Good Practice Insights

featuring Sunny and Allana



www.youthvip.scot

At the last YouthVIP Panel session, we sat down with two of our incredible YouthVIP Panel members - Sunny and Allana - to discuss their volunteering experiences and get their views on what good practice when engaging young volunteers looks like to them. The conversation was super insightful, and jam-packed with content.

Below are snapshots of what they shared, alongside some practical examples of the lessons organisations can take from their journeys.

My Life My Say - Allana's Experiences

Allana: I volunteer with an organisation called 'My Life My Say' which is a political organisation that aims to get young people involved in democracy, and through that I go down to London with them a lot. In most organisations that's not something that I would be able to do because of my disability.

The funding that they have, and that they put forward to actually getting young people involved has made such a difference to me; they have done things like pay for a carer, and all of my travel so that I can get down and be engaged in those events.

They are always continuously checking up on me, and asking me at every event - or anything that they want to get me involved in - how they can make it accessible for myself, what are the things that I need. They do that for absolutely everybody - even with people who don't have disabilities.

"It's very youth-centered and always asking 'what do you want', 'how do you want to be best presented', and 'what can we do to make it so that young people can get involved effectively.'"



Allana

Young Scot - Sunny's Experiences

Sunny: An organisation that has demonstrated great practice for me has been Young Scot.

I have volunteered with Young Scot since I was 15 - so for a very long time - and it was actually one of the first places I could openly be queer and be myself because I wasn't even ready to come out at home at the time.

"I felt very safe here [at Young Scot] and they've always created a very safe space for me to open up and explore different things, whether that be through the volunteering work itself or through the social relationships I've been able to develop, and friendships I've been able to develop and friendships through my time here."



Sunny

Creating a safe space and talking to young people and actually listening to what we want is a major example of how they [Young Scot] do great practice.

What Are Some Lessons Organisations Can Take From Your Experiences?

Allana: A really good thing is always taking the involvement with young people as a learning opportunity every time. For example, one thing that you [Sunny] asked for was pronoun badges for everybody and since then, Young Scot have always provided them. At all the sessions, we get to have them so that's really positive thing.

Just learning and listening to young people is really the key thing in getting young people involved, for example asking “what do the young people themselves want”, “what does that person need”. I think often organisations can have this perception of young people as being quite scary to get involved because they don't know what young people necessarily want.

“You just need to almost remove the label of young and just look at them as people and ask them, because in any other context you would ask an adult ‘what do you need in this volunteering space’, and ‘here are the responsibilities you might have, can you do those effectively?’”



Allana

If organisations just did the same and stopped having this stigma and fear that that would go a long way. It's okay for organisations to say to young people, “we've not done this before, we don't really know what we're doing but we're going to work with you”. The key thing is working with them the whole time rather than just presenting a ton of forms, telling them to fill them out, and then just leaving them to their own devices.

“There's a major difference between meeting the legal minimum expectation for every young person versus meeting what they actually need.”



Sunny

Sunny: That's where these key conversations come into play - it's about understanding what does that individual young person actually need and not necessarily what you think that young person needs based off of past experiences or what you've heard from other organisations - just having a genuine open conversation with that young person.

Allana: I also think organisations almost look at young people in a way where it’s as if the only demographic that they're part of is young - and that's the only thing that they want to make allowances for.

Organisations need to consider that that's not the only demograpic they are a part of, they're also potentially queer, disabled, care experienced, they are carers themselves, they're in poverty, maybe they're asylum seekers, maybe English is their second, third, maybe even fourth language, they've got exams going on...

Sunny: Maybe their employment means they won't be able to come along to every opportunity.

Allana: People have all sorts of things going on in the backgrounds of their lives and I think the emphasis needs to not just be about like what does the age mean but also on the fact that young people are growing and learning in their identities, and what they will need will transition as they age.

"When you first start volunteering, it's a very new experience for yourself, and you don't necessarily know how to advocate for what you need."

Allana



Allana: Having that open conversation and having that safe space and an organisation saying, "look you know we're here for you and we're always going to make changes as and when you need them" is a really, important, vital thing.