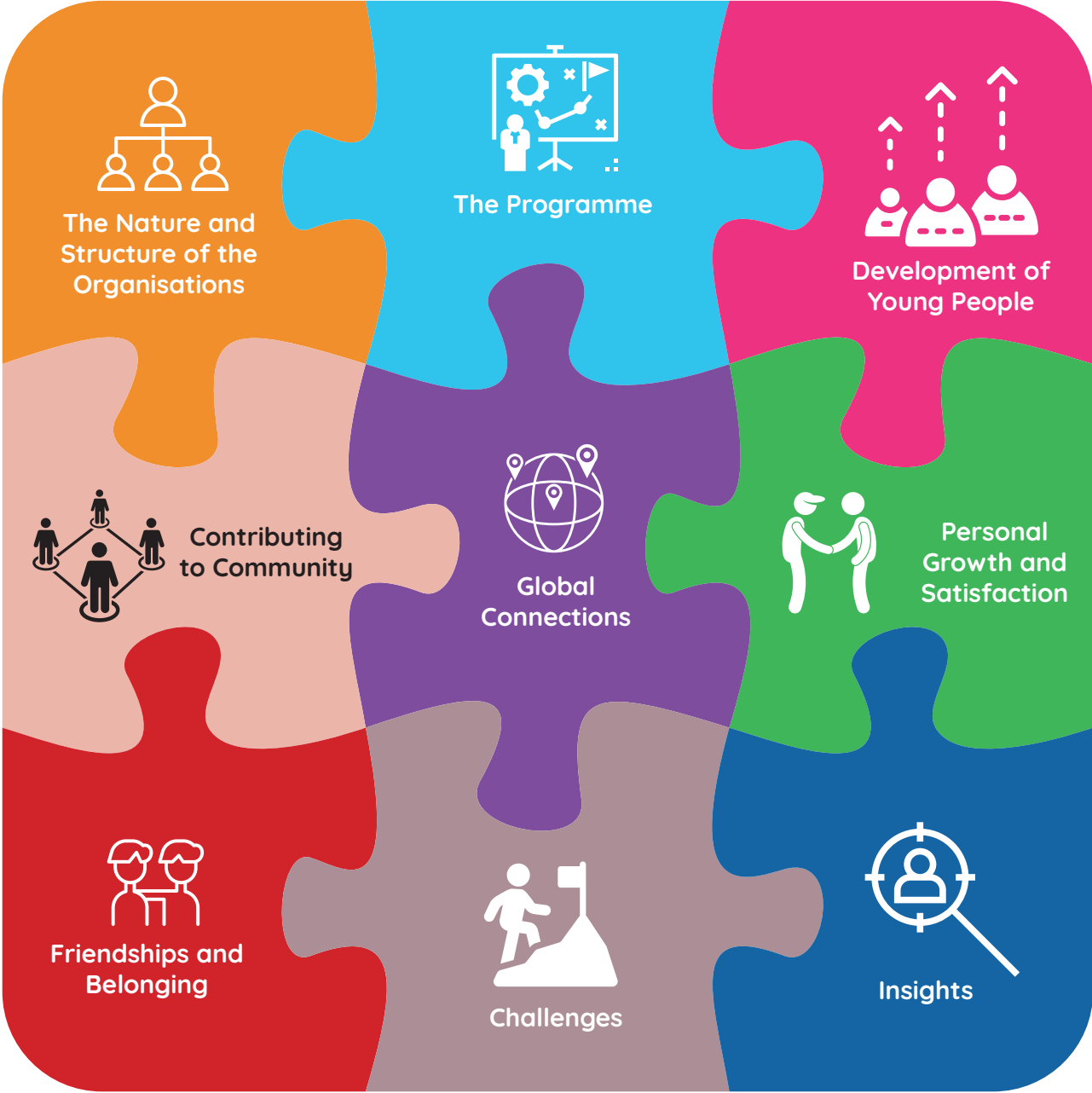
What volunteers like best about volunteering in Uniform organisation?





