Young Disabled Leaders
Engaging The Power House
# Young Disabled Leaders - Engaging The Power House

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1. Background to the Project

When the Young Foundation announced that it was to launch a programme to help young people be leaders of change, Radar and CSV saw a great opportunity.

**Radar** had been concerned for some time that despite young disabled people regularly saying how much they wanted to take up meaningful positions of responsibility and be able to influence organisations, they were not achieving their goal. To support disabled people’s aspirations, Radar established a leadership programme that has had a large impact on its participants’ lives and reports great successes. Whilst Radar’s leadership work has proven to be a real triumph, it noted that very few of its participants were from the younger age groups. It also recognised that within society very few young disabled role models were evident in the mainstream. The majority of disabled young people have low expectations and little confidence in themselves to push through into leadership roles. Limited ambitions of disabled people are caused by both practical and attitudinal barriers, but people with disabilities have talents, experience and insight to offer.

**CSV** had developed a youth leadership model that it was using in schools and with students. The intention of it is to empower young people from all kinds of backgrounds and help them to realise their potential as leaders, whether that was within their own place of study or through active involvement in the wider community, for example through volunteering and other forms of civic action. CSV is the UK’s largest volunteering charity with 170,000 people of all ages involved in projects and programmes each year.
This project was a new partnership between Radar and CSV that brought together the knowledge, experience and track records of both organisations. It allowed Radar to begin to address its concerns about how to nurture the next generation of disabled leaders by taking practical steps with young people. For CSV, it meant using a tested and proven model of youth leadership training and making sure that it was flexible to be inclusive of young disabled people. Both organisations are committed to ensuring that there are more opportunities for all young people who wish to become actively involved in society.

This project was created to equip young disabled people with tools with which to improve their chances of becoming leaders. It aimed to increase young disabled people’s skills, knowledge and confidence primarily through providing learning opportunities in a safe and friendly environment with their peers. It then aimed to gather a corpus of advice and experience from the young leaders and pass this on to organisations to help them better engage with young disabled people in their locality.

As part of the Youth of Today programme, a partnership between seven youth organisations, the Young Foundation is managing funding to fifty youth leadership projects through the Youth of Today Leadership Fund. It is thanks to this grant that Radar and CSV have created and run their Young Disabled Leaders project, starting in April 2010 and going through for 12 months to March 2011.
2. Who is who?

Anastasia Konstantatos - I am from Leeds and I attend St John’s School for the Deaf in Boston Spa. I joined the YDL project because I wanted to become a leader and learn to empower myself and other deaf people.

William Thompson - I am from Leeds and I attend St John’s School for the Deaf in Boston Spa. I joined the YDL project because I am very keen to help other disabled people and myself learn more about disabled people and organisations.

Thomas Nobrega - I am from Leeds and attend St John’s School for the Deaf in Boston Spa. I join the YDL project because I am very keen to become a leader and believe in my ability to do so. This project will give me the springboard to make this happen.

Alice Kemp - I come from Penistone, Barnsley. I got involved with this project because my teacher suggested that I would benefit from it.

Jamie Anthony Horsley – I live in Beverley, near Kingston upon Hull in the East Riding of Yorkshire. I got involved with the YDL project through my voluntary work and my volunteer community officer Annie Watkins. She suggested that I should join the programme to build up my confidence and enhance my future well-being.

Pearl Milnes - I live in Bishop Hill in York. I got involved in this project as I thought it would be a great opportunity to meet like-minded young people who want to make a difference.

Sean Bowman - I am from Barnsley. I got involved with this project because my teacher suggested it.

Christopher Ellis – I am from Rotherham. I joined YDL because I wanted to do things for myself and others.

Jamie Graham - I am from Rotherham. I joined the YDL project because I wanted to meet other young disabled people like myself and learn about how to become a leader and help others who are less fortunate.

Imogen Godwin - I live in Beverley, East Yorkshire and I am visually impaired. I run a blog and am involved with several forums, and I am a correspondent for my area in the 'look' charity audio magazine.

Ashley Schofield - I am from Kimberworth, Rotherham. I wanted to help others and do lots of new things. I wanted to tell others what we like to do.

