

# **The volunteering activities of children aged 8 - 15**

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## **Abstract**

Despite policies to encourage children's sense of citizenship and to increase young people's participation in the Voluntary Sector, there has been very little research on volunteering by the under-16s, and scant attention has been paid to existing evidence. This paper uses the UK Time Use Survey 2000 to explore the formal and informal volunteering of children<sup>1</sup> aged 8 to 15: their participation rates; the time spent; the volunteering activities they do; and to give some idea of the characteristics of child volunteers. It is shown that children are a core group of active volunteers who should no longer be sidelined in voluntary or fourth sector research and policy, and nor should research on children ignore volunteering as an aspect of their lives. The conceptualisation of volunteering can be enriched by a better understanding of children's experience, and the ways in which current conceptions of volunteering may themselves obscure children's contribution.

## **Key words**

volunteering; Third Sector; Fourth Sector; children; time-use.

## **Introduction**

The UK literature on volunteering displays a consistent weakness regarding the volunteering activities of children below the age of 16. Children are absent from conceptualisations of volunteering in the academic literature, and from the majority of policy documents aimed at broadening participation. None of the regular nationally representative surveys, either specifically on volunteering or on children's experiences more generally, collect any data on

children's volunteering; and, up to this point, there has been no analysis of this using the one source of such data, the UK Time Use Survey 2000.

This gap in research is all the more surprising as it has persisted despite a great deal of government interest and activity in volunteering over the last decade<sup>ii</sup>. With regard to government monitoring, Tarling, writing in 2000, noted the lack of available data on the voluntary sector. Since then first the Home Office and then the Department for Communities and Local Government have been running the Citizenship Survey. This collects quarterly data on formal and informal volunteering activities undertaken by those aged 16 and above (cf. CLG 2009).

There have also been concerted efforts in volunteering strategy development, both with regard to 'young people' aged 16 and above and, to a lesser extent, to 'children' below that age. Interestingly, there has been very little explicit cross-reference made between the two age-groups. For the older age group, in common with Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands (Gaskin 2004), there have been several initiatives aimed at increasing volunteering by young people: the setting up of Millennium Volunteers for 16 – 24 year olds in 2000; the Young Volunteer Challenge piloted from 2003 - 2005; the publication of the Russell Commission Report on 'youth action and engagement' in 2005 (Russell Commission 2005); the resulting launch of the Vinspired portal for volunteers aged 16 – 25 in 2006; and the Morgan Inquiry into young adult volunteering in 2008 (Morgan Inquiry 2008)<sup>iii</sup>.

Ironically, neither the Russell Commission, the Morgan Inquiry nor the Commission for the Future of Volunteering's *Manifesto for Change* (2008) made more than passing reference to

children, despite emphasising inclusivity, and recommending greater formal recognition of volunteers.

Relevant government policy aimed at those aged 16 and under has tended to focus on 'active citizenship'. Predicated on community participation, this incorporates the volunteering ethos, although clear categorization of the promoted activities remains elusive and contested. The Giving Campaign (and its secondary-school based arm Giving Nation) ran from 2001 - 2004. Giving Nation was seen as one of the notable successes of the campaign, and continues to operate under the auspices of the Citizenship Foundation. Its aim is to "develop the culture of giving and the issues of citizenship in the UK" (Giving Nation 2006). In 2001 the Department for Education and Skills launched a three-year pilot programme, Active Citizens in Schools (ACiS), which built on the Millennium Volunteers model by seeking to engage 11-15 year olds in sustained volunteering activities through their schools. ACiS was set up in anticipation of the introduction of compulsory Citizenship classes for 11 – 16 year olds (ContinYou 2010) which began in 2002. Spring 2010 will see the launch of a new schools-based community service scheme for 14-16 year olds, the 'Student Community Action Programme'. It is to be run by the national youth volunteering organisation v, and funded by the Department for Children, Families and Schools. Precise details of the scheme are not available at the time of writing, but it follows an announcement by the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, in April 2009 about the introduction of a compulsory programme in which all young people would complete 50 hours of community service.

The element of compulsion distinguishes these last two initiatives from volunteering as most people would understand it. The fact that these compulsory initiatives target children

underlines children's dependency. Without wishing to negate the agency of children, it serves as a caution that children live in relations of dependency with a variety of institutions such as families, schools and religious groups. They are therefore particularly susceptible to even benign forms of 'encouragement' towards 'voluntary activity', let alone compulsion or coercion.

The common, negative stereotypification of young people remains largely unchallenged due to the dearth of research on children and young people's 'constructive' activities, as Roker, Player and Coleman (1999) suggest in introducing their rare study of teenagers' volunteering and campaigning activities. Sociological theorisation of childhood offers some explanation for the marginalisation of children in social research (as in society more generally), not only in explorations of volunteering, but also in paid work, domestic labour and care. The sociology of childhood shows how children are constructed as dependent non-contributors, at least in the 'minority world'<sup>iv</sup>(cf. Qvortrup 1995; James and Prout 1997; James, Jenks & Prout 1998; Prout 2002). An exception to this is the focus on 'young carers': children whose care for a family member who is sick, disabled or with mental health problems has been recognised. However, this exception proves the rule, as interest in young carers revolves around the notion that they are being robbed of a 'proper childhood'. In contrast, the increasing number of sociological studies that give children their own voice to describe their everyday lives, suggest that children commonly carry out caring work, particularly within families (Morrow 1996; Brannen, Heptinstall & Bhopal 2000; Such and Walker 2004). These studies prompt a reconceptualisation of children as actors and agents.

Another example of the narrow lens through which children are viewed rests in the fact that, although the TUS provides a wealth of data on children's time-use, only limited analysis has been carried out (Egerton and Gershuny 2004; Barnes, Bryson & Smith 2006). This analysis is confined to the effects on children of time shared with parents, and particularly on variables associated with educational achievement. The focus, in other words, is on children as recipients of adult time and attention. We do not mean to imply criticism of such analyses or to impute bias. Our point is a simple one, though two-fold. Firstly, that what is discounted as being of little interest about children's use of time tells us something about the way society views children. Secondly, that this partial picture helps to sustain such a view.

Looking at volunteering from a child-centred perspective suggests that not only have children's volunteering contributions been ignored, but that the volunteering world, a world consisting of debate, policy, data production and analysis around volunteering, is cast in an adult mould. Firstly, the volunteering debate tends to ignore the fundamental structural barriers to children's participation in volunteering. Children's volunteering is inevitably shaped by the ways in which childhood is constructed in our society, a key part of which is children's conceptual, spatial and temporal separation from the adult world, with children being relatively confined within home and school. While schools frequently provide a platform for children's formal voluntary activity this does not compensate for the limited opportunities that children are given to participate in public life. Secondly, particularly with regard to informal voluntary activity, the common definition of volunteering as activities aimed at benefitting non-family members ignores children's relative confinement, and means that many of children's activities in the service of others (were they to be measured) will not count as volunteering.

Here research on youth volunteering offers us some useful insights into how we might use young people's perspectives towards a fruitful re-conceptualisation of volunteering. Several studies have challenged the view of volunteering as either formal volunteering through a group or organisation or informal help to individuals. For instance, Roker et al's (1999) study of 14 – 16 year olds' volunteering and campaigning activities highlights the difficulty of distinguishing between the two, and shows high levels of pro-social activity by children, much of which may not be defined (by young people themselves or by others) as 'voluntary activity'. A three-year study of young people initially aged between 16 and 22 (Lister, Smith, Middleton, and Cox 2002) identified several areas of activity which they termed 'constructive social participation'. These were: voluntary work (both formal and informal); informal political action (such as taking part in campaigns or demonstrations); activities with political implications, such as actions which promoted inter-cultural relations; awareness-raising in face-to-face encounters, e.g. challenging racism in conversations; random altruistic acts such as donating money to charity, giving to the homeless etc.; and the everyday building of 'social capital' by 'looking out for' or helping neighbours, and participating in community organisations. Similarly a study of 16-24 year olds (Walker & Fisher 2002) found that young people engaged in a variety of activities which the authors suggest might best be described as 'altruistic engagement'. These activities ranged from recycling, giving goods to charity shops, ethical purchasing, campaigning and taking part in charity events. Informal helping or 'neighbourliness' was also seen as important.

As the authors of this last study note,

Defining ‘charity’ and ‘giving’ too narrowly excludes much of what young people see as important to them and the society in which they live. (Walker and Fisher 2002:2)

Such a situation has both methodological and practical outcomes in that not only will much activity be ‘defined out’ of volunteering, but that the voluntary sector may be regarded as irrelevant by many people, including children and young people.