The responses to the survey clearly demonstrates the commitment of parents and the vital role that they play in the work of the Uniform Youth Work Sector within their local communities. This is further demonstrated by the fact that 22% of respondents stayed on in the organisation or joined after their children had left.

Key Themes for volunteers in the uniform youth work sector





The Nature and Structure of the Organisations

Common to all the organisations is that they are global movements, operate out of core foundations rooted in the values and principles espoused by their founder(s) and a strong connection to these values remains in the organisations today. All the organisations wear a uniform, the respondents noted that this is a good leveller in terms of class, it creates commonality and it aids a sense of belonging.

Many respondents noted that within the organisation there is a role and place for everyone, whether you are able to dedicate many hours a week or a few hours occasionally and there is a clear understanding of what that role is. This allows a degree of flexibility for volunteers as the circumstances of their life changes and the level of commitment they are able to give changes.

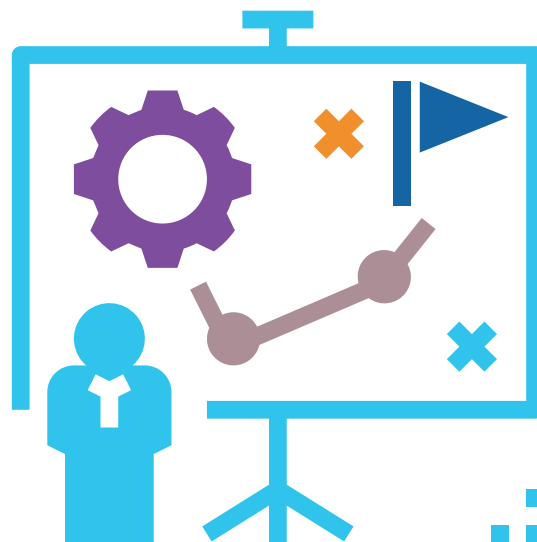
Volunteers find the structure of the organisation supportive. They are aware of the people and roles that exist to support them. For example; leader gets support from division commissioner/battalion, who gets support from county commissioner, regional commissioner and or staff.

There is always someone to turn to for information, support and guidance. Respondents stated that this structure was of great benefit to them especially in dealing with Governance e.g Charity Commission and GDPR, they are also available to support leaders in dealing with difficult issues and recruiting, managing and supporting volunteers.

For volunteers from Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade the local church was a significant source of support.

The Programme

All organisations have strong clear programmes that all leaders are trained to deliver. Volunteers stated that the structure of the programme framework was an enabler to volunteering. Respondents stated that while there was a strong framework the programme allowed for flexibility to meet the current needs, interests and abilities of young people. Leaders appreciate the participative nature of the programmes that allow young people to choose what topics, activities and badges they engage with.



The programme of the organisations have a number of common features

Personal Development	Youth Led/Leadership	Service to community	Spiritual Development
Physical Activity/Health	Outdoors and the Environment	Adventure	International
Teamwork	Skills development - outdoors, lifeskills	CRED	

Volunteers noticed that as young people participate in the programme they grow in confidence, try new things, build friendships and have national and international experiences they may not otherwise have had.

The programmes also allow for an element of risk taking within safe boundaries. This may include knife skills, lighting fires, wild camping, climbing, archery, watersports, foraging and outdoor cooking.

The programmes are accredited with young people able to achieve various badges and awards based on the skills they have developed. Young people select the number of accredited programmes they take part in.

