CHALLENGE PAPER

Youth Volunteering and Well-being:

Exploring the Benefits of Engaging in Civic Action

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IAVE's <u>mission</u> is to create a more just and sustainable world by enabling the leaders, organizations, and environments that empower volunteers. This work includes a special focus on supporting our global network of volunteer leadership organizations (GNVL) across 67 countries and our Global Corporate Volunteer Council (GCVC) which brings together some 50 global companies to help strengthen, expand and advocate for volunteer efforts.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Challenges of Youth Volunteering & Well-being

During 2022 IAVE gave renewed focus to raising awareness and understanding of how the corporate sector can influence and support volunteering for sustained systemic change to help young people enhance their employability. A briefing or 'Challenge Paper' was commissioned by IAVE to frame and set out the issues, which was then used to inform a series of global dialogues involving participants from some 100 organisations across 75 countries. The captured discussions informed a final '**Insights Paper**' (published in early 2023) that provides evidence of what actions need to be taken to facilitate and support young people through their volunteering journey to develop their skills, knowledge and attitudes towards enhancing their livelihoods, employability and/or entrepreneurship.

IAVE has a strategic interest in youth volunteering and the key issues challenging young people today and decided to commission two more challenge papers focused on youth volunteering. These topics, youth well-being and youth activism were greatly influenced by experiences recorded during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. There is clear evidence of an emerging crisis in young people's well-being, particularly their mental health. There is also strong evidence of their increased interest in unstructured volunteer involvement that is organised and led through informal youth networks.

This paper considers **The Challenge of Youth Volunteering and Well-Being**, reflecting the increased recognition of the importance of mental health and well-being in social and personal development, particularly among young people. It explores current evidence on the links between volunteering and well-being and what needs to be in place to support youth volunteer involvement to have a positive impact.

Introduction

Challenges to young people's well-being, including mental health issues, are on the rise in many communities around the world. According to the World Health Organisation, 1-7 youths aged 10-19 have untreated mental health issues. Anxiety and depression are top causes of illnesses, while suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15–29-year-olds[1]. According to the UN's Secretary General[2], 'we are living in a global mental health crisis' and people's well-being is declining, exacerbated by physical and emotional abuse, denial of education and employment and other human rights violations. Beyond issues of mental health, the well-being of individuals has been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in significant ways. This includes declining work and job quality, worsening work-life balance, exhaustion and with many people feeling left out and isolated[3].

Volunteering and participation in wider civic action have been found to be contributory to enhancing young people's mental health and well-being – although, as will be made clearer later in this paper, the links are not always direct and simple. A number of studies have already found positive links between volunteering and well-being among the wider population, with much of the research focussing on older volunteers, particularly the elderly[4,5]. This Challenge Paper builds on these existing studies by focusing on evidence surrounding volunteering and well-being among young people. The paper explores the challenges faced by young people as they 'make sense' of and, at the same time, seek to find their place in an increasingly complex and fast-changing world[6].

This Challenge Paper is part of a series of research pieces commissioned by the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) exploring the links between youth volunteering and social change. The series seeks to spark conversations about young people's volunteer action and how it links with employment, well-being, and activism. The aim of this paper – Youth Volunteering and Well-being – is to present current evidence and case studies of youth-led well-being solutions, how volunteering can add value to the well-being of young people, and under what circumstances this is most likely to occur.

This paper is structured into four parts. Following this introduction, Section 2 provides a brief overview of the different ways in which youth well-being is understood, with a particular focus on risk, balance, and flourishing. Section 3 discusses the global crisis surrounding youth mental health and well-being, examining how various crises (including the COVID-19 pandemic) have contributed to these issues. In Section 4, the primary focus is on the relationship between youth volunteering and well-being, drawing on existing evidence from a range of settings and case

studies from Tanzania and the United Kingdom. The paper concludes with a brief summary and poses several key questions that need to be addressed to support volunteer involvement and maximise its positive impact on well-being..

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

▶ Challenges to **young people's well-being, including mental health issues, are on the rise** in many communities around the world.

▶ **Volunteering and participation in wider civic action** have been found to be contributory to **enhancing young people's mental health and well-being** – although, the links are not always direct and simple.

