

# London Roundtable Youth Volunteering, Employability and Sustainable Livelihoods

02 May 2023



International  
Association for  
Volunteer  
Effort

**VOLUNTEERING**  **MATTERS**

# Introduction

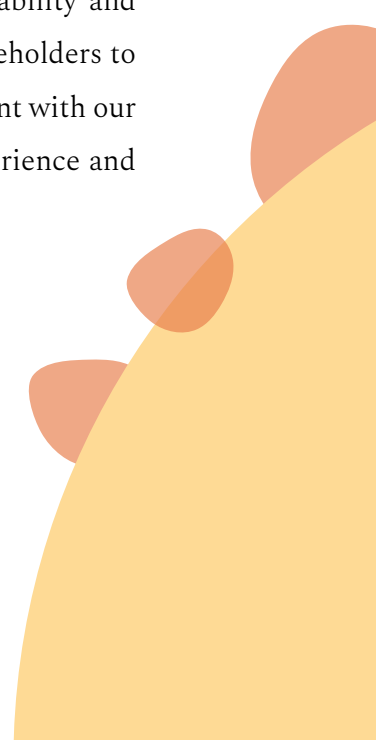
On the 2nd of May 2023 IAVE (International Association of Volunteer Effort) held a Roundtable event in London hosted by Volunteering Matters. The objective was to bring together an invited group of individuals with an interest in the topic of youth volunteering, employability and sustainable livelihoods to hear from IAVE and engage in a strategic discussion about the topic, sharing their experience, the challenges and successes. Importantly looking to the future and how to enable and develop volunteering to enhance opportunity and economic sustainability for young people.

# Background and Context

During 2022 IAVE gave renewed focus to raising awareness and understanding of how the corporate sector can influence and support volunteering as an agent of sustained systemic change to help young people enhance their employability and find employment. IAVE sought to encourage and enable more innovative involvement by business including working in partnership with leadership for volunteering organizations to create a community of practice.

A briefing or '**Challenge Paper**' was commissioned to frame and set out the issues and this was used to inform a series of global dialogues involving participants from some 100 organizations across 75 countries. The dialogue discussions were captured and informed a final '**Insights Paper**' that provides evidence of views on what actions need to be taken to facilitate and support young people through their volunteering journey to develop skills, knowledge and attitude towards enhancing their livelihoods, employability and /or entrepreneurship.

IAVE is continuing to give priority to this issue as it considers developing a global project that can recognize and give support to volunteering as a pathway to employability and enhancing livelihoods . This includes ongoing engagement with a range of stakeholders to discuss the issues, share experience and knowledge. Delivering a roundtable event with our partner Volunteering Matters provides an opportunity to consider the UK experience and place this within a global context.





# London Roundtable

The event brought together some 24 individuals both in person and virtually from a range of organizations from across the non-governmental, public, and private sectors (a list of organizations can be found in the Annex) and was very ably chaired by one of Volunteering Matters iwill Ambassadors, Lella Violet Halloum, a young changemaker in tech and young people's preparedness for work, based in Harrogate, Yorkshire. It was truly an event in the spirit of the fabled 'Camelot' round table where there was respect for all and everyone's views mattered.

Despite the many different aspects and perspectives that participants held on volunteering, the value of utilizing place-based approaches and methodologies resonated strongly; viewing volunteering as a mechanism through which to drive change at a local level and as a mean to bridge social capital. Following a welcome from Paul Reddish, (CEO, Volunteering Matters), participant introductions and a presentation from Nichole Cirillo, (Executive Director, IAVE), there was a stimulating and lively conversation.

During her presentation Nichole posed four questions and while there was a free-flowing discussion with a range of views shared this can be summarized under each of the key questions.

# Q1

Promoting and developing youth volunteering as a pathway to employability is not new in the UK, please share what you feel has been successful and what could we do better in the future?

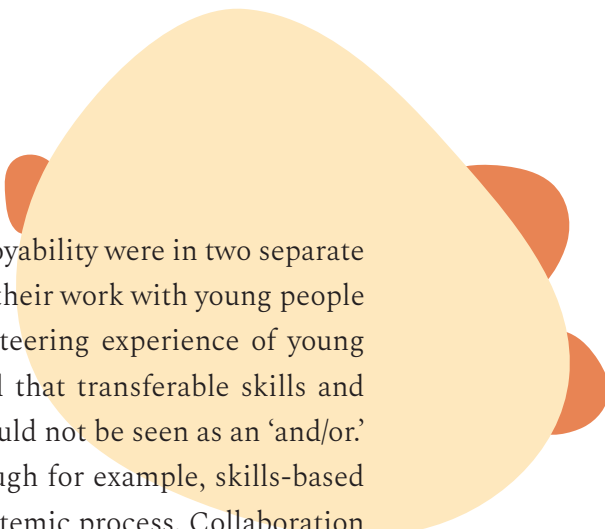
It was recognized that volunteering can add value to young people, providing valuable experience, supporting aspiration, and giving motivation. This value enhances self-development and can offer a credible pathway to employability and better economic prospects. However, often intervention has been focused on employment with success measured on numbers of individuals getting jobs or moving into education. The challenge is to understand and value the volunteering experience in its broadest sense of enhancing life skills, developing confidence and competence, always a journey but not necessarily to a defined destination.

Context is also important, schools and universities, for example, are key stakeholders in linking volunteering, work experience, and internships towards employability opportunities. However, successful outcomes for the young people are not uniform with some schools/universities better at navigating the experience and the partnerships with others such as the corporate sector. The class system can also be a defining influence with working class young people not encouraged to see the value or benefits of volunteer involvement. Young people's backgrounds and lives are ever changing, and new issues emerge, the current situation regarding young refugees and asylum seekers creates challenges and opportunities, the challenge is clearly concerned with enabling them to volunteer so that they can experience the opportunities that volunteering can offer. Key future components of success that emerged included the need to prioritize, encourage, enable, and listen to the voice of young people and the need for stakeholder organizations to collaborate more, sharing experience, ideas, and best practice.

# Q2

What are the challenges of involving the corporate sector in this work and how can we make the partnership between the corporate sector and youth volunteering more effective in the future?

It was recognized that involving the corporate sector in linking the volunteering experience to employability can provide tangible benefits for young people. However, the discussion clearly identified that often corporate support for volunteering and supporting young



people to develop skills and experience to enhance their employability were in two separate silos. For example, companies involve employee volunteers in their work with young people to develop job readiness but do not link or credit the volunteering experience of young people as valuable to developing skills. It was acknowledged that transferable skills and valuing volunteering should be important to corporates, it should not be seen as an ‘and/or.’ Recognizing the skills their own young employees gain, through for example, skills-based volunteering, is often also not measured or credited in any systemic process. Collaboration between corporates and other partners such as non-governmental organisations or public sector bodies can be less than effective as expectations (by all parties) are often not clearly articulated and flexibility can be a challenge.

## Q3

The shape of youth volunteering is changing as the motivations and expectations of young people evolve, what do organizations need to do to be more adaptive and in tune with this changing environment and how does volunteering as a pathway to supporting sustainable livelihoods also need to change to reflect the current/future needs and expectations of young people?

A major strand of the conversation was the need to focus on young people and their evolving needs, life experiences and motivations. Listening to and giving young people a voice in decisions and operational actions that involve and/or impact on them is not just an ‘add on,’ it is an imperative. There were examples of youth charters and government policies that were setting out the need to incorporate the youth voice, while welcome it was acknowledged that this was not without its challenges as the community support for young people to access opportunities to use their voices particularly at decision making tables is not always robust. Learning from where it works well and bringing about systemic change is required to make sure young people are automatically at the table.

The context and shape of volunteering, particularly for young people, is changing and there is a danger that stakeholders interested in volunteering are ‘not keeping up with the times.’ Young people are increasingly motivated by the need or the cause. They are increasingly stepping forward to do things by themselves and for others and the iwill ambassadors ‘lived experience’ of volunteering is testament to this. Young people seek connection and require flexibility, they are inspired by each other and are prepared to make a huge commitment if it

is the right opportunity for them. Place and space are important influences of why and how young people get involved in voluntary action. The more we seek to listen to and empower young people and the more opportunities we offer, including leadership opportunities, the more we will secure a future for volunteering and civic engagement.

In this maelstrom of change it was recognized that volunteering can offer an important and valuable pathway to enhancing life skills, employability, and sustainable livelihoods. It was also acknowledged that young people themselves do find it difficult to talk about the transfer of skills and experience gained from volunteering into the world of paid employment. This may be increasingly a challenge when trends indicate that young people are motivated by a cause and focused on making a difference rather than what they are gaining from the experience.

## Q4

Countries such as the UK, although made up of four devolved administrations, tend to focus on the 'national' situation and need, is their scope and an appetite to be part of a global response to the issue of youth volunteering and sustainable livelihoods?

There was broad support at the Roundtable for recognition and accreditation for volunteering and the experience/life skills it supports. There was also support for being part of both a global dialogue and global action. It was felt that reshaping and learning globally can achieve so much by broadening the conversations and giving each of us better tools to enhance our offer to and impact for young people.



# Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to all the participants for taking part in the conversation and bringing their passion and a wealth of experience. A big thank you to the Chairperson of the Roundtable, Lella Violet Halloum. Thanks also to Volunteering Matters for hosting and organizing the event. IAVE is delighted to share the work we are progressing on youth volunteering and appreciates the support and enthusiasm to be part of a global dialogue.



# About IAVE

For over 50 years, IAVE - the International Association for Volunteer Effort - has advocated for the importance of volunteering as vital to creating a fair, peaceful and compassionate world. Our Universal Declaration of Volunteering, launched in 2001, called for volunteering to be recognized as “a fundamental building block of civil society”. In 2015, IAVE was a leader in advocating that the contribution of volunteers is vital to achieving the United Nation’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) and is specifically acknowledged in the UN resolution recognizing that contribution. IAVE’s biennial World Volunteer Conference, begun in 1970, is the only sustained convening of volunteer leaders throughout the world. This event creates a vital space within which to affirm a global culture of volunteering and the importance of volunteers to enhancing social cohesion.

IAVE also have been a strong advocate for the inclusion of a “youth voice” in shaping the present and the future of volunteering, including a dedicated Youth board member, being guided in our actions but an active, global Youth Advisory Committee and hosting a decadal Youth Volunteering Summit.

[www.iave.org](http://www.iave.org)

# About Volunteering Matters

Volunteering Matters supports communities to mobilise and harness volunteers to help shape their community, its people, and institutions to be the best they can be. We partner with communities to overcome adversity, tackling social isolation and loneliness, improving health, developing skills and opportunity and making sure young people can lead change. This includes programmes created with and for many vibrant, skilful, and often ignored communities at scale across England, Scotland and Wales namely (but not exclusively), people with SEND, care-experienced young people, refugees, asylum seekers, and older people at risk of isolation.

Within Volunteering Matters sits four bands, three of which were present at the roundtable:

As co-facilitators of The iwill Movement, alongside UK Youth, Volunteering Matters are proud to embed and champion youth social action and volunteering as pivotal means to increase the agency, confidence, opportunities, and abilities of young people. It is key that young people are embraced and viewed as active citizens instigating positive place-based change and leadership, and this roundtable was coordinated alongside iwill, in order to help bring to life the value of the soft and practical skills which young people gain through participation in youth social action.

Since 2005, ProjectScotland have been supporting young people to develop their confidence and skills to move into employment, training or education. ProjectScotland provide a personal plan for each young person, including a volunteer placement with a local charity, one-to-one mentoring, and ongoing support from one of our team. And when we say, 'ongoing support', we mean it! We are there for our young people, every step of the way, even after a volunteer placement comes to an end. Because of that, 78% of our volunteers continue on to something better.

The problems faced by Scotland's young people are becoming more and more complex. They often have a range of barriers stopping them from realising their potential. ProjectScotland enable young people to be a force for good through volunteering, while gaining work experience and an opportunity to develop themselves. Our charity partners get additional skills, talents, and enthusiasm. We enable young people to be a stronger part of their local communities and give something back.

Volunteering Works are experts in creating solutions to your needs and creating straightforward, effective, and impactful employee volunteering opportunities. By putting people and communities first, Volunteering Works help employers and their workforce make a real difference to the places around them, using their energy, skills, developing new ones and having fun too.

[www.volunteeringmatters.org.uk](http://www.volunteeringmatters.org.uk)

## **Other papers recently released by IAVE focused on youth volunteering can be found here:**

**Youth Volunteering and Well-Being: A Challenge Paper**

**Youth Volunteering and Activism: A Challenge Paper**

# Annex

Organizations Represented at the IAVE London Roundtable on Youth Volunteering, Employability and Sustainable Livelihoods hosted by Volunteering Matters.

Barclays Bank

Deloitte

Deutsche Bank

Gandmentors, Islington

Harris Academy

IAVE

Ipswich Central

iwill Movement, iwill Ambassadors

NCVO

ProjectScotland

RECLAIM Working-class Young Leaders UK

Refugee Education UK

Royal Holloway, University of London

UK Youth

Volunteering Matters

Volunteering Works

Young Manchester





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Association for  
Volunteer  
Effort

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