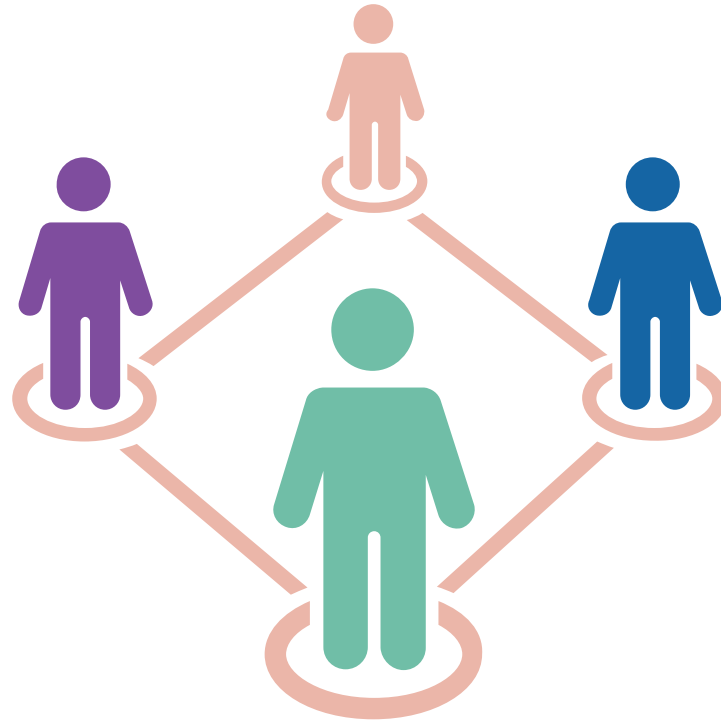


Development of Young People

A key motivation for volunteers was the development of young people and the role that they can play in supporting this. Some volunteers spoke about their experience of being a positive role model for young people. Key indicators of the difference leaders feel they are making is increased confidence, growth and development, young people's development of leadership skills and life skills.

They were also motivated by supporting young people to have new experiences and stepping outside their comfort zones by widening their horizons in the outdoors, international experiences and in cross community programmes. Growing in awareness of self and others.

Some volunteers spoke of the satisfaction that they get when members have grown up and then bringing their children to the organisation stating that they want their children to have the same fun, opportunities, friendships, adventures and experiences that they enjoyed during their time in the organisation.



Contributing to Community

All six organisations have groups/units located in local communities in both rural and urban areas. Volunteers work with groups in the local area they come from, live in or work in. The young people they volunteer with also come from the local community. A motivating factor for volunteers was that they felt by volunteering they are giving back and contributing to their community.

That by volunteering you are creating a safe positive space for young people to develop friendships, learn skills, reduce isolation and build connections within their community with adults and other young people.

A number of volunteers highlighted the CRED programme that the **6** Uniform Organisations developed and participated in together as a particular highlight for them and the young people. They felt that this programme had a significant impact on the young people and their contribution to a shared future.

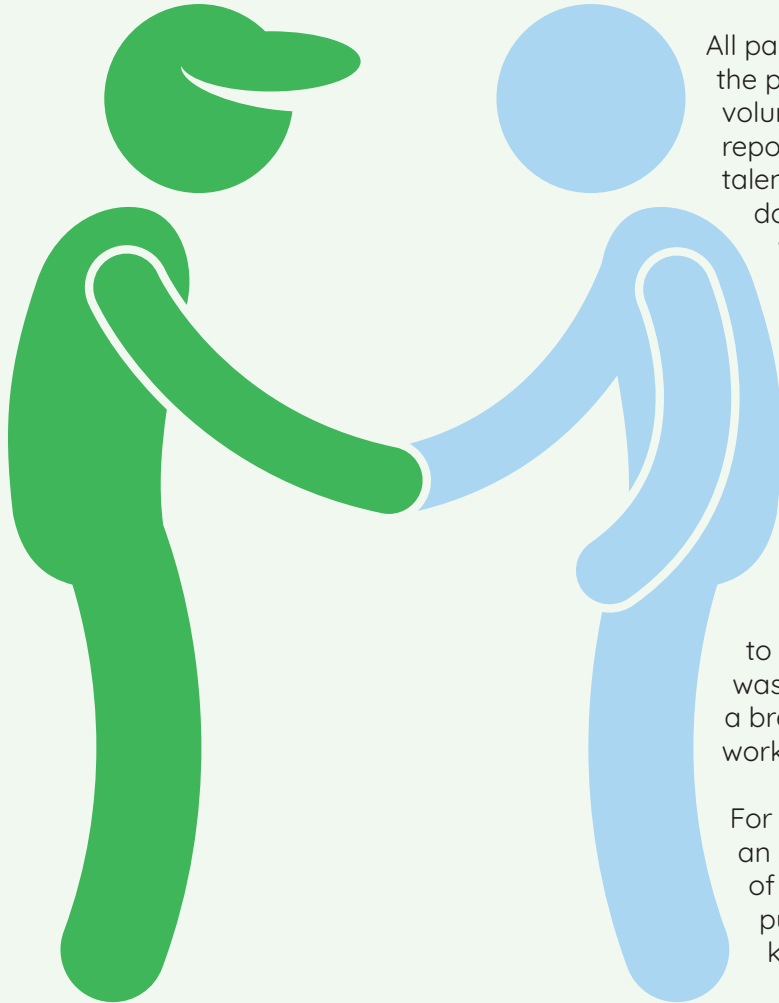
Service and contributing to the community is a key part of the programme and volunteers value the time they and the young people can invest in this through fundraising, Christmas hampers, helping others, environmental clean ups, awareness raising on issues. Volunteers recognise that these activities help young people feel more connected to their community and increase the visibility of young people's positive actions.