SECTION 2:

Risk, balance, and flourishing: understanding well-being

In general terms, well-being has been used as a wide-ranging term to describe a 'broader notion of physical, mental, social, material and civic health'[7]. While there is currently a lack of consensus on a single definition, researchers emphasised that well-being should not be understood as being synonymous solely with health or happiness. Well-being is more holistic and cuts across different aspects of young people's personal and social lives[8,9,10]. What is more, young people's state of well-being is not only determined by individual aspects but also influenced by wider structural challenges such as lack of employment[11], limited access to education, poverty, and poor housing. Within the wider academic discourse on well-being, for example, the interest shifted from a focus on individuals' 'effective coping' (i.e., how individuals build 'resilience' amidst significant challenges and issues) to identifying wider environmental factors (e.g., in schools, families and communities) that facilitate and/or impede coping with stresses[12]. Context plays an important role in understanding well-being[13,14]: levels of poverty, family structures, cultural practices and beliefs, government support, and community dynamics all influence well-being. What follows are three conceptualisations of well-being that would aid the discussion in this challenge paper.

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

▶ In general terms, **well-being** has been used as **a wide-ranging term to describe a 'broader notion of physical, mental, social, material and civic health'**.

▶ **Context plays an important role in understanding well-being:** levels of poverty, family structures, cultural practices and beliefs, government support and community dynamics all influence well-being.

Risk. Well-being has been commonly discussed in relation to risk and protective factors. Risk factors increase the likelihood of negative well-being outcomes, while protective factors facilitate more positive outcomes. Under this view, to facilitate well-being is to minimise (or effectively address) risk factors and increase protective factors experienced by young people. Table 1 lists some of the common **risk and protective factors** identified by a number of longitudinal studies on young people's well-being[15].

| Table 1 | Examples of Risk and Protective Factors towards young people's well-being |

Risk Factors	ProtectiveFactors
Community: e.g., poverty, corruption, violence, harmful social norms *Family*: e.g., parental neglect, parental mental health or drug problems *Peers*: e.g., membership in deviant groups, social isolation *School or Work*: e.g., victim or perpetrator of bullying, truancy, poor attachment to school *Individual*: e.g., temperament, low intelligence, chronic illness, early initiation into drug and alcohol use, being a victim of abuse, mental illness	*Community*: e.g., cultural identity and pride; a sense of belonging to school and community; good relationship with at least one adult *Family*: e.g., supportive parents, family harmony, responsibilities at home *School*: e.g., positive school climate, opportunities for success/recognition *Individual*: e.g., good physical health, social competence, optimism, problem-solving skills, adequate nutrition, membership of a prosocial group

Risk and protective factors differ according to contexts and situations. For instance, research showed how children orphaned by AIDS in Cape Town experience specific risk factors such as HIV-related stigma, unequal treatments in their new homes, and the multiple pressures in child-headed households[16]. Protective factors for young refugees in the UK could include developing friendships over time, mastery of the English language and access to refugee support organisations[17]. These examples show that risk and protective factors are context dependent.

Balance. Another conceptualisation of well-being focuses on the balance of resources that young people have in the face of adversity: 'stable well-being is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge.[18]' According to this perspective, youth well-being is not a fixed state and can be seen as a balancing act, where the availability of resources determines whether young people are able to effectively tackle challenges or issues. This view also signals the importance of agency: well-being is not seen as something that just happens to young people but as 'a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person[19]'. Facilitating young people's well-being, therefore, requires the provision of resources (economic, physical, social and mental) so they can respond effectively to the challenges they face.

Flourishing. Another view sees well-being as contributory to a flourishing society – where an individual is 'developing as a person, being fulfilled, and *making a contribution to the community*'[20,21]. This model has three dimensions: (1) satisfaction with life; (2) personal development and (3) social well-being. Well-being is facilitated by positive emotions (feeling good) such as inspiration, optimism and pride[22]. This view also highlights the importance of social well-being: not only about feeling good and functioning well but also about *doing good for others* – a 'commitment to prosocial behaviours and choices that benefits others and the wider community'[23]. Believing that 'society is capable of developing positively'[24] allows for better connections with others and living harmoniously.

