

Youth Participation Worker

A careers information sheet for people interested in paid or voluntary work in the voluntary and community youth sector

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What's it like being a Youth Participation Worker?

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YWCA is a charity working with the most disadvantaged young women in England and Wales. (www.ywca-gb.org.uk).



What do you do at work?

'I organise and support young women to be involved in national events, including Party Conferences, and I coordinate the national work of Participation Workers who work in our local centres. I coordinate and develop opportunities for young women to have a voice locally and nationally within the YWCA and in the external world. I share this role with a colleague on a job share basis. We have developed the Wise Up Accredited Participation Programme. I also make funding applications, manage budgets and look for ways in which young women can be heard within the organisation.'

How did you get to be a Youth Participation Worker?

'I started with the YWCA in 1998 as a youth worker in the St. Helen's project. Before that I was a detached Youth Worker for Liverpool Youth Service.

'I originally did a degree and planned to qualify as a teacher. After realising that I didn't like the way learning was offered in schools, I regrouped and saw an advert for a youth worker. I was accepted and then had the opportunity whilst working for Liverpool Youth Service to gain a youth work qualification through the YMCA George Williams College. I completed the Diploma in Informal Education through distance learning.

'I started with the YWCA at St. Helens working in the School Exclusion Project and ran drop in sessions and eventually managed an informal education team. In the meantime the YWCA nationally had developed a Policy and Campaigns team and what evolved was a focus

on young women's participation. I was managing a strong youth work project, which included campaigning and participation. I was then appointed as a curriculum development manager with a role to involve local projects in campaigning. A successful bid to the Big Lottery Young People's Fund led to the establishment of our full-time Young Women's Participation Workers project.'

What's so great about your job?

'I enjoy combining the management role with direct work with young women. I also get great motivation and inspiration from the young women I work with. I like to see the difference it makes to those involved and the potential to influence wider changes through government and social policy. I have also had the pleasure of seeing something grow and become embedded in the organisation.'

What's not so great about your job?

'It is hard to juggle the varying demands and working on a lot of things at the same time, such as developing external networks and building internal links. There is also the challenge of getting everyone to really be open to young women's involvement. It is also challenging to maintain flexibility to local need through local projects whilst implementing a national agenda. I dislike all the travelling, although it is unavoidable.'

Where is this leading you?

'I like being in a role that has an impact on the whole organisation, rather than being a Centre Manager. I might look to do more training of other workers and young people in the future, developing other people's practice and sharing learning.

What are your hot tips for would be Youth Participation Workers?

- participation shouldn't be just seen as a specialist role. It should be part of every youth worker's role. It starts with each of us and our own practice.
- you have to be able to trust young people to be involved.

Key Facts

What might be involved?

The work

Youth participation is about giving young people the opportunity to have their voices heard and to help them make decisions for themselves. It is only by working in true partnership with young people, by listening to their opinions and concerns that we can ensure that services meet their needs and that society can benefit from their contributions. It is the participation worker's role to help support and empower young people and facilitate their engagement.

There are many different youth participation jobs. Some jobs focus on young people's rights or helping young people to engage in the democratic process. Other roles are about supporting an organisation, which works with or for young people to respond to young people's needs, ideas and priorities.

The work could be with specific groups of young people, for example, young people using a particular service like a hospital, or could focus on a particular issue. Often participation workers use creative methods to get young people involved. Whoever you are working with, whatever you are involving them in, and whatever means you are using to get them involved, your job as a participation worker is to help make sure young people are at the heart of things.

There are so many different roles for participation workers, that depending on the job, you could find yourself supporting young people to do a whole range of things.

If you are facilitating young people's involvement in the organisation that you work for, then you will be empowering and encouraging young people to get

involved in different parts of the organisation such as:

- recruiting staff
- project planning
- fundraising
- business planning
- creating publicity

Other participation jobs might focus more on helping young people to get involved in their community or democratic action. In which case you might be supporting young people to get involved in:

- campaigning
- promoting young people's rights
- political engagement and policy development (locally, nationally or internationally)
- evaluation of services
- delivering presentations
- research
- training
- peer support
- conflict resolution
- volunteering
- practical action

Context

Depending on your job, you might find yourself mostly based in one place, or doing a lot of travelling if you have

any regional or national responsibilities. Getting young people involved through occasional residential projects is something you are likely to find yourself doing in many participation jobs

Responsibilities

In addition to working with young people, you're likely to have other responsibilities that might include:

- delivering training
- producing resources
- supporting others to work with young people
- developing structures and methods of working
- evaluating work
- writing reports
- planning activities, events and residential programmes
- liaising with parents
- undertaking risk assessments
- promoting the project

Pay and conditions

For at least some of the time, you have to be available when young people are too, so evening or weekend working is quite common. Normally you will be able to take time off to compensate for this.

You can get part-time and full-time jobs. Salaries vary widely depending on the level of responsibility involved, but start at around £19,000 to £25,000. More senior practitioners or those with strategic or managerial roles can expect to earn significantly more.



Routes in

Personality, skills, interests and qualities

You will need to enjoy working with people and to do the job well, be good at communicating with both young people and people in high places e.g. politicians.

A Youth Participation Worker needs to:

- be a good facilitator – able to help young people to take action and empower them to get involved
- be friendly and approachable
- be able to relate to people from diverse backgrounds
- be flexible and able to think creatively
- have good written skills
- be good at listening
- have the capacity to liaise with other organisations
- be committed to young people's rights
- be committed to working out of normal office hours

Paid staff and volunteers working with young people should have an enhanced criminal record disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). In addition, if you want to work with young people or vulnerable adults from November 2010 you will need to apply to be registered with the Independent Safeguarding Authority's Vetting and Barring Scheme. For more information go to www.isa-gov.org.uk/ and www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk/. A driving licence is also useful in many roles.

Learning pathway/experience/volunteering

There is no single route into this kind of work and you don't need a special participation qualification to become a participation worker. The most important thing is having experience of working with young people and being committed to empower them. Volunteering is an excellent way of getting experience and getting a feel for the kind of work involved and whether it's for you. Advice on how to find a volunteer placement can be found at www.ncvys.org.uk >> [training](#) >> [careers and volunteering](#).

A good route into participation work is to gain experience and qualifications as a youth worker and then to specialise.

Qualifications and training

The main relevant qualifications you could have are the same for being a youth worker (see the NCVYS Youth Worker Careers Information Sheet and Qualifications in Youth Work FAQ Information Sheet). There are some post-graduate youth participation qualifications on offer from Birkbeck College, but the vast majority of participation workers do not have such a specialist qualification.

There are a lot of opportunities to train and develop more skills on the job, for example Participation Works has a database of training, workshops and events

- www.participationworks.org.uk/events-training

Where it could lead

Opportunities to progress could include moving on to manage others or to coordinate larger or more strategic projects.

Food for thought

Over the last five years or so youth participation has been an area of significant growth and is now recognised as a specialist job role in its own right (but still continues to be an important aspect of every youth worker's role).

Participation is high on the agenda of the Government, funders and of organisations, so job opportunities are likely to continue to increase.

This work fits well with the making a positive contribution element of Every Child Matters (the Government-led programme of change to improve outcomes for all children and young people – see (www.everychildmatters.gov.uk))

Find out more

National Council for Voluntary Youth Services

(NCVYS) www.ncvys.org.uk – the national network for the voluntary and community youth sector in England. The web page www.ncvys.org.uk >> [training](#) >> [careers and volunteering](#), contains advice on how to find a volunteer placement, where to go for further careers advice and details of any funding sources to pay for training courses. See also www.ncvys.org.uk >> [youth participation](#)

Participation Works www.participationworks.org.uk

– the online gateway for children and young people's participation.

See also www.participationworks.org.uk/networks/spotlight-pwne-members for insights into the roles of a wide range of participation workers

Hear by Right, National Youth Agency <http://hbr.nya.org.uk>

– offers tried and tested standards for organisations to improve their practice and policy on the participation of children and young people.

Birkbeck College University of London www.bbk.ac.uk/study/pg2010/voluntarysectorstudies/TMSYOPRT.html

– offers postgraduate study in Youth Participation (at MSC postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma levels). Study is part-time and designed for those already working in the field, or recent graduates wishing to get into the area of work.

Equal opportunities

If you require this information in different formats or have any other need, then please contact the workforce development officer at NCVYS.

Please email mail@ncvys.org.uk or ring 020 7278 1041.

Thanks

This information sheet has been written for NCVYS by Alison Straker and Peter Miller and Nichola Brown from NCVYS. Thanks go to the following individuals for their contributions: Steven Pryse from NCVYS, ENVOY – NCVYS’s national youth forum, Ali and Gareth Thomas.

Disclaimer

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