Holly Girven - I am 14 years old and I go to Queen Elizabeth’s High School in Gainsborough. I got involved in this project because I wanted to learn how to be a better leader and also to show people that disabled people are just as capable as everyone else.
Hannah-Rebecca Joy Guscoth - I am 19 years old. I currently study at the University of Reading, reading Art & History of Art. My interests are mainly music and politics, and I try to spend my spare time volunteering with different organisations in the youth and community sectors. The Young Disabled Leaders project is probably one of the most interesting projects I've come across, and I would love to do more work like this in the future.

Hamza Shaikh - I am deaf and a Muslim. My school is Braidwood School for the Deaf. I am 16 years old. I became a Sports Leaders in 2005. I joined the YDL project because my school told me about it, as I am always interested in getting involved in new things that help me develop as a leader.

Paul Perkins - I am 18 years old. I attend Calthorpe School. I support Liverpool FC. My hobbies are playing football, netball, tennis and cricket. I also have many pets. I attend a school in Birmingham and do a lot of leadership work with my classmates.

Lavinia Scott - I come from Essex. I got involved with the Young Disabled Leaders project because I am interested in advocating for young disabled people and especially those with speech and language impairments.

Jessi Parrot – I am from London. I got involved with Young Disabled Leaders because I feel it’s important to challenge issues and negativity with positive solutions and positivity.

Stephanie Vaz - I'm from Notting Hill, West London. I got involved in the Young Disabled Leaders project because I think it is so important for young disabled people to speak up and get more involved in society.

Daniel Williams - I am 14 years old and I attend the Glebe school, West Wickham, Kent. I try to be a conscientious student; my favourite subjects are PE, Geography and Expressive arts. Outside of school, I swim for Chislehurst Millennium swimming club and am the South East Champion in table tennis.

Scot Gilman – I am 14 years old and a student at the Glebe school. I enjoy school, with PE being my favourite. I love all sports and follow Chelsea football club.
3. The Young Disabled Leaders Project

The Young Disabled Leaders (YDL) project took place over a one-year period, covering the three areas of London, Birmingham and the Leeds / Humberside region. In each of these areas, three training days were held to focus on different aspects of ‘Leadership’. The overall focus of this project was two-fold: to up-skill the young leaders and to glean from them advice and experiences that form Section 5 of this report.

The individuals that have formed the YDL cohort are extremely varied in skill, experience and ambition, as can be seen from the previous section. All of our participants are within the ages of 13 and 19 years old that experience a disability, injury or ill-health. Along with this cohort, there were a few older ones who have acted as peer mentors throughout the project. It was interesting to see that some of our group have already demonstrated a great deal of enthusiasm for disability rights and civic action, including members of Youth Councils, Youth Governments and nominees for Radar’s Young Person of the Year Award.

Regardless of their previous experience, this project aimed to focus on specific skills required to be a leader and gave the individuals an opportunity to work with like-minded peers to galvanise and encourage them. Hopefully, this shall raise their sights even higher and incite them to become more involved with causes in their local area, regionally, nationally and even internationally.

To give the leaders a platform for discussion and to keep a dialogue between the training events, we established a blog for the YDL programme: www.youngdisabledleaders.com. We chose to use this as a channel, as it was seen as appropriate to the cohort’s age, easier to monitor and it was possible to regulate content whilst maintaining privacy for the younger ones involved.

For each of the training sessions, we utilised the experience and talents of youth trainers from CSV and Radar leadership facilitators. These are experienced trainers in the area of leadership and took the lead on each of the days. Content was discussed and collaborated on with the trainer, Events Coordinator and the leadership team prior to the event.

As a means of feedback and monitoring, the Young Foundation provided us with SEED Stars – a visual scaling system where the young leaders could indicate how they felt with regard to specific skills when they first came onto the programme and after each training day. These ranged from emotional resilience and communication skills to organizational skills and decision making.
Training Day 1 - What makes a good Leader?

This first day was used as a means of ice-breaking and to allow the group to meet and begin to gel as a team. The overall theme of the day was to create a benchmark of what makes a good leader from the young peoples' viewpoint. This allowed us to see if their perceptions needed exploring and how to approach various elements of leadership.

Through a series of games, the group got to know each other and the trainer was able to see the mix of characteristics and skills possessed by the group. It was noteworthy to see who was dominant in the group, who was rather passive and who found collaboration difficult, as this gave insight to their personality and their view of leadership. It also helped us to plan and structure upcoming sessions.

In discussion, various leaders were identified from history and popular society: Nelson Mandela, David Beckham and Tony Blair to name a few. Their merits and demerits were discussed and gave an opportunity to challenge the group’s view that one must be a prominent and successful person to be a Leader. This was the first step in showing the young leaders that one must not always lead from the front, nor with the loudest voice.

An activity that was valuable was where the group were presented with a pile of picture cards. On each card there was a characteristic or personality trait: courage, wisdom, enthusiasm etc. The group was asked to sort the list into a ‘priority list’ for a person if they want to be a leader. The results were interesting.

They displayed a belief that one must be brave and courageous, prepared to take risks and lead from the front. Whilst this was true, it allowed an opportunity to challenge this view and see that empathy and a joyful nature were also valuable traits.

The group were then asked to pick out characteristics that they felt they possessed. It was nice to see that they picked out traits that they originally viewed as ‘non-essential’, as it showed them that they could be Leaders without needing to make great changes.

The afternoon was spent looking at how digital media is used on websites and on the Internet. They were trained in the use of professional digital cameras and Photoshop and were able to take pictures of each other and digitally manipulate these images. Not only did this serve to further bond the group, but it also taught them new skills that could be employed on their own blogs and websites.
Result: The group was given a relaxed and friendly environment in which all could flourish and begin to bond as a group. A baseline was formed as to the group’s perception of a Leader, whilst challenging this by highlighting lesser stressed characteristic traits which are invaluable. Individuals in the group could see that they have the potential to be leaders and their confidence was buoyed.

Training Day 2 - Being part of a team

This day was designed to demonstrate to the groups how one can be an effective part of a team and the value of communication. Through a series of games, this point was humorously hit home. Through human puppets, MI5 missions and other inventive means, the group began to realise that forcing someone to follow is far less effective than motivating someone to follow. The value of teamwork, trust, compromise and communication were appreciated by all.

One example of this was a role-play exercise where the group was asked to work in smaller teams to create a funding application presentation. This required them to work under pressure to identify an objective, work out costings and discuss details. Once done, they were expected to divide the presentation so that all had something to say. They then had to present their application in a Dragon’s Den scenario to the trainers.

This exercise allowed the group to put into practice what they had learnt about teamwork. It was exciting to see previously dominant and vocal individuals giving precedence to more quiet and reserved members of the team. They supported each other in turn-taking and in remembering details and won over the cynical Dragons each time.

Using a ‘critical sandwich’ the group was trained in how to give constructive feedback and how to always remember to give praise. The critical sandwich was a mnemonic to help the young leaders only give constructive feedback when preceded and followed by positive comments – the positive comments being the bread and the criticism forming the meat! This was a simple but useful tool that the group put into practice when giving peer feedback.

The group was then was asked to compare and appraise a series of websites and blogs. This information would be used to form the social media section found in Section 5. The young leaders were excellent judges of what makes an effective website or blog. Websites that contain no media, are of a high language register and lack accessibility options all failed to pass muster. Some of the young leaders host their own websites and blogs, so
this was a worthwhile exercise to inform their own work and to help their mediums become more effective in delivering their messages.

**Result:** In this session the group’s confidence grew considerably. Seeing them work as effective members of a team; seeing them support one another to achieve a mutual goal; and to see them become effective and constructive critics was a powerful testament to their development and potential.

### Training Day 3 - Handing over the reins

The aim of this final training day was to see the young leaders putting all of their learning into practice. The structure of the day was designed to give opportunities for the young people to take control of scenarios – to be leaders.

As a foregleam to the final event, where they might be asked to present in front of an audience, the groups were tasked with working in pairs and putting together a presentation. This presentation was to summarise their experiences and learning from the programme – a reflective exercise where they could individually assess their own progress. This was an important section of the day, where they could truly celebrate and share their personal and collective successes. Again, it was astonishing to see them supporting one another and working together so that each of their voices was heard.

They were equipped with ‘Five Golden Rules’ to remember when giving a presentation. Many of our YDL groups are engaged in activities that require them to speak in front of others, so they welcomed and appreciated this specific skills training.

The rest of the day was then spent talking about what volunteering opportunities the young leaders have been, or are, involved in. They expressed their experiences, good and bad, and formulated some elements that they felt were important for organisations to consider when recruiting young disabled people. These have formed a large part of the advice section in Section 5.

A reflective exercise was then used to concrete the learning over the programme, where the group drew out what they have learned and enjoyed. Seeing their creativity and appreciation for a programme like this shows the value of organisations looking to these young people for input and support.

**Result:** This was an extremely rewarding day. The team was able to put into practice all the different elements taught throughout the programme: teamwork; trust; empathy;
confidence; how to give an effective presentation; and the value of reflective discussion. They are now equipped to attend and participate in the final event where organisations will be keen to see what they have achieved.

In summary, this programme had a dramatic effect on many in the groups. It saw them transformed from a group of individuals, who felt that ‘leading’ meant shouting the loudest or achieving the highest, to a team of peers who could work together to produce excellent results. They are now a group who appreciate the need to step back and listen to others; to value the quietest person in the room rather than the loudest; to articulate your wants and needs; and to utilise the skills of peers. Seeing their confidence at speaking out in front of adults and relative strangers and hearing them articulate their ambitions and desires proves that these ones are a rich resource for any organisation. In addition, this programme has shown each and every one of the young leaders that disability is not a barrier to being a leader and being a success.
4. Testimonials

“Since being on the YDL project I have gained a lot more confidence and, in turn, it has helped me to project a clearer understanding of where I am now to where I need to be in the future. The sessions are really good as they re-enforce our own belief that, with the help of others around us, anything is possible for disabled people. All too often, disabled people are tarred with the same brush that they will not succeed. But the meetings we have had are slowly but surely helping to dispel those myths. We can and will succeed as a team and as individuals. Positive thinking rules OK.” – Jamie Anthony Horsley

“I have gained a lot of skills on this project and also made lots of new friends. I have learnt how to be a better leader and the skills you need. I have enjoyed playing the games and getting to know everyone. It has been great to learn new skills from other people and discuss the skills we think you need. I am very grateful for this project and it has helped me become a better person.” – Holly Girven

“My disability is not visible to many, hardly anyone can see it if I don't point it out to them, so as a result I have the somewhat exclusive opportunity to witness projects and activities from the inside, specifically without facilitators being aware of my needs. Accessibility isn't about what changes people make for you, it's about what things are already in place. The YDL project is an example of arrangements already being in place. Many projects deem themselves to be 'all-inclusive', or wide-reaching, but they don't even seem to have the self-awareness to notice who they are excluding through their practices and procedures.” – Hannah Rebecca Joy Guscoth

“I got involved with the YDL project because I wanted to learn new things and meet new people and improve my leadership skills. I have enjoyed attending and made some really good friends. It has helped me develop my leadership skills by presenting to groups and leading on certain activities.” – Paul Parkins

“I have gained many things from the YDL project, ranging from presentation skills to working closely with a group of people. I am really glad that I was involved in the project. The project has encouraged me to stand up for things I believe in and to get involved in forums and other projects. I really enjoyed meeting and working with other disabled youths. I got to learn about other people’s experiences and what they get involved in. It was also nice to work with positive role models like Abdi who has encouraged us to become young leaders and to not let our disabilities be a barrier. I think there needs to be more projects like this that reach more disabled youths.” – Stephanie Vaz
“I feel that the project has enabled me to recognise my own strengths whilst also appreciating that other young people have special and different needs to me. I enjoyed meeting new people and engaging in activities that allowed individual qualities to be recognised. I especially enjoyed the leadership exercise that encouraged team building skills, communication and confidence building.” – **Daniel Williams**

“I joined Young Disabled Leaders because the title appealed. I have a disability and I love leadership, but I was moved to join mostly through not knowing what would be involved. We learned about confidence, pitching ideas and constructive criticism. All the adult leaders were incredibly supportive of the leadership I am involved in outside the group. I have met some wonderful people who I hope to stay friends with for a long time after this experience. It’s amazing to be part of such a wonderful group, with such amazing, inspiring young people. Thank you YDL for such an awesome time!” – **Imogen Godwin**
5. Model for Youth Engagement

Radar and CSV have spent the last year working with its Young Disabled Leaders to gather their thoughts and experiences of volunteering, civic action and trying to ‘get involved’. In addition to this, we have compiled information already in the public domain to form this section of our report. It aims to give organisations like yourselves advice and ideas on how to better engage with young disabled people, to capitalise on their skills, talents and creativity, as demonstrated throughout this YDL project.

A major report by Disability LIB in 2008 warned that the disability sector is facing a ‘crisis in leadership’ and put young disabled people at the centre of it. Young disabled people consistently tell us they want to hold meaningful positions with responsibility and/or influence. So what is going wrong?

A Few Facts

- One in five young adults aged 16 to 24 were unemployed in 2009.
- One in four adults with a work-limiting disability are not working but want to.
- There are 180,000 registered charities in England and Wales, with nearly 850,000 trustees, but less than 4,500 of those trustees (less than 1%) are under 25 years old.
- In 2010, 70% of young disabled people said discrimination keeps them out of work.

Why engage with young disabled people?

Should legislation be the only motivator in making opportunities more accessible to young disabled people? Through this project, we have been repeatedly startled as to the drive, skills and ambition of the young people and can pay testament to the contribution they could make to an organisation.

Franklin D. Roosevelt said: “We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future”. Surely the future of the Third Sector, including all disability organisations, lies in the hands of the young. As a matter of self-preservation, it is vital that we invest in young disabled people to equip them to pick up the mantle from their predecessors. It is now that we must teach them to be effective, competent and confident members of society.
Having young people involved in your organisation reaps many benefits, including:

- It will bring new vision and a fresh perspective to your organisation
- It creates a pool of volunteers who can help accommodate austerity measures
- Including young people in decision making means local and national policies are created which reflect what everyone wants and needs in their communities
- It taps into a wealth of knowledge that older people often do not possess, for example, social media, ICT and advertising. This allows your organisation to engage with specific segments of your target group that may have been previously inaccessible
- It will create a culture of openness within your organisation, where many more may feel comfortable to disclose previously unmentioned disability
- Young people are often more flexible in their working hours, thus creating a more flexible work force

Benefits are not one-way. As previously mentioned, one in four adults with a work-limiting disability is not working, but wants to. Opening up organisations to young people gives them opportunities and experiences that can truly aid them in participating in wider society, such as:

- Dispelling the myth that utilising disabled people is ‘complicated’ and ‘too difficult’
- Giving young people experience in professional environments and roles, which will better equip them to secure paid employment. Over 70% of employers would hire a candidate with volunteering experience over someone who has never volunteered
- Giving them a sense of purpose and ambition that could have been quashed by previous negative experiences

But what roles could be fulfilled by young disabled people? To name a few: trustees; focus groups members; web monitors and contributors; fundraisers; youth ambassadors; youth advocates; office support; researchers; consultants.

As you can see, there is a massive variety of opportunities that could work to mutual benefit for an organisation and the young person.
Is this theory or fact?

Case Study: Vitalise – a national UK charity - Extract from Executive Summary viii

“Vitalise is a national charity providing essential breaks for disabled people and carers, and holidays for visually impaired people. The charity mainly operates through five accessible Centres in England – in Nottingham, Southport, Southampton, Essex and Cornwall. Young volunteers have played a key role in helping to deliver services to Vitalise guests for over 40 years. They are essential for the success of the organisation.

“The principle and practice of integrating young volunteers of all backgrounds with older volunteers of all backgrounds in one shared environment has been fundamental to the success of Vitalise’s volunteer programme.

“Each year, Vitalise engages over 2,000 young volunteers... Together they provide over 5,000 weeks of care and support... Volunteering with Vitalise has a profound effect on young people, their futures and those around them.

“Vitalise works with volunteers in a variety of roles including those of trustees, local committee members and fundraising supporters.”

The big question - How?

So, now we all agree that engaging with young disabled people brings myriad benefits not only to an organisation’s immediate functionality, but also to future engagement and effectiveness. The benefits to the individual volunteer cannot be ignored, providing them with opportunities and skills that they may not have otherwise gained.

But how? Perhaps greater youth engagement is on your organisation’s agenda, perhaps you have tried previously, with varying success. Perhaps you would like to, but do not know where to start.

“Volunteering should be promoted as being cool, progressive, respected, beneficial, relevant and enhancing.” – Generation V Report, Institute for Volunteer Research ix

What follows is a framework for youth engagement that has been compiled through input from our YDL participants and gathered research.
BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

Attracting and retaining young people requires more strategic thinking than many think.

**Have a clear vision** – a number of our YDL leaders expressed frustration with many volunteering opportunities. Upon entering the organisation, they were under-utilised and felt like they were fulfilling menial or token roles. It is imperative that before you advance with attracting and recruiting young people as volunteers, interns or employees, roles and tasks are clearly defined and agreed. This will make the experience rewarding and effective for all involved and will ensure repeat volunteering and possible conversion to being paid members of the staff team.

**Commit** – attracting and retaining young people requires commitment from every level of an organisation. Directors and Senior Management need to appreciate the benefits and the demands of utilising volunteers, thus committing funds to supporting volunteering opportunities. If there is no cost to the organisation, the cost will fall on the volunteer, often negating the value of the opportunity. This commitment must be seen from ‘top-to-bottom’, including ground staff, as they must be prepared to offer training, support and encouragement throughout the experience. Organisations that have made the necessary commitment express that the benefits far outweigh the challenges and it results in a worthwhile exercise for everyone. It might be that to attract the skills of young ones, funds must be committed to creating a new paid role within your organisation. Again, although this may be a pull on resources, their input in website design, fundraising or youth engagement may generate far more income in the long run.

GET THE WORD OUT:

Many young people do not volunteer because they are not aware of the opportunities available to them or the benefits.

Many of our YDL leaders first entered volunteering and participation schemes through hearing about them at school or college. These institutions provide a mutually beneficial opportunity with organisations looking to recruit – schools require Work Experience placements and Duke of Edinburgh Award opportunities; colleges require placements where specific skills can be demonstrated in real environments and developed through osmosis – the mutual benefits are obvious.
Traditional Approaches:

**Face-to-face** – although seemingly crude, this is often the most effective way to recruit volunteers. Identifying people within your organisation who can fulfil this role is imperative and supporting them to hone their skills is paramount.

Visiting schools and colleges provides a unique opportunity to ‘humanise’ your organisation and allows the young people to look beyond their original perceptions. It provides a forum for questioning and can effectively dispel fears that many have regarding volunteering in general, or specifically their fears of volunteering within a disability organisation.

On a larger scale, attending recruitment fairs, exhibitions and disability campaign events can all provide a ‘broadcast’ opportunity. Using this dragnet approach allows you to talk with many that might be outside of your usual target group.

**Word of Mouth** – the age-old ‘grapevine’ can do much of the work for you when disseminating information regarding opportunities. Volunteering networks, disability networks and family links can all provide mediums for getting your ‘call to arms’ out there. Many of our YDL participants got involved off the back of a friend recommending a scheme through their own positive experiences. These ones effectively become ambassadors for your organisation, doing all the recruiting work for you.

Being a bit more modern:

The Internet is a formidable resource, but it is a beast that needs to be tamed. In recent years, many organisations have realised that joining every newsgroup, forum, network, Twitter and Facebook account may not be the most effective means – ‘less is more’ still proves to be powerful advice.

The answer seems to be that it depends on your objectives. First, though, one needs to know one’s enemy.

What follows is a brief breakdown of social media channels and their possible use.

**Use of social networking in engaging with young people:**
Social networking is a collection of Internet tools that facilitate interaction and communication. Not all are appropriate for your objective and not all yield the results you might be looking for.