It is clear in this section that well-being is a complex concept that could have various manifestations. Cutting across the three perspectives – risk, balance and flourishing – is the importance of providing young people with enough support to facilitate their well-being. In the next section, we explore how the global mental health crisis is having a substantive impact on young people's well-being.

SECTION 3:

Young people's well-being and mental health: Understanding the global crisis

While the experience of adolescence varies across cultures and contexts[25], it is generally considered a challenging time of significant transitions in young people's journey into adulthood. It is when they create new connections[26], make vital decisions and experience major life changes. These changes can result in important personal and social challenges that may impact their overall well-being[27]. At a time they need it the most, it has been observed that youth-focused well-being services are declining which could potentially disrupt positive coping among young people. This section will discuss the aspects of what has been described as the global crisis of youth well-being.

Young people's well-being in multiple crises and social challenges

During times of crises, young people are often disproportionately affected. A study in Australia found that the 2008 global financial crisis significantly impacted 19-20-year-olds' overall life satisfaction, future prospects and standards of living[28]. A previous IAVE Challenge paper in this series has already presented evidence that young people are three times more likely to be unemployed compared to their adult counterparts. Unemployment early in life tends to impact young people's mental health, even in the long term, causing anxiety and depression[29,30,31].

Issues surrounding the well-being of young people often fall along lines of inequality in gender, geography, income and (dis)abilities[32]. In Trinidad and Tobago, for instance, it was found that girls were more likely to contemplate and attempt suicide as compared to boy[33]. Transgender and gender-diverse youth were also found to be more likely to experience poor mental health and a higher prevalence of suicide[34]. A survey[35] found that young people living with HIV experience constant stigma and pressures that place them in further psychosocial distress, eventually leading to depression and anxiety[36].

Young people experiencing multiple natural disasters also 'contend with a variety of life stressors resulting from both the event and the recovery period after the disaster'[37]. Many young people also experience what is termed as 'climate anxiety'. A survey of 10,000 children and youth in 10 countries[38] revealed that young people were worried about climate change and how it is handled by governments – eliciting emotions such as sadness, anxiety, anger, powerlessness, helplessness and guilt[39]. Close to half of the participants expressed that climate anxiety is affecting their everyday life, activities and thoughts.

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

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▶ **Young people experiencing multiple natural disasters** also **'contend with** a variety of life stressors resulting from both **the event and the recovery period after the disaster'.** Many young people also experience what is termed as 'climate anxiety'.

Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic

These issues have only been exacerbated by the pandemic. The impact has been most severe towards young people from vulnerable backgrounds, such as those with disabilities, refugee youth and those with existing mental health problems. Research from Brain Builders – a youth-led volunteer organisation in Nigeria – found that many young people (63% of those they surveyed) mentioned that they experienced mental health stresses during lockdowns because of delayed learning, insufficient food, lack of employment and loneliness[40]. In a youth-led participatory action research[41] in Southeast Asia and the Pacific[42], young people expressed that they were significantly impacted by the grief resulting from deaths of family and friends, as well as the uncertainty of the overall public health situation during the pandemic. The loss of livelihoods and closure of small businesses have placed families in precarious financial situations,

prompting some young people to start working or generating income (such as by opening small tea shops) to support their families. While young people expressed that their 'homes' were safe spaces, this was not the experience of a number of young people who reported higher levels of domestic violence, forcing some young girls into early marriages. This experience mirrors what UN Women describes as the Shadow Pandemic: the intensification of gender-based and domestic violence experienced by women and girls as a result of lockdowns[43]. Closure of schools has also disrupted the routines of many young people. This was especially challenging for those with mental health issues who find these routines as important mechanisms for their well-being[44].

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

▶ **The impact has been most severe towards young people from vulnerable backgrounds** such as those with disabilities, refugee youth and those with existing mental health problems.

Gaps in support and services

While the demand has increased, available mental health services decreased or were disrupted following the pandemic lockdown measures. In a survey of over 2,000 young people in the UK who have a history of mental health needs, 31% of those who have received some form of mental health support previously, expressed that they were no longer able to access the same support although they needed it[45]. This situation reflects the global lack of infrastructures, systems and funding to address youth mental health and well-being[46]. Many young people are unable to or feel discriminated against when accessing services. When available, they are often costly, with significant variations in quality of care. In response, several organisations have launched initiatives to respond to this funding gap[47].

In summary, the global challenge of youth mental health well-being has been exacerbated by multiple crises faced by young people – from the climate emergency and unemployment to the COVID-19 pandemic. Often it is the most vulnerable young people that are impacted the most. All these challenges exist at a time when services and structures on well-being are diminishing. In section four, we consider the role volunteering plays in contributing to youth well-being, including tackling issues associated with mental health.

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

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SECTION 4:

Volunteering as a pathway to enhanced well-being among young people: key insights

While many studies have identified a positive correlation between volunteering and well-being[48], some found that the relationship is not direct. For example, a longitudinal study conducted in the United Kingdom found that the positive relationship between volunteering and well-being did not manifest during adolescence or early adulthood, but rather later in life, from mid-40s until old age[49]. Therefore, nuance is needed to understand the links between volunteer work and well-being. The aim of this section is to unpack the ways by which volunteering can contribute to enhanced well-being among young people.

Young people have long addressed issues of well-being in their communities through volunteering

Against the backdrop of insufficient and inaccessible mental health and well-being services, many youth volunteering initiatives focus on providing mental health and well-being services and support, especially to those who are unable to access them. In Mongolia, for example, around 400 youth volunteers created youth support groups in their communities, delivered

mental health information and encouraged self-help techniques[50]. A similar initiative is being conducted by young people in Zimbabwe through the Youth Friendship Bench, where student volunteers (often those studying psychology or sociology) are trained as mental health providers to serve as mental health 'buddies' for their fellow youth[51]. In 2021, this programme served 50,000 people. Responses also occur informally, outside formal institutions or organised projects. For instance, informal, unstructured volunteer groups that formed during disaster response in New Zealand were instrumental in increasing each other's well-being through informal check-ins, sharing meals together and talking over the emerging issues they faced[52].

Many of these youth-led mental health solutions are also tailor-fitted to address specific needs of certain youth groups. In Canada, for instance, a group of youth volunteers organises community activities and education to facilitate better well-being among South Asian youths who experience discrimination and racism[53]. Through a youth-led volunteer response, the

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

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▶ Against the backdrop of insufficient and inaccessible mental health and well-being services, **many youth volunteering initiatives focus on providing mental health and well-being services and support** especially to those who are unable to access them.

▶ **Youth volunteers' commitment to well-being extends beyond service delivery** into campaigning and awareness raising.

▶ These initiatives do not only benefit the 'recipients' of the programmes but also the volunteers themselves. **Well-being is enhanced by** feelings of '**belonging to our communities**, a **positive attitude towards others**, feeling that we are **contributing to society** and engaging in pro-social behaviour, **and believing that society is capable of developing positively**.'

into the local community. There are also a number of mental health hotlines and phone support services that are dedicated to the needs of LGBTQIA+ young people[54]. Youth volunteers' commitment to well-being extends beyond service delivery into campaigning and awareness raising. In South Africa, students at the University of Cape Town launched a campaign that aims to highlight youth-led well-being solutions within policy and programme initiatives[55]. The campaign seeks to raise awareness that employability and education programmes for young people could be more effective if they also embed support for youth well-being.

These initiatives do not only benefit the 'recipients' of the programmes but also the volunteers themselves. Well-being is enhanced by feelings of 'belonging to our communities, a positive attitude towards others, feeling that we are contributing to society and engaging in pro-social behaviour, and believing that society is capable of developing positively[56].' The next section explores this aspect in more detail.

Youth volunteering challenges social isolation and improves social connectedness

Existing evidence highlights how youth volunteering could offer a pathway for young people to engage with their local communities actively and purposely, thereby improving their relationships with other community members, their wider social connections and consequently improving their well-being. A survey in Northern Italy, for example, found that young people's social well-being improves when they participate in community and youth organisations[57]. Civic participation, such as through volunteering, helps build a sense of community among young people (e.g., feeling part of a group; holding influence over decision-making in their community; social acceptance) as well as a sense of empowerment (having knowledge of and access to resources to reach their goals). The study found that participating in youth organisations with an explicit civic aim (as opposed to leisure-based organisations) specifically contributes to positive social well-being for youths, even when done occasionally.

When young people volunteer, they have an opportunity to build and enhance relationships with fellow young people and community members from different generations, in structured and unstructured ways. A recent qualitative study among youth volunteers in Sri Lanka[58] found that volunteering with peers in similar age groups 'made it easier to connect and communicate'. However, they also found support among mentors, staff members and supervisors who they described as 'affectionate', 'welcoming' and 'really friendly'. These connections helped develop a sense of community in the contexts where they work.

Case Study 1: Ariel Adherence Clubs in Tanzania

Ariel Adherence Clubs (AACs) are psychosocial support groups for children and adolescents living with HIV, operating in seven African countries since 2007. In Tanzania, the AACs recruit volunteers who, themselves are adolescents living with HIV (ALHIV) and train them as facilitators and peer educators to support their fellow ALHIVs. Working with other healthcare providers, these young volunteer peer educators provide outreach health education and track the adolescents' attendance at their clinic appointments. Through this programme, the number of adolescents subscribing to sexual and reproductive services in adolescent-led and youth-friendly health centres increased. The AAC psychosocial support and peer health education programme encouraged ALHIVs to talk about common issues, have fun, and normalise their experiences living with HIV. The program helped develop a sense of purpose and responsibility among the youth volunteers to be good role models and share their own experiences to their fellow YPLHIV. This facilitates their involvement in a network of institutions advocating for social protection and services such as education, health and nutrition, spiritual guidance, and livelihood. Further, the programme exposes these YPLHIV peer educators to engagements with the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children and other appropriate Ministries in Tanzania [59].

The connections that volunteering facilitates are particularly significant to certain segments of the youth population that may experience stigma or difficulty in belonging. Many youths living with HIV/AIDS (YLHIV) still experience isolation and stigma alongside a number of financial, health and social barriers[60]. The case of Ariel Adherence Clubs (see Case Study 1) demonstrates how volunteering facilitates not only the dissemination of life-saving services and information about HIV/AIDS but also builds solidarity among YLHIVs – generating shared responses to the issues they face. Through volunteering, YLHIVs are able to develop a sense of community without fear of being shunned or rejected. Other studies echo these experiences of young people in Tanzania and demonstrate how being part of a group to campaign for HIV/AIDs awareness decreased feelings of social isolation[61].

Research among youth refugees in Italy and New Zealand has also found that participation in civic activities (including volunteering) were considered as contexts where refugee youths develop a belonging to their local community or a sense of 'fitting in'[62,63]. Those who volunteer, for instance, have reported a higher sense of community and self-esteem despite challenges such as language barriers, lack of information about volunteering and worries about potential conflicts with other groups. Young refugees in New Zealand expressed that volunteering allowed them to feel that they are 'part of the city' and that they belonged: 'for young refugees previously on the outside, this levelling has proven immensely empowering[64].'

This section has highlighted how volunteering could provide young people with social resources, networks, ties and connections which were useful in increasing their well-being and sense of community. Research points to how friendships and community involvement counts for 40% of the variation in people's happiness[65]. Through volunteering, young people are able to develop

peer-to-peer and intergenerational relationships that facilitate better feelings of belonging in a society. These outcomes are particularly significant to marginalised young people whereby volunteering combats social isolation and enhances community cohesion.

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

▶ **Civic participation**, such as through volunteering, **helps build a sense of community among young people** (e.g., feeling part of a group; holding influence over decision-making in their community; social acceptance) **as well as a sense of empowerment** (having knowledge of and access to resources to reach their goals).

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Volunteering can enhance young people's sense of self

Youth volunteering could also be contributory to young people's identities, particularly increasing their self-esteem and reconfiguring their positions in a society. Recent research in the UK found that among more than 2500 individuals surveyed, those who have volunteered in sports have higher self-esteem, are less likely to worry and feel that their work is of importance[66]. Close to 90% agreed that their life had more meaning because of volunteering and that they had a lot to be proud of because of the work that they do.