In what follows we take a first step in charting the voluntary activities of children as young as eight years old. First, we introduce the UK Time Use Survey 2000 on which this paper is based, and set out the parameters of our analysis. We then go on to look at the prevalence of children’s volunteering activities and the times spent on them, and compare this to other age groups. Next, we look in more detail at the formal and informal voluntary activities undertaken by children. Subsequently, we explore the characteristics of children who volunteer, before discussing the implications of our findings for future research and policy relating to children’s volunteering.

## **The UK Time Use Survey 2000<sup>v</sup>**

The UK Time Use Survey 2000<sup>vi</sup> provides a unique opportunity to explore the volunteering and helping activities of children, as it collects detailed time use data from children as young as 8 years old. A second Time Use Survey was carried out in 2005, but since no information was collected from children, this leaves the 2000 survey as the only source of information on the voluntary activity for this age group. The 2005 survey does have some relevance to our purpose here however, in that the report (Lader, Short & Gershuny 2006) compares data from

older age groups across the two Time Use Surveys and shows little change over time in participation rates or in the amount of time spent on many activities, including voluntary activity. This finding provides some reassurance that the results for children in 2000 are still pertinent today. Furthermore, as the data used in this analysis pre-dates specific government initiatives on children's voluntary and community activities, it acts as a useful benchmark for children's 'naturally occurring' volunteering activity.

The TUS 2000 (henceforward referred to as the TUS) is an extremely rich data source, designed to overcome many of the criticisms that have been levelled at time use surveys (e.g. Folbre and Bittman 2004): the use of diaries allows a more accurate estimation of total amounts of time spent on activities than a reliance on retrospective accounts of time use; each diarist was asked to complete two diaries – one on a randomly allocated week-day and the other on a randomly allocated week-end day; the use of diarists' descriptions of their activities allows a fuller picture to emerge than selection from a pre-coded list; activities were recorded in ten-minute time slots, which affords detailed data. An individual questionnaire captures information related to time use using a broader or an unspecified time-frame compared with the diaries, and this serves as a 'wider lens' which supplements the diary snapshots. In addition, the TUS collects individual and household level demographic contextual data.

Our analysis looks at children's formal and informal volunteering. The former is defined as volunteering *through* or *for* groups and organisations, while the latter covers unpaid help given to individuals and not organised through a group. Despite the particular issues accruing

to children, which we noted above, we abide by the definition used in the 1997 National Survey of Volunteering, namely

any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to, close relatives, or to benefit the environment (Institute for Volunteering Research 1997)

The majority of studies previously and since have used this definition, with only slight variations in the order of activities or specific wording. None of these variations makes any substantial alteration to the meaning.

The TUS provides two ways of looking at each of these types of voluntary activity. The questionnaire data provides information on voluntary activity in the last four weeks, and the diary data shows us the average time spent per day in the diary week. Just over 11,500 people took part in the 2000 Time Use Survey. In total 1,641 eight to fifteen year olds completed questionnaires, and 1,574 of these children completed diaries. Although children were asked to complete two diaries, some only completed one. In total 3,115 diaries were completed. All our analyses use the weights provided by the survey company in order to make the sample more representative. The application of weights also ensures that only diaries of the required standard are included in the analysis<sup>vii</sup>.

### **How does children's volunteering measure up?**

The significant social contribution that children make through voluntary activity is made evident in Table 1.

<Insert Table 1 about here>

First, we will explore the data on formal volunteering. Children aged 8-15 are one of the highest groups for participating in formal volunteering in the previous four weeks (column (a)). At 14.2%, their participation rate fell only fractionally behind the leading group, 45 – 64 year olds, of whom 14.6% had volunteered formally in the same period. Children were nearly twice as likely to have volunteered through a group as the 16 – 24 year olds, and were significantly more likely to have done so than the 25 – 44 year olds.

The ‘average time per day’ in columns (b) and (e) of Table 1 is based on the amounts of time recorded in diaries averaged across the week and across the total number of diaries. These averages are inevitably low. Nevertheless, they do provide us with a sort of ‘league table’ for average time spent on volunteering per age group. On average, people over the age of 45 spent more than twice as much time on formal volunteering as the younger age groups. Children recorded spending only half a minute a day on formal volunteering, the least amount of time among the age groups.