The benefits of social media include:
- Building awareness of your organisation and its activities
- Cost effective means of acquiring new supporters and volunteers
• Directing the voice of ‘happy customers’ who can express the benefits of volunteering to their peers independently
• Gives stakeholders a channel to express their views about your organisation, providing an opportunity for learning and internal improvements

We have defined below a few of the popular channels that are used by our YDL leaders.

**Facebook™ – Social Network** – these networks focus on building relationships. You can own a profile and attract ‘friends’ or followers. Within this, you can post information, pictures and videos. This gives the feel of interaction and enables friends to talk back.

**Blogger™ – Blog** – these are websites that allow users to post an Internet-diary. These can be used to disseminate news, advice, policy documents and gives a human voice to a news site. Readers can comment, which creates a forum of discussion.

**Twitter™ – Microblog** – a short form of a blog where users post short messages and statements (140 characters). They are a great way of giving real-time updates from events, generating interest and excitement. Often, this is a one-way medium, with followers just reading posts. They can, however, be re-posted creating a web of links to your original post. These are public expressions, which can be seen by anyone.

**YouTube™ – Video Sharing** – this is a popular medium for video posts. The upside of this free site is that videos can be easily embedded into Facebook accounts, websites and blogs.

**Foursquare™ – Geolocation** – using GPS technology, users can announce where they are and what they are doing. This is a great way of advertising an event and showing popularity, thus encouraging local ‘readers’ to attend.

**Factoids:**

As of July 2010:
• Facebook had 500 million users and 50% of these people log on daily
• Twitter users sent out 65 millions tweets per day

Many of our YDL leaders, and recent research, warns against jumping on the bandwagon and joining everything. They said that the worst thing an organisation can do is join all of the available mediums and only use them on an ad hoc basis, with irregular updates and out-of-date information. The key is to decide on your target group and your objective and focus your energies on building relationships and dialogue with your followers. This relationship can then be translated into action and recruitment.
APPLICATION AND SELECTION:

The application process seems to be a large and formidable barrier to many becoming volunteers, applying for roles or entering civic action.

“Three quarters of Trailblazers think the job application process puts disabled people at a disadvantage” - Trailblazers, Muscular Dystrophy Campaign

Our YDL leaders expressed disappointment that many volunteering schemes and opportunities come with a gigantic or complex application form. Sadly, often it is disability organisations who demonstrate the least amount of awareness in this area.

How can applications be made more user-friendly?

- Make the application available in different languages and formats, including a professionally created Easy-Read version
- Make the availability of formats known – often they exist but no-one knows
- Allow applications to be submitted in sign language, verbally or face-to-face
- Make the application process as flexible as possible. For example, when asking for applications for the YDL project we encouraged applicants to answer the questions in their own way. This led to one participant submitting her application in the form of a poem. Allowing creativity will demonstrate at this initial stage the types of skills your potential young people possess.

Some might take the view that all volunteers should be welcomed and screening should not be needed. This is not necessarily true. Having identified definite roles calls for a specific skill-set, thus there needs to be some sort of screening of potential applicants. The role might be anything from being a trustee, a member of a focus group, someone to run the website or a fundraiser – all calling for very different knowledge bases.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT:

The YDL leaders expressed that on occasion, they have been welcomed into a role and then left to their own devices. This will only result in their experience being short-lived and will make them think twice about doing so again. Clear induction and training is vital to ensure that the volunteer knows the organisation’s expectations, the remit of the role and who they are to go to if experiencing difficulty.

Many young people have never been in work, or have had bad experiences, so a flexible and empathetic approach is needed. Training should be broken up into digestible units, appreciating the individual needs of the inductee. Being willing to adapt the normal induction to accommodate the young disabled...
person will make the whole experience more effective. This may mean providing materials in an appropriate format, bringing in sign language interpreters, or providing a note-taker, to name a few.

Sometimes new members can feel isolated from the main staff team. Ensuring to introduce your young person to the staff team, as well as including them in team meetings, activities and emails goes a long way to making them feel valued. Some organisations have employed a ‘buddy system’, where the young person is placed with someone older or more experienced, who can guide them in the initial stages.

FEEDBACK:
Again, this is a two-way street. Whilst you want to know how you have done and how to improve, so does the young person. If they are on a placement for college or school or looking to build their CV, they will be looking for tangible recognition and feedback.

Many expressed their disappointment that when a volunteering role came to an end they were given a thank-you and a handshake and shown the door. Whilst informal feedback and recognition – such as a thank you, commendation and constructive criticism – is important, having a formal feedback strategy is vital for them to feel that they have developed and added something to your organisation.

• Welcoming the volunteer in an email or news bulletin makes them feel welcome and lets everyone know who they are and why they are in your organisation
• Having a weekly, or regular, meeting with the young person and their manager allows for any issues or questions to be addressed and for commendation and encouragement to be given
• Recording what skills should be learnt or developed at the start of the role allows development to be tracked and gives a structure to the experience
• Asking the young person to feedback at the end of an opportunity informs your organisation on how to better engage with this age group and makes them feel valued. This, again, will encourage them to become involved again in the future, perhaps in a role of greater responsibility or commitment.

ACCESS:
In discussions and workshops with our YDL leaders, this was a recurring theme. We have decided to create a separate section to raise access requirements which are relevant to the whole experience, from recruitment all the way through to retention.

Information:
• Using email, the Internet and social media websites allows users to access information in a format that is appropriate for them. They may already be using screen readers, voice recognition software, or specialist software which will allow them to access your information. This is far more effective than paper-
based, fixed-format factsheets, newsletters and application forms. Allow application forms and feedback forms to be submitted electronically.

- Give thought to making information available in Easy-Read, British Sign Language or audio formats. Although the cost of these might be high, the value of recruiting someone with specialist skills in website access and design, a trustee or a consultant will off-set this in the long run.
- Articulate the full demand and expectation of the opportunity on offer. Due to a lack of experience or access to information many young people under-estimate (or over-estimate) the expectations of a role, which results in a bad experience or no experience at all. In the case of a role of responsibility, such as a trustee, make it known what is expected and why it is something that can be taken up by anyone or why you would specifically welcome applications from young people.

Cost:
- Many disabled people need to travel in specialist transport or use wheel-chair accessible stations, which can increase the cost of travelling to a volunteering role or job. Being willing to cover the cost of transport makes an opportunity more accessible and attractive.
- Due to the current climate, many disabled people are not able to find work, but would like to. Think about offering internships that are paid, or at least cover certain costs, to give disabled people a ‘step-up’ into employment.

Adaptations:
If it is necessary for a volunteer to work from the building, consider the following:

- Step-free access to working environments
- Allowing the individual to work from the ground-floor, if lifts are not available
- Providing specialist software that allows access to technology, such as Dragon (voice recognition software) or Jaws (a screen reader for visually impaired users)
- Providing ergonomic tables and chairs, computers and peripherals
- Accessible rooms to work from and meet in
- Installing mirrors in a lift to allow a wheel-chair user to navigate safely
- Power doors allowing easy access

(Note: many of the above could be useful to present staff members or visitors to your building and would not be to the sole benefit of the disabled individual.)

It may not be necessary for a role to be carried out by being present in an organisation’s buildings. Allowing young people to work remotely opens up the opportunity to a much larger segment of society who would find travelling to your organisation’s offices challenging.
Everyone involved in the YDL project hopes that you have found this report useful. Whilst initiatives like the Big Society and legislation like the Equality Act 2010 give compelling reason to want to engage more with young disabled people, the motivation should be from recognising the skills and talents that could be of benefit to your organisation. This project has proven that these young people are, in many cases, already Leaders of their generation through their involvement in disability organisations, Ambassador Schemes and Youth Politics. We hope that you recognise their value and seek out opportunities to engage more fully with them.

Endnotes

i Disability Lib - *Thriving or Surviving: Challenges and Opportunities for Disabled People’s Organisations in the 21st Century*

ii www.poverty.org.uk

iii www.poverty.org.uk

iv www.charity-commission.gov.uk

v www.mdctrailblazers.org

vi Radar access to elected office

vii www.direct.gov.uk

viii http://www.vitalise.org.uk - ‘Young Gifted and Committed’

ix Generation V: Young people speak out on volunteering - Research Bulletin, Institute for Volunteering Research

x www.mdctrailblazers.org