The previously referenced study in Sri Lanka[67] found that volunteering was considered by the young people as part of their 'journey of growth' – broadening their personal perspectives and new realities, similar to a sense of flourishing discussed in the previous section. In this research, it was found that volunteering exposed young people to new experiences, new tasks and new people, which inspired personal reflection 'resulting in re-evaluation of long-standing beliefs and broadening of perspectives contributing to personal growth'. A young volunteer, for instance, shared: 'there is a role we have to play and empowering someone to bring them into better [social] positions, that is something I believe we can do'.

Case Study 2: The Boom Project in the UK

The BOOM Project, run by Greater Manchester Youth Network (GYMN) in the United Kingdom, is a movement that provides volunteering opportunities for youth in care and care-leavers to get socially involved, build confidence, and learn new skills. The volunteering activities were matched to the demographics and interests of young people. This program catered to in-care and care-leaver young people in care institutions wherein they were engaged in various volunteering activities supported by the GMYN. These volunteering activities led to positive outcomes manifested in the attitudes of the youth participants; specifically, this increased their confidence, self-esteem, communication and interpersonal skills, and sense of control to make their own choices. Activities such as baking cakes for people with dementia, rock climbing, and group work helped these youth volunteers realise their sense of purpose and transformed their perspectives from passively waiting to proactively engage when presented with opportunities. Further, it was noted that the presence of support through structured activities and motivations is significant to their personal development [68].

These findings point to how volunteering allows young people to position themselves as important members of their communities. Through the BOOM project in the UK, for example (see Case Study 2), young people in care and youth care leavers were able to exercise their agency and enhance their sense of self through volunteering. To a certain extent, volunteering helped these young people to make important contributions to their society and challenge the stigma associated with their cohort.

These findings highlight that during youthhood – a time for self-exploration and discovery – volunteering helped young people develop their identities and expand what they can and cannot do. Personal development is an important indicator of well-being. These examples show how volunteering can offer pathways towards autonomy, fulfilling potential, and the feeling that life has meaning[59].

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

▶ Youth volunteering could also be contributory to **young people's identities, particularly increasing their self-esteem and reconfiguring their positions in a society**.

Volunteering could also counterintuitively place young people's well-being at risk

It is also important to highlight that volunteering activities in high-intensity and stressful environments can have unintended and adverse effects towards young people's well-being. Lessons from a peer-to-peer HIV/AIDS youth support group in a number of countries in Africa, for instance, found that despite their commitment, many young peer educators experience emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and burnout. This is because of the high level of responsibility they take and witnessing highly emotional situations among their peers[70]. Volunteer-driven crisis line services are critical players in mitigating increased rates of psychological distress and suicide. However, volunteers themselves confront complex situations which place their well-being at risk[71]. The research found that the negative impact of these situations was more pronounced among younger volunteers as compared to their adult counterparts. Young people were found to be more vulnerable to emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, and mismanagement of routine activities. Adult crisis line volunteers have acquired more years of experience in doing crisis intervention activities which may contribute to reduced perceived stress posed in serious working environments[72].

Adverse impacts on young people's well-being were also documented in extreme work environments such as in disaster response and crisis intervention programmes. In Israel, a study investigated the experiences of youth volunteers who respond to a number of emergency events, such as answering routine emergency calls, motor vehicular accidents and even in mass casualty incidents. They were found to acquire post-traumatic stress symptoms and other mental health problems brought about by their exposure to traumatic emergencies[73].

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

▶ It is also important to highlight that **volunteering activities in high-intensity and stressful environments can have unintended and adverse effects** towards young people's well-being.

▶ Across many of these studies, it was found that **organisational resourcing, training and peer support are all important factors in mitigating the mental health impacts of volunteering** in intense and demanding situations.

Across many of these studies, it was found that organisational resourcing, training and peer support are all important factors in mitigating the mental health impacts of volunteering in intense and demanding situations. For mental health crisis line volunteers, it was found that being able to talk about their negative experiences and coping strategies with co-workers were instrumental in increasing their well-being[74]. For youth volunteers in peer-to-peer HIV/AIDS programmes, it was found that giving a clear scope of work, appropriate and ongoing training, a capacity-building programme and regular debriefing and psychosocial support all contributed to decreasing the negative impact of this work. Organisations involving youth volunteers need to have volunteer management best practices in place to incorporate risk management and focus on volunteer well-being.

PART 4:

Conclusion and challenge questions

The global mental health and well-being crisis needs urgent and multi-sector responses coming from a variety of stakeholders. Volunteer involvement has the potential to increase young people's well-being through enhanced social connections and a sense of belonging to communities. Based on the evidence and examples reviewed in this paper, youth volunteering can add value to young people's well-being in three key ways:

1. Young people's volunteering and leadership are filling the gaps in well-being services as well as providing peer-to-peer and community-based support in informal ways. Young people also play a role in campaigning to prioritise well-being, especially addressing mental health needs, in policy and programming.

Challenge Questions:

> **How can volunteer-involving organisations, governments and other institutions build on existing youth-led solutions to well-being to enhance their impact?**
> **What resources are needed by young people to continue their advocacy for well being, where are the gaps, and how can they be collaboratively addressed?**
> **How can policymakers, practitioners and other community leaders partner with and empower young people to further highlight the importance of supporting youth well-being in various sectors such as employment and education?**

2. By engaging in volunteer work, young people can connect with individuals who share similar values and interests and develop a sense of belonging to their community. This can help counteract feelings of isolation and disconnectedness that can often arise during adolescence and young adulthood. Additionally, through their volunteer involvement, young people are able to contribute to their communities and have a say in decisions that impact their neighbourhoods and society as a whole. This can be empowering and can help young people develop a sense of agency and responsibility towards their communities.

Challenge Questions:

> ▶ **In what ways can various stakeholders enhance community cohesion and facilitate spaces where young people can actively engage and feel that they belong?**
>
> ▶ **How can stakeholders leverage volunteering as a means to facilitate the participation of the most marginalised youths in a society?**
>
> ▶ **In what ways can we tailor fit volunteering opportunities to be more inclusive and better relevant to the well-being needs of all young people?**

3.   Participation in volunteer action allows young people to enhance their roles in a society, developing their self-esteem and wider sense of self. By engaging in activities that benefit their community or society, young people can develop a greater appreciation for the positive impact they can have on the world around them. This can lead to a more positive self-image and a sense of connectedness to a wider impact.

Challenge Questions:

> ▶ **How can stakeholders better recognise and value young people's volunteer work?**
>
> ▶ **How can volunteering programmes be enhanced/developed so that they can be pathways for young people to develop their sense of self and well-being?**
>
> ▶ **How can we develop an enabling environment that facilitates rather than impedes positive coping among young people?**

While volunteering can have many positive effects, it is important to recognise that in intensive and stressful situations, volunteering can also pose a risk to young people's well-being, especially when they do not have enough support to face these challenges. This highlights the importance of creating an enabling volunteering environment where young people feel supported, safe and secure. By creating an environment that supports and protects young people during their volunteer work, we can help ensure that they have a positive and fulfilling experience that contributes to their overall well-being.

SECTION HIGHLIGHTS

▶ The **global mental health and well-being crisis needs urgent and multi-sector responses** coming from a variety of stakeholders.

▶ **Young people's volunteering and leadership are filling the gaps in well-being services** as well as **providing peer-to-peer and community-based support** in informal ways.

▶ By engaging **in volunteer work, young people can connect with individuals who share similar values** and interests **and develop a sense of belonging** to their community.

▶ **Participation in volunteer action allows young people to enhance their roles in a society**, developing their self-esteem and wider sense of self.

▶ By **creating an environment that supports and protects young people** during their volunteer work, we **can help ensure that they have a positive and fulfilling experience that contributes to their overall well-being**.

Acknowledgements

ENDNOTES:

[1] See: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health

[2] Based on Secretary-General's video message to launch the World Mental Health Report 2022: Transforming Mental Health For All: https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2022-06-17/secretary-generals-video-message-launch-the-world-mental-health-report-2022-transforming-mental-health-for-all

[3] OECD 2021

[4] Tabassum, Mohan and Smith 2016

[5] Volunteering Australia, 2021

[6] Cahill, 2015

[7] Cahill, 2015, page 95

[8] Cahill, 2015

[9] Dodge, Daly, Huton and Sanders, 2012

[10] Marks and Shah, 2004

[11] See IAVE's Challenge Paper on Youth Volunteering and Employability which contains a discussion on how unemployment early in life leads to long-term impact on young people's well-being and social participation.

[12] Cahill, 2015 in pages 98-99 discusses how challenges to youth well-being differ, for instance, between the Global North and the Global South countries

[13] Ghai, Magis-Weinberg, Stoilova, Livingston and Orben, 2022

[14] Cahill, 2015

[15] Based on the review by Cahill 2015

[16] Cluver and Gardner, 2007

[17] Mohamed and Thomas, 2017

[18] Dodge, Daly, Huton and Sanders, 2012

[19] Dodge, Daly, Huton and Sanders, 2012

[20] Marks and Shah, 2004

[21] See also, Chaves 2021

[22] See discussion on Chaves 2021 where she also emphasises that well-being is not the lack of negative emotions but having positive emotions that complements the former's effect

[23] Chaves 2021, page 276

[24] Marks and Shah, 2004, page 9

[25] Cahill 2015

[26] Parker, Jerrim and Anders 2016

[27] Patel, Flisher, Hetrick and McGorry 2007

[28] Parker, Jerrim and Anders 2016

[29] Millora, 2022

[30] McQuaid 2017

[31] Haider 2017

[32] See for instance research by Honey, Emerson and Llewellyn 2011

[33] https://www.unicef.org/easterncaribbean/media/2926/file/Gen-U%20Trinidad%20Fact%20 Sheet.pdf

[34] Brown, et. al. 2020

[35] The exploratory survey report in 2020 investigating the mental health of young people living with HIV in WHO regions: Americas, Africa, Eastern Mediterranean, Europe, Southeast Asia, and Western Pacific

[36] Uwamahoro, N. et al. (2020)

[37] Self-Brown, Lai, Patterson and Glasheen, 2017

[38] These surveys were conducted in ten countries (with 1000 respondents each): Australia, Brazil, Finland, France, India, Nigeria, Philippines, Portugal, the UK and the USA

[39] Hickman, et. al. 2021:

[40] Brain Builders Nigeria 2022

[41] Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPABAE), 2020

[42] The study was conducted by young people in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu researching about the experiences of marginalised youth during the pandemic

[43] UN Women: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19#facts

[44] Lee, 2020, p. 421

[45] Young Minds, 2020

[46] UNICEF (2022). The Global Coalition for Youth Mental Well-being. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/partnerships/coalition-youth-mental-well-being

[47] An example of this is the WHO-Partnership for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health introduced a global platform for youth engagement and mobilisation to increase a multisectoral commitment, funding, and with adolescents through their Adolescent and Youth Constituency Partnership

[48] For review, see for instance, Volunteering Australia 2021

[49] Tabassum, Mohan and Smith 2007

[50] UNICEF Mongolia, 2021

[51] Wallen, et. al., 2021

[52] Nissen, Carlton and Wong 2022

[53] Singh, 2020

[54] HRC Foundation, n.d.

[55] Bertha Centre, n.d.

[56] Marks and Shah 2004

[57] Cicognani, Mazzoni, Albanesi and Zani 2015

[58] Meemaduma and Booso, 2022

[59] Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, n.d.

[60] See for instance an analysis of barriers faced by youths living with HIV in East Africa in Kimera, et. al., 2019

[61] See for instance research by Samson, Lavigne and MacPherson 2009 in Canada

[62] Alfieri, Marzana, D'Angelo, Corvino, Gozzoli and Marta, 2021

[63] Carlton, 2015

[64] Carlton, 2015, p. 347

[65] Marks and Shah 2004

[66] Join In, 2014

[67] Meemaduma and Booso, 2022

[68] Webb, et al., 2017

[69] Marks and Shah 2004

[70] Webb, et al., 2017

[71] Willems, Drossaert, Vuijk and Bholmeijer, 2020

[72] Kitchingman, et al., 2016

[73] Roditi, E. et al. (2019)

[74] Willems, Drossaert, Vuijk and Bholmeijer, 2020

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