Due to the different time-frames used in the questionnaires and the diaries (whether volunteered in the last four weeks compared to whether volunteered on the diary day) we cannot simply use the data in Table 1 to calculate the average amount of time volunteers spent volunteering. However, we can calculate, *of those diaries* (as opposed to diarists) *which recorded time spent volunteering* what was the average time spent on the diary day. This is represented in columns (c) and (f) in Table 1, and shows a very interesting picture. Although the 8 – 15 year olds’ diaries recorded one of the shortest *average* amounts of time on formal

volunteering (drawing even with the over 65s), where volunteering *was* recorded the average time per ‘diary day’ was just under 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  hours. This was quarter of an hour less than the 25 - 44 age group, and half an hour less than the 45 – 64 year olds. Diaries of 16-24 year olds recorded the greatest amount of time on formal volunteering - an average of 3  $\frac{3}{4}$  hours.

The TUS questionnaire asks about help given to other households in the past four weeks in broad terms. We configured the data on helping in order to isolate those who had given help to someone in another household who was not a relative, and for which they received no payment - the definition of informal volunteering commonly applied in surveys of adults’ voluntary activity. We will discuss below how such a definition of informal volunteering may disproportionately downplay the activities of children. But even using this stricter definition we see in column (d) of Table 1 that children were the median group regarding participation in informal volunteering, falling behind 25 – 44 year olds and the over 65s, but ahead of the 45 – 64 and the 16 – 24 year olds.

The average time per day recorded in informal volunteering across all respondents was greater than for formal volunteering. Again, as column (e) indicates, those aged 45 and above recorded spending more than twice the amount of time on average as younger age groups. Overall children spent the least amount of time, on average 1.8 minutes a day, volunteering informally. However, using the diary data as described above to calculate the average amounts of time spent where informal volunteering was recorded, we see in column (f) that the picture between age bands is much more similar. The diaries of children recorded an average of just over 1 $\frac{1}{4}$  hours a ‘diary day’ on informal volunteering, which was the same as

the 25 – 44 and the 65+ year olds. The 16 - 24 year olds' diaries averaged a quarter of an hour more, and the 45 – 64 year olds half an hour less.

Both of the core criteria for informal volunteering had a disproportionate effect on the data for children's volunteering, compared to other age groups. The raw data in the TUS allows us to examine the numbers of respondents who helped someone outside the household, and then to disaggregate those who helped relatives and, separately, those who received payment.

First, we will deal with the issue of relatives. For all age groups help given to a non-household relative accounted for a large proportion of helping out – between 43% and 65%. However, after the 45 – 64 year-old age group, children were the second most likely group to have helped a relative outside the household. The position in the lifecourse for both of these groups is likely to be an important factor. Much of the 45 – 64 year-olds' helping activity is likely to be helping an elderly relative. Children's position in the lifecourse limits what they are permitted to do outside the sphere of the family, and so channels their helping activities onto relatives. This may account for their relatively low profile in informal volunteering as defined from an adult-centric perspective.

The issue of payment is tied to a more technical consideration. Children were far more likely than other age groups to have acknowledged receiving some payment the last time they helped someone: 15% of 8-15 year olds received payment, compared to 11% of the 16 – 24s; in the older age groups no more than 2% of helpers were paid. Davis Smith (2000) points out that payment is a rather grey area in volunteering. The least stringent definition of volunteering would stipulate that payment was not the prime inducement and that any payment was below the value of the work done. However, the most commonly used

definition of volunteering, and that used in the current analysis, requires that an activity be 'unpaid'. The wording in the TUS is very open, and unfortunately we do not have details of the motivations of paid helpers nor the payments made. They could be anything from repayment of expenses, to an enhanced hourly rate from a doting neighbour, to being given some loose change from a shopping trip. What we *do* know is that interviewees were asked this question on helping immediately after being asked about whether they had a job for which they were paid, and what that job was. This makes it less likely that any payment for help was equivalent to a wage. Our decision to err on the side of caution and exclude all those who said they had received payment last time they volunteered informally, means that our figures for this type of volunteering are likely to be lower than they might have been were more accurate data on payment available.

### **What does children's volunteering consist of?**

In this section, we use TUS data to explore the types of volunteering activity that children get involved in. We make some comparison with adults' volunteering by drawing on existing analysis of the 2001 Citizenship survey (Attwood, Singh, Prime & Creasy 2003), which is closest in time to the TUS. Respondents were asked to name or describe up to six groups for which they had volunteered in the preceding four weeks, and 279 were mentioned. The types of voluntary organisation that children worked with can be divided into nine categories. These are presented in Table 2.

<Insert Table 2 about here>

Nearly a third of the voluntary groups that young people volunteered through were categorised as 'outside school group'. It is frustrating that no more precise definition is

available. Looked at against the other categories of organization we might hazard a guess that it may indicate an extra mural activity co-ordinated through the school. But this is no more than conjecture. Also popular, each with 15.8% of the share, were voluntary activities involving sport and religious activities. Just over 10% of the voluntary groups that children worked with centred on children or education. Children were asked what they did by way of volunteering for each of the organisations they mentioned. Like the adults in the 2001 Citizenship Survey (Attwood et al 2003) the most common activities for children were helping to run an activity (36.7%) and helping to raise money (32.9%). Visiting and conservation also featured.

Children were also asked to describe their informal voluntary activities of the last four weeks. Table 3 accumulates up to eight activities per child.

<Insert Table 3 about here>

Nearly half of children's informal volunteering revolved around household work, and nearly a quarter involved personal care. Over 10% of volunteering involved visiting or accompanying people, playing games and helping with hobbies. There is some accordance between the formal and informal volunteering by children regarding education-related help. This accounted for 8.4% of children's informal volunteering. It is likely that much of this is helping other children with schoolwork. Again, if we compare with data on adults, we note that, while there is overlap between children's and adults' informal voluntary activity, there are certain things that children rarely do. The activities that were most commonly undertaken by adults (giving advice, looking after a property, providing transport) do not feature in children's accounts.

## **Which children volunteer?**

A range of individual- and household-level variables were available to us in the TUS. We used these to look at the social profile of those who volunteer. These variables were age, sex, ethnicity, household type (whether the child lived with a lone parent or with a married/cohabiting couple), housing tenure and household income. Other measures of socio-economic position cannot be applied to children, as they are based on educational level, occupational status and individual income. For both types of volunteering, it was clear that all ages within the 8 – 15 age group volunteered, with no significant difference between precise ages. Below we outline the association between the other available variables and first formal and then informal volunteering.

Females were significantly more likely to volunteer formally than males (16% of females volunteered against 12% of boys). Roker et al's (1999) survey of 1,160 14 – 16 year olds also showed greater female participation in volunteering, although their interviews indicate that there may have been a definitional element to this. Their male interviewees were more reluctant to class their activities as volunteering than were female interviewees, on the grounds that they were done in a school context or that they identified a degree of self-interest.

The findings on ethnicity were somewhat surprising. The sample sizes meant that we restricted our analysis to the three largest ethnic groupings. For contextualization we analyzed the impact of ethnicity across all age groups and found that the percentage of those

who volunteered formally was highest among Black respondents (17%). The figure for White respondents was 12%, and for Asian volunteers was 6%. This indicates the same ranking, albeit with more marked differences, as the contemporaneous Citizenship Survey (Attwood et al 2003), although that survey uses a different time-frame - volunteering in the past year. However, when we looked at the age group 8 – 15 years, ethnic differences appear more marked, and were statistically highly significant. While 32% of Black children volunteered, 15% of White children did so, compared with only 6% of Asian children. It should be noted, however, that the Black sub-sample was very small, consisting of only 30 respondents, and so is particularly sensitive to errors in reporting or recording. The study by Roker et al (1999) compared volunteering between White and Asian respondents only. Their interviews indicated a number of issues that arose for Asian respondents, which limited their participation in formal volunteering.

Children's formal volunteering was also strongly related to socio-economic status as measured by household income and tenure. Each rise in income band was associated with a rise in volunteering, so that while only 9% of the children living in the bottom income band volunteered formally, 20% of those in the top band did so. Similarly, children in owner-occupied housing were also significantly more likely to volunteer than those living in rented accommodation. Household type was also statistically significant. Children in lone parent households were less likely to volunteer than those in 'couple' households (10% compared to 16%). Household type is, of course, associated with the socio-economic variables noted above.

The picture for informal volunteering differs somewhat. Methodological issues specific to the TUS relating to definitional criteria, along with a ‘lack of fit’ between children’s lives and the criteria for capturing informal volunteering, mean that analysis of the characteristics of informal volunteers should be treated with caution. In our analysis, sex is not a significant predictor of children’s informal volunteering. The association with ethnicity appears to take a different pattern, with White children most likely to volunteer informally. Earlier US findings on 12 – 17 year olds (Sundeen and Raskoff 1994) also show that White children are more likely to volunteer informally than those from minority ethnic groups. However, the correlation between ethnicity and informal volunteering in the TUS is not significant, and numbers are very small. As with formal volunteering, children in ‘couple’ households are more likely to volunteer informally than are children in lone parent households, although the relationship ceases to be statistically significant. Tenure and household income remain significant, with children in owner-occupier and higher income households more likely to volunteer informally.

## **Discussion**

This paper has focussed on the UK on the basis that this is the geographical remit of the dataset, and the context in which survey respondents were carrying out their activities. The volunteer- and community-oriented policies noted in the introduction also have a particular setting. The UK, for instance, has not had a history of military service for which some of the European models of national youth volunteering programmes substitute (Gaskin 2004). And many of the community programmes that are strong in the US operate a system of financial awards and accreditation, which will have a different resonance within the UK’s system of higher education finance.

This analysis of children's voluntary activity is a first step in acknowledging that children constitute an important group in both the third and the fourth sectors in the UK. Such an acknowledgement is not only worthy in itself, but may also be used to increase the level of children's participation, particularly in formal volunteering. It should counter the mistrust that voluntary organisations appear to have about young volunteers, which is off-putting to young people, particularly disadvantaged youths who lack confidence (Gaskin 2004). It may encourage a sense of being a valued member of society, or increase a sense of self-efficacy, factors positively associated with participation (Lister et al 2002 and Roker et al 1999 respectively).

There is also a diversity issue here. The Voluntary Sector has long recognised a need to be more inclusive. The initiatives over the last decade that have been targeted at young people have achieved relatively high levels of engagement with black and minority ethnic groups and low income volunteers (Gaskin 2004). It is not clear whether this is due to the programmes having diversity as a core objective, or whether young volunteers are naturally more diverse than older volunteers. But certainly greater recognition of this 'new blood' will help to change the image of volunteering and, we hope, perpetuate greater involvement in voluntary activity across all sectors of the community.

How does children's volunteering compare to older age groups? The amount of time 8 – 15 year olds as a group spent on volunteering was relatively low. However, where volunteering was noted as an activity in time-use diaries, the amounts of time spent during the 'diary day'

were not too dissimilar from other age groups – and hour and three quarters for formal volunteering and an hour and a quarter for informal volunteering. Children’s helping activities take on a different shape to those of adults, and we have identified several problems that arise from applying commonly used definitions of volunteering to measure children’s volunteering activity. For instance, children are more likely to spend time helping a relative, and so not be counted as volunteering using its commonest definition. We also need to take account of the fact that there are certain informal voluntary activities (strictly defined) that they do not do, or which their status as children prevents them from doing. Using the 2001 Citizenship Survey as an indicator by which to compare the *profiles* of child and adult volunteers (precise comparison is not possible due to the different time-frames used in their analysis), it appears that gender and ethnicity have far greater impacts on children’s formal volunteering than they do on adults’, although further research on ethnicity using larger sample sizes is recommended.

The Time Use Survey 2000 is a relatively blunt instrument for looking in detail at volunteering. Our analysis has suffered in particular from the vagueness of data on voluntary organisations worked for and on payments received for informal help given. This latter is likely to have had a considerable impact on the sample used to analyse children’s informal volunteering. Given children’s disadvantaged position in power relations, it would also be useful to have some test of the degree of voluntarism. But despite these limitations, we believe that the exercise has been a useful one.

We have shown that children are a group that should not be overlooked in research on volunteering. In future, volunteering should be further explored in surveys of children, such

as the annual Family and Children's Study carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) on behalf of government departments. Children should also be included in regular surveys of volunteering, such as the Citizenship Survey. We recognise that gaining consent throws up particular issues for research with children. However, this is not sufficient justification for omitting children from research. In fact the Home Office recently recognised the importance of listening to children's experiences and, following successful testing, since January 2009 has included children aged 10 and above in its continuous British Crime Survey (Home Office 2008). Finally, we recommend that research should explore the contours of informal help that children give to relatives outside the household.

