Get involved
in the youth justice system

HELP YOUNG PEOPLE
REDUCE YOUTH CRIME
HELP VICTIMS
MAKE A DIFFERENCE
# A quick guide to volunteering

## How will I make a difference?
Volunteering in the youth justice system is rewarding and worthwhile. You can make a real difference by:
- working with young people who have offended or are at risk of offending to help them turn their lives around
- helping to reduce youth crime and make your community safer
- helping victims.

## Who can volunteer?
People of all ages and backgrounds can volunteer. What matters is that you have relevant skills, especially the ability to communicate with, and support, young people.

## What do I get in return?
As a volunteer, you should get:
- the chance to make a difference to young people’s lives
- training and support
- the opportunity to improve your skills
- reimbursement of expenses related to your volunteering.

## What opportunities are available?
Volunteers carry out many different roles, such as:
- reading coach
- mentor for young people
- youth offender panel member
- appropriate adult for a young person in custody
- magistrate.

## How do I become a volunteer?
Contact your local youth offending team through [www.yjb.gov.uk/yots](http://www.yjb.gov.uk/yots) or look up their number in the phone book. Visit [www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk) and search their database of volunteering opportunities or look up the details of your local Volunteer Centre at [www.volunteering.org.uk/volunteer](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/volunteer) if you live in England or [www.volunteering-wales.net](http://www.volunteering-wales.net) if you live in Wales. Other contact details are listed on pages 16–17.
How will I make a difference?

If you want to...

• make a difference to a young person’s life
• see less crime in your community
• make your community safer
• ensure that victims are listened to
• learn new skills and gain useful experience

... then volunteer in the youth justice system.

Through volunteering, you can...

• Help change the lives of young people and their families
  Behind the media image of young people who offend are usually young people who have had difficult lives and who want to get ‘back on track’. Of course, many young people face difficulties and don’t go on to commit crime, but the ones that do can find it even harder to get back into mainstream life. By volunteering with young people you can help them turn their lives around, and the lives of their families.

• Help to reduce crime
  By volunteering with young people who have offended or who are at risk of offending, you can help them choose a different path from crime. Often these young people have become disconnected from opportunities to do something positive with their life. Whether this be education, access to safe and constructive activities – like sport – or having someone who can listen to their problems or worries.

Many people are concerned about crime and anti-social behaviour in their community. Volunteers get a better understanding of youth crime, young people and the youth justice system, and help make their community safer.

• Help victims
  Volunteers can help victims of youth crime deal with the crime and rebuild their lives. For instance, by volunteering as a youth offender panel member, you can help to ensure that victims are involved in the justice process. You’ll agree a contract with the young person that aims to address the causes of their offending behaviour and repair the harm caused to the victim.
**About the youth justice system**

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) oversees and monitors the youth justice system. Many different organisations and professionals are involved in the system, including:

- the police and youth courts
- social services and the education system
- youth offending teams, which work in the community with young people who are at risk of offending, or who have offended
- the secure estate for children and young people (secure training centres, secure children’s homes and young offender institutions), which is where young people who have been given a custodial sentence are sent to.

The YJB does not recruit volunteers directly but provides guidance to youth offending teams and the secure estate on how to get the best from volunteers.

**Behind the behaviour**

Why do some children and young people become involved in crime, while others stay out of trouble?

Often young people who offend have had difficult lives. School exclusion, family conflict, abuse, poor housing and the availability of drugs are some of the factors that can increase the likelihood of a young person offending.

Even if children and young people have experienced some of these risk factors, there may be other things in their lives that help buffer them against those risks, such as their personality type; having a positive experience of education; good literacy skills; having a stable, affectionate relationship with one or both parents; or links with other adults who model positive social behaviour. As a volunteer, you could increase the factors that help protect young people from getting involved in crime, for instance by helping them with their literacy skills. Young people tell us that getting into education, training or employment and having a positive adult role model in their lives are key factors that stop offending and reoffending.

Most volunteers don’t work with the most serious, persistent young offenders. Many young people make a mistake and enter the youth justice system but learn from that and go on to fulfil their potential. By supporting and empowering those young people, you can help them learn, move on and succeed.
Did you know?

> There are approximately 8,000 volunteers in the youth justice system.

> If young people haven’t committed an offence by the age of 14, they are less likely to do so in the future and, the earlier they begin to offend, the higher the chances of them becoming persistent and violent offenders in later life.

> According to research, over half the young people entering custody (average age 17) have a reading age below the level of an average 11-year-old.

The following poem illustrates the experiences of one young person who wants to change his behaviour.

**Chasing the Dragon**
by Jason (Brinsford Young Offender Institution)

Counting the cost of things
I have lost. The times and the places,
the friendships and the faces.
Hot and cold. Seem to look old.
Is it time to STOP?

Crying and shaking. Body still aching.
Mind still spinning. Must stop grinning.
Vision blