

**#Youth
VIP**

Power of Youth Day

case studies from the YouthVIP Panel

written by GH

panel member from 2023-2026

Can you tell me a bit about your progression through your own volunteering roles and what this progression has meant to you?

For many years, my understanding of “volunteering” was fairly narrow. I, like many young people, thought that the only way to volunteer was to pack bags in my local supermarket, or to do a sponsored run. One thing I always had, however, was a strong desire to make a difference, throwing myself into various activities; litter picking, supervising “indoor break” at primary, helping with my local allotment, all with the intention of trying to make the world just that little bit better. And for a while, that’s all that I thought volunteering could be.

My first introduction to the world of groups and panels was with the North Lanarkshire Youth Climate Ambassadors – a local climate activism group that my friend was a part of. The group met one evening every week (as at this point many activities were still online because of the pandemic) and I distinctly remember being so unbelievably nervous in the online waiting room, debating logging off. *At the time, I felt as if I was totally out of my depth and wondered how I could make change as someone who was only in high school at the time. But the second I logged onto the call; I was instantly put at ease. Everyone was so kind and welcoming, and it quickly became clear that it was passion which united us* – not everyone knew the ins and outs of how wind farms worked, but what we did know was that we wanted to do our bit to help save the planet.

My involvement with the Climate Ambassadors totally opened my worldview; *it not only allowed me to get involved with activities such as planning group events and taking part in litter picks, but placed me in rooms where I could talk to those who could push for change in local council, in schools, and in their own communities.* Anyone who has been involved in volunteering will be able to attest to the fact that once you start with one opportunity, it can lead to another, and another, and another – that's exactly what happened to me. The youth worker who led the climate ambassadors group, Kirstin, forwarded me the opportunity to get involved in interviewing candidates for the Vice Chair of YouthLink position. This acted as my introduction to volunteering with Young Scot. I remember being so shocked that an organisation was actively involving young people in such a big decision and that I was even wanted in those spaces. So, when the opportunity to get involved in a panel with Young Scot opened, it was a no brainer for me.

I joined the Scotland's Young People's Forest Panel, and then later the YouthVIP panel, getting involved in various training and engagement opportunities along the way. Young Scot introduced to me my ability to be an active participant in the future of young people in Scotland, taking my social action work national.

Both groups allowed me to explore different aspects and themes within volunteering; SYPF about championing a better, more climate-conscious future and creating designated green spaces for young people, YouthVIP about using my voice and lived experience to make volunteering accessible and enjoyable for young people across Scotland.

Whilst my volunteering journey continued after this point, seeing me become an #iwill ambassador for Scotland, a member of the Scottish Women in Sport Digital Committee, join even more Young Scot panels and much more, it was my next step in my journey with the YouthVIP panel which had the biggest impact of all. I am now employed by Volunteering Matters (which includes YouthVIP under its banner) as the Youth Marketing and Communications Content Lead for the panel, working closely with members of staff to plan and film content at panel sessions, update and maintain the YouthVIP website, and work on various external resources – all with the aim of making people aware of the amazing work of the panel and its young people. For me, this role is a dream, and I still can't quite believe it's real! Having an opportunity like this is such a blessing, and one which I would not have had if it weren't for my volunteering experiences.

My volunteering journey has been nothing short of transformative, and my decision to get involved in volunteering was the best choice I have ever made for myself. One of the aspects in which I have noticed the most incredible impact is my confidence. I went from being perpetually shy, introverted, and lacking in self-confidence to being able to confidently deliver presentations, lead workshops, and overall, I feel that I carry myself a lot more confidently in my daily life. This is something which has been noted by teachers, peers, and my own family, who all note that they have seen a positive change in me. I can safely say I would not be where I am without the lessons, experiences, and opportunities I have had through volunteering.



What has been your biggest volunteering achievement so far and why?

When it comes to my biggest volunteering achievement, there have been so many things which have stood out to me over the years - awards, specific events, presentations - but for me, one which I always look back on comes from the early days of my volunteering journey. As part of my role as a North Lanarkshire Youth Climate Ambassador, I was invited to deliver a presentation with one of my colleagues at a Senior Pupil Sustainability Conference at Motherwell Civic Centre. At the last minute, my colleague dropped out. The leader of the group said that it would be fine if I cancelled as she knew how nervous I was feeling about the potential of presenting myself. However, I decided to go through with the presentation.

When I was sitting in the audience, listening to others present, I didn't think I was going to be able to do it. When it was my turn, I was so nervous going up on stage and the first couple of slides I went through, I could feel my hands shaking. But as the presentation went on, I settled into it and managed to deliver the whole thing without any major hiccups. Afterwards, I was invited to do some networking and view some projects created by attendees. Whilst walking around, I was approached by a teacher from a local secondary school, who came to congratulate me on the presentation. She told me that not a lot of people my age would have been able to do what I had just done, and when I shared how nervous I was, she was totally shocked, saying that I didn't look like I was when I was on the stage.

This experience acted as a bit of a turning point for me – both in my volunteer journey and in my life. It inspired me to push my comfort zone more often, with a view to developing my skills and qualities over time but also taking on more public speaking related events because I've found that I really enjoy doing them! Through doing so, *I can now say that I feel confident taking on similar opportunities; presentations, panel discussions, Q&As, etc., and now any time I look at a problem, or thing that I'm scared to do – I look at it is something that, over time, I can always tackle if I just put my mind to it and don't let fear hold me back.*

For me, the fact that I am trusted to stay involved in opportunities and be invited back to more events is an achievement in itself and is something I will always be so grateful for.

What role does YouthVIP provide to young people in Scotland?

It is incredibly hard to put into words just how much being involved with YouthVIP has impacted me, and it's not an exaggeration to say that it has changed my life. To me, YouthVIP is unlike anything else; so incredibly unique that it can be hard to quantify how influential it has been. When it comes to what YouthVIP provides, a few examples include;

1. Confidence – being part of the YouthVIP panel has a way of bringing young people out of their shell and allowing them to gain confidence in themselves - something I have noticed among my fellow members. Through a combination of exposure to new opportunities, working with a diverse group of young people, and being supported by incredible staff members, YouthVIP creates an environment which allows young people to flourish, grow, and build their confidence in a safe and supportive environment. Not only is this great for the panel, in allowing for engaging discussions and excellent contributions from all members, but it also is so valuable on a personal level, and something that young people can take and apply in every aspect of their lives. Whether it be doing a solo talk at school, engaging with people out in their community, or even just being able to work in groups, the confidence building aspect of YouthVIP is so incredibly important.

2. Opportunity – YouthVIP is excellent at providing young people with opportunities that they would not otherwise get. Through my personal experience, as part of my role as a panel member I have had the chance to; speak at Parliament, deliver a presentation at Edinburgh University, facilitate workshops at discussion days and summits, connect with external organisations to access events, and much, much more! Not only that, but a huge focus of the panel is making sure that volunteering opportunities are accessible and enjoyable for ALL young people across Scotland, meaning every young person can feel empowered to access the benefits that volunteering can provide!

3. Broad Range of Perspectives – YouthVIP brings together young people from across Scotland, of all different ages, backgrounds, and who have unique lived experiences. Being able to collaborate with such a diverse group of panel members not only enriches the work of the panel but means that every member can learn from other people's experiences and take what they've learned into their own lives.

4. New Understandings – many people look at volunteering as simply packing bags for local food drives, or doing sponsored walks, and I remember being totally shocked that being involved with something such as the YouthVIP panel where I was sharing my experiences, working on projects - and having lots of fun – could be considered volunteering. Being part of projects such as YouthVIP allows young people to see that, at its heart, volunteering is all about making a difference, and that can look like local community work, or pushing for change on a national scale. YouthVIP offers the chance for panel members to think bigger – placing them directly in rooms with people who are well placed to make a difference.

5. Advocacy – I have always been a believer that organisations should not be assuming that they know what young people want – but should ask young people for themselves. Being on the YouthVIP panel gives its members the chance to discuss aspects of their story which have acted as barriers and identify areas for improvement, getting the chance to speak up on issues which they have experienced in their own lives. Also, through activities and opportunities, panel members frequently have the chance to share their views with changemakers, advocating for themselves and being vocal about the changes they would like to see. This has not only served me well as I undertake a law degree – in which strong advocacy skills are essential – but also in my personal life, in situations where I may need to stand up for myself and speak my mind.

There are so many more impacts and benefits I can state but in summary:

“ YouthVIP has the potential to change the lives of young people in Scotland and totally transform the volunteering landscape – making it something that can be accessed by all young people, breaking down barriers and opening doors. ”

I have been able to access this impact firsthand and owe a lot of where I am now to the lessons I have learned from the panel. YouthVIP is a part of me now, and I feel eternally grateful that I get to continue to be a part of the amazing work the panel does. I continue to be inspired by everyone involved; staff, panel members, and the external organisations who support the panel's mission.