Research on young volunteers aged 16 – 24 has indicated that young people take part in 'constructive social participation' in diverse ways, which may fall outside the commonly used definitions of volunteering. It is also clear that young people's behaviours, attitudes and motivations change throughout the period from early teens to early twenties (Gaskin 2004). Children's experiences may challenge accepted notions of volunteering in yet more ways. More research on children's volunteering could guide us in reviewing the relevance of existing formulations of voluntary activity to children's experience. As the Commission on the Future of Volunteering, writing from an adult perspective, conclude,

the culture of volunteering in this country tends to downgrade certain types of voluntary work, such as informal volunteering, and to exclude or undervalue what certain groups can contribute. (Commission on the Future of Volunteering 2008: 25)

Perhaps, after all, we should not *just* be asking 'Do children volunteer?', but also 'How might consideration of children's experiences re-shape our view of what volunteering *is*?'

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

i Although we realise that the term ‘children’ may have negative or pejorative connotations, we apply it to people under the age of 16 in order to distinguish them from 16 – 24 year olds, who are the targets of a number of specific policy initiatives and studies. Children under 16 also share a position in society that is in many ways distinct from young people above that age.

ii Sundeen and Roskoff (1994), analysing the first US national survey of teenage volunteers, noted a similar anomaly, where policy debate had run ahead of empirical research on youth volunteering.

iii For a review of the evidence on young people’s engagement with these programmes see Hill and Russell (2009).

iv We borrow the term from Punch 2000 as a reminder that those living in post-industrial countries are in a minority. Also, with regard to children, that what we in the minority world may regard as childhood norms do not reflect the experiences of the majority of the world’s children.

v The UK Time Use Survey 2000 (TUS) is a government survey funded by a consortium comprising the Economic and Social Research Council; Department of Culture, Media and Sport; Department for Education and Skills; Department of Health; Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions; and the Office for National Statistics. This analysis uses the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the data set (2003). The data sets and accompanying documentation are available through the UK Data Archive, University of Essex. Ipsos-RSL and Office for National Statistics, *United Kingdom Time Use Survey, 2000 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive, September 2003. SN: 4504.

vi Fieldwork was in fact carried out between June 2000 and September 2001.

vii “A diary is of the required standard if it has (a) 90 minutes or less of missing time (i.e. time unaccounted for) and (b) 5 or more separate 'episodes'. A new episode is defined if any

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details relating to an activity change from one time period to the next i.e. if there is a new main or secondary activity, a new location, or who the activity was carried out with changes.” (page 3 2003. Ipsos-RSL and ONS ‘Understanding the Weights’ in 4504-1 User Guide 1)

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**Table 1: Participation rates and average time spent on voluntary activity: by age group**

Age  <i>years</i>	Participated in formal volunteering in the past 4 weeks*  (a) <i>percent</i>	Average time spent per day by entire sample on formal volunteering <sup>+</sup>  (b) <i>minutes</i>	Average time spent by those participating in formal volunteering on the diary day <sup>+</sup>  (c) <i>minutes</i>	Participated in unpaid help for a member of another household who is not a relative in the past 4 weeks*  (d) <i>percent</i>	Average time spent per day by entire sample helping a member of another household who is not a relative <sup>+</sup>  (e) <i>minutes</i>	Average time spent by those participating in helping a member of another household who is not a relative on the diary day <sup>+</sup>  (f) <i>minutes</i>
8 – 15	14.2	0.5	100	12.6	1.8	78
16 – 24	7.2	1.1	220	11.5	3.7	84
25 – 44	9.9	1.9	119	14.9	3.3	70
45 – 64	14.6	3.7	137	12.2	8.6	104
65 +	12.8	4.0	100	13.1	7.2	80
All ages	11.9	2.5	119	13.2	5.2	85

\*Source: Time Use Survey 2000 Individual questionnaires. Total number 11,664

<sup>+</sup>Source: Time Use Survey 2000 Activity diaries. Total number 19,898

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**Table 2: Type of voluntary group worked with**

Type of voluntary group worked with	Number of occasions	Percent
Outside school group	88	31.5
Sports / exercise	44	15.8
Religious	44	15.8
Youth, children or education-related	29	10.4
Culture, arts or other hobby	25	9.0
Health and social care	17	6.1
Animals	6	2.2
Politics / human rights	3	1.1
Umbrella volunteering organisations	3	1.1
Other	20	7.2
Total	279	100

**Table 3: Types of informal voluntary activity undertaken**

Type of informal voluntary activity	Number of occasions	Percent
Household work	98	48.5
Personal care	45	22.3
Visiting, accompanying and pastimes	21	10.4
Education-related	17	8.4
Other	21	10.4
Total	202	100