

we love our **youth worker!**



● the national charter for church youth workers

Volunteer Guide

The National Charter for Church Youth Workers has helped many churches effectively support their employed volunteer youth worker.

‘But what about our volunteer youth workers?’ you may say. Well, here is our Volunteer Guide to help you adopt the principles of the charter to provide a framework for effectively supporting your volunteer youth workers.

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We will pray and support

- ▶ **We believe** that our volunteers need spiritual support in their work with young people.
- ▶ **We promise** to pray for our volunteers and keep their needs a high priority in the church's prayer life.

It's important to remember that the spiritual support the church gives to its volunteer youth workers is vital. If you want your youth work and young people to thrive, then you'll want to make sure that the church takes the challenge of praying for those who are facilitating that work seriously too.

Most volunteer youth workers are juggling a variety of other commitments – full-time jobs, families and other life pressures – alongside their work with the young people in your church. For them to know that they are valued enough to be a priority in the Church's prayer life is important, and may mean they stick around for longer because they are resourced spiritually to be able to do so.

You may want to designate some Sunday services throughout the year where your volunteer youth workers are recognised and prayed for publicly. For more personal prayer, you may want to encourage other contexts where smaller groups or individuals can pray and support your volunteer youth workers. Some of the congregation, who don't see themselves as able to help as a volunteer with the youth work, may find this a great way to contribute.

Especially if your volunteer youth workers are acting as mentors to young people, it may be helpful to encourage them to be meeting with a spiritual mentor: someone who'll meet with them regularly, challenge them in their own walk with God and simply offer a space to share and pray openly about things that are worrying them.

A mentor could be an older member of the congregation, or someone who's experienced at listening and supporting people. Whoever they are, they need to be someone the volunteer youth worker trusts and can be open to about their needs.

▶ **Questions to consider**

- ▶ Does the church pray for those working with young people, as well as for the young people themselves?
- ▶ Is there an appropriate context for the volunteer youth worker to share any struggles or needs and to ask for personal prayer?

▶ **Ideas to help you meet this promise**

- ▶ Organise a spiritual mentor or group of people who can listen, challenge and pray for your volunteer youth workers.
- ▶ Start a regular prayer update for the youth work and include prayer requests from the volunteer youth workers as well as praying for the young people.
- ▶ Re-commission and pray for the youth volunteer team in a church service at the start of each year.



We will give space for retreat and reflection

- ◉ We believe that taking time to think and pray is just as essential for our volunteers organising events and meeting young people.
- ◉ We promise to encourage our volunteers to use part of their schedule to give space for retreat, reflection and personal development.

Your volunteer youth workers are key role models for the young people in your churches; discipling and helping them grow in character and faith. For this reason, who they are is just as important as what they do.

It's vital for churches to actively give space for volunteer youth workers to grow spiritually. Tell them to find whatever they need to help them to stay strong in their faith... because the best thing your teenagers can find in a youth team, are people who are following God with all of their heart.

► Questions to consider

- ◉ How can you actively encourage your volunteer youth workers to take time to strengthen their own faith?
- ◉ What money do you have in the budget to sponsor any retreats or spiritual activities?

► Ideas to help you meet this promise

- ◉ Give your volunteer youth workers a devotional book as a gift and a way of encouraging them to develop in their own spiritual life.
- ◉ Set aside part of your youth budget for helping the volunteer youth workers grow in their own personal faith, as distinct from learning new youth work skills.
- ◉ Arrange a youth leadership team retreat day or weekend.



We will provide ongoing training and development

- ▶ **We believe** that learning the skills of youth work is an ongoing process and that it's important to continually invest in professional development.
- ▶ **We promise** to set aside time and money to provide this for our volunteer.

Volunteer youth workers may not be qualified in youth work but the church has a responsibility to invest in them and develop their skills, both for their own confidence and sense of achievement but also to ensure good and safe provision for young people. Whatever skills the volunteer youth workers arrive with, the church has a responsibility to see that they are equipped for the role they play.

Volunteer youth workers may face tough pastoral issues and often need to know how to counsel young people with complex needs, including dealing with child protection issues. They may need to learn new skills like speaking in public, leading small group programmes or mentoring.

There are lots of different kinds of training available to meet these needs: from one-day events to conferences and academic programmes.

▶ **Questions to consider**

- ▶ Do you offer any regular training or input for your volunteer youth workers?
- ▶ Have you done any analysis as to what training your volunteer youth workers might benefit from?

▶ **Ideas to help you meet this promise**

- ▶ Get hold of a training needs analysis tool (if you don't have access to one, look at www.amaze.org.uk for suggestions) and work through it with your volunteer youth workers to identify their training needs
- ▶ Approach the Local Authority and other key organisations to see what training they have to offer. You could also find out whether anyone in the church can provide training through his or her own work or experience.



We will give a full day of rest each week

- ◉ We believe that taking regular time off helps maintain our volunteer's passion and energy for their work with young people.
- ◉ We promise to actively encourage our volunteer to take regular time out from their responsibilities.

Volunteer youth workers will likely have other priorities and commitments in their lives. Whilst they may be perfectly happy to commit to youth work in the church it is important that they take regular time off from their responsibilities. This helps them to keep perspective and not get stuck into a rut do the same old routine. Ensuring people take time off will also encourage you to find other volunteer youth workers, sharing the work load will help everyone to be rested, achieve more and there will be flexibility should someone no longer be available to volunteer.

To help you in the right direction with volunteer youth workers we have provided some templates that you might find useful, feel free to edit and copy to your own requirements.

- ◉ Volunteer agreement
- ◉ Volunteer job description checklist
- ◉ Volunteer example job description

▶ Questions to consider

- ◉ Are you aware of how busy or full the rest of your volunteer youth workers' lives are?
- ◉ Are you ever able to give your volunteer youth workers the week or weekend off? Do you have enough people on team to help allow this to happen?

▶ Ideas to help you meet this promise

- ◉ Use a service or small group session to explore the issue of work/ life balance with all the church and encourage everyone to think about the way they structure their lifestyle. This is an issue for everyone, not just the youth teams!
- ◉ Review your schedules and factor in time off at different points of the year for your volunteer youth workers.



We will share responsibility

- ▶ **We believe** that having a designated volunteer does not release the rest of the church from our responsibilities towards young people.
- ▶ **We promise** to encourage everyone to play a part in volunteering, praying for or supporting young people.

Who is responsible for the youth work in the church? If the answer is 'the youth team', you might want to think again. Having a volunteer youth worker, and volunteer youth workers who are committed to the young people in your church doesn't relieve the church of its broader responsibility for young people; it's something shared together by everyone.

Your volunteer youth workers shouldn't feel that the church has simply handed the task over to them and left to get on with it.

Everyone in a church should be concerned about children and young people and can find a way to contribute to supporting them and helping them grow in faith. A healthy youth work programme needs car drivers, prayers, cooks, cleaners and those who will simply stop and talk to a young person and listen to them. Everyone has a part to play in youth work.

When we all take on responsibility for young people, it increases the capacity and effectiveness of your volunteer youth workers rather than diminishing it. Best of all, young people themselves will feel more welcome and at ease in the church.

▶ Questions to consider

- If you listed everyone who helps with the youth work in some way, whether regularly or occasionally, how many of the congregation would be involved in the youth work?
- If someone started attending the church, how would they know what opportunities there are to help young people and how should they help volunteering?
- Does the church think about the needs of young people in the community as well as the young people who are part of the church community? If so, how does the church show this?

▶ Ideas to help you meet this promise

- Organise a volunteer recruitment Sunday once a year to find extra help for the youth work.
- Challenge the congregation to each find one way of supporting young people in the church: from volunteering to praying to baking cakes for the weekend away.
- Set up a task group to explore the ways that the church can get more involved in meeting the needs of young people in the community: for example, by encouraging church members to volunteer in other youth organisations and clubs, or by serving as school governors.



We will provide good management

- ▶ **We believe** that it's important to have clear structures and procedures for recruiting and employing volunteers, and to provide supportive management structures.
- ▶ **We promise** to follow good practice guidelines in the way we recruit and manage volunteers.

Whether you employ people or use volunteer youth workers, good and proactive management is essential and in some areas, there are legal requirements. Because of this it is important to establish effective policies and procedures and to keep up to date with legislation covering your youth work.

Try to ensure that the way you look after your volunteer youth workers doesn't take them for granted. Spend time thinking about what you want the volunteer youth workers to achieve with the young people, and that they have the resources (time, money, venue, equipment, spiritual and emotional) to be able to do this.

▶ **Questions to consider**

- ▶ Have you got written policies on key areas like child protection, health and safety and volunteer recruitment?
- ▶ Do you offer support for the volunteer youth worker to help them manage their volunteer teams more effectively?

▶ **Ideas to help you meet this promise**

- ▶ Contact other local churches and volunteer youth workers, and ask how they care for their volunteer teams.
- ▶ Review what you expect from your volunteer youth workers, and make sure that you have communicated this to them clearly.



We will celebrate and appreciate

- ◉ **We believe** it's vital to acknowledge what our youth worker is doing and the commitment they have made to work with young people in our church.
- ◉ **We promise** to make sure our youth worker knows they are appreciated and we will celebrate their achievements.

We all know the difference that feeling appreciated makes, and how demoralising a lack of recognition can be. Churches need to think seriously about how they value their volunteer youth workers. Celebrating and appreciating people is part of what it means to express Christ's love in our world.

Celebrating achievement, for example, could include sharing what has been done over the past few months, welcoming new members of the team, acknowledging long service and commitment. Whatever the reason, a church culture where people are acknowledged and appreciated will almost certainly make for better and more effective youth work, and greater loyalty to the team.

▶ **Questions to consider**

- ◉ Do you think that your volunteer teams feel valued?
- ◉ How does the church already show its appreciation to volunteer youth workers?
- ◉ Are there particular times of the year when it's especially appropriate to celebrate and appreciate the youth work team?

▶ **Ideas to help you meet this promise**

- ◉ Hold a 'Volunteer youth workers Sunday' when you show your appreciation to those who help by publicly acknowledging their work in a service, or holding a special lunch or social event.
- ◉ Give a small gift each year to those volunteering in the church and youth work. These small gestures can often make a huge difference in helping people feel their effort and work is appreciated.