All six organisations are global organisations with a membership of over 68 million worldwide. Volunteers enjoy the connection to a global movement rooted in shared values and ethos. Volunteers valued international experiences both for themselves and the young people. They valued that they felt connected to members world wide and are able to rally and support fellow members in times of crisis or need e.g. Australian Bush Fires. Also, due to the global connections this response is able to be swift and meet needs. There is sense of a global family.

Events are regularly held on a global basis such as Jamborees, World Scout Council and Global Youth Forums There are also opportunities to attend camps and events hosted by countries or groups of countries, to visit world centres to volunteer there, to complete service projects and Fellowships; or individual groups/units can decide to camp internationally usually connecting with local members.

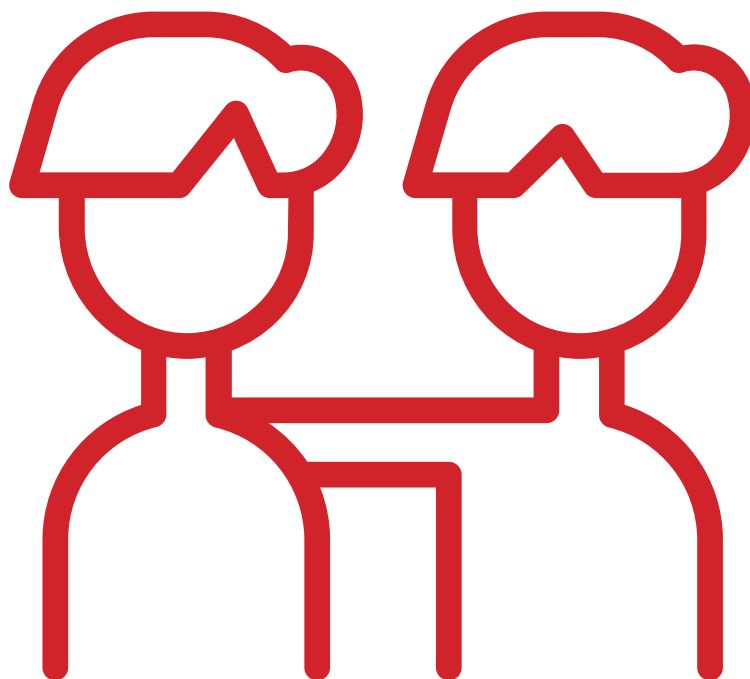
Personal Growth and Satisfaction



All participants in the focus groups talked about the personal benefits they gained as a result of volunteering in a uniformed organisation. They reported having the opportunity to use skills and talents in ways that other aspects of their life don't allow for; this includes their ability to work with children and young people, decision-making and leadership skills. There was an appreciation for the opportunity to develop and enhance leadership skills. Respondents reported being able to use the skills gained through volunteering in other areas of life, including in their employment.

Improvement in mental health was a benefit for some respondents. It was by no means the reason they became involved, however they acknowledged the contribution to mental well-being. A contributing factor was the connections made with others, having a break from the routine of day to day life both work and family.

For leaders in GB and BB their volunteering is an expression of their personal faith and a way of living out that faith in action. A sense of purpose and meaningful connectedness was a key feature for many respondents.



Friendships and Belonging

An important aspect of volunteering was the development of friendships. Friendships with other leaders supported volunteers in their role and increased the longevity of service. Volunteering connects people with similar values and interests, and they can share fun activities and a commitment to making a difference to the lives of young people. This can reduce loneliness and isolation and due to the variety of roles enables older volunteers to stay involved even if they are no longer carrying out face to face work with young people.

The volunteers expressed that friendships they made within the organisations lasted beyond the length of their service. 'I'm still friends with the girls I went to Guides with and the women I volunteered with - we meet up regularly and they are definitely friends for life'

Volunteers reported a sense of belonging to the local group/unit as well as to a regional, national and international movement. They have a sense of connection to their community and have many opportunities to meet new people. This sense of belonging and having a place within the organisation was a factor that motivated them to continue volunteering long term.



There are increasing demands on volunteers and they face a number of challenges. Finding time for volunteering activities and the administration involved in many of the roles are the main challenges faced. Volunteers expressed that at times they feel there is a tension between the amount of time they spend volunteering versus time they spend with their family. Many stated that it was the support of their family that enabled them to volunteer e.g. family looking after children so they can go to their organisation.

It is important to note that a key support mentioned by volunteers was that of their employer. Some employers allowed volunteers flexibility in their working hours as well as the use of resources such as photocopying. Many volunteers expressed that the high profile and the level of understanding the general public

have about uniform organisations helped when asking employers for this support. 'My employer lets me start at 7am on Tuesdays so I can leave at 2.30pm and get back home in time to take Cubs on Tuesday night - they don't have to do that but they know how important it is to me and respect the work of the organisation'.

There are increased administration requirements that volunteers need to comply with such as safeguarding checks, training and renewals, Charity Commission NI registration and annual submissions, GDPR, updating membership records of leaders and young people, training, funding applications and returns as well as the administration required for residentials, camps and international experiences. Due to changes in legislation and best practice guidelines, leaders are increasingly required to complete qualifications in areas such as walking etc. to safely carry out activities with young people.

Volunteers found the recruitment of other volunteers a significant challenge. In many cases older volunteers spoke of wanting to retire from volunteering but felt unable to do so as it would mean that the group would have to close or reduce the number of young people involved. Volunteers found it difficult to get potential volunteers to commit to the prospect of volunteering long term.



Technology Online

Databases and phone applications were highlighted as useful tools for volunteers as it enabled them to access information on the go. These online systems mean that administration and record keeping are also more streamlined, quicker and reduce the need for paper based records and storage.



Community support

The visibility, recognition of and awareness of uniformed organisations in wider society is an enabling factor for volunteers. Volunteers acknowledged the support of family and employers in supporting their involvement in the organisation. This support was crucial for people to continue for many years as a volunteer.



Recruitment - personal invitation

Current volunteers said they were more likely to get involved when they are approached and asked by someone to volunteer. There is value in the continued direct approach to personal invitation to become involved as a volunteer.



Insights



On-going support

There is an appreciation for the support that is in place, however it is necessary to continue to attend to the needs of volunteers. This is especially important in two main areas; in relation to the increasing governance requirements and in the challenge to recruit new volunteers to continue to meet the needs of children and young people who wish to be part of a uniformed organisation.



Values

The values of the organisations are well articulated and understood. A connection to and affinity with the values supports a sense of identity and purpose and contributes to the retention of volunteers as they feel connected and motivated by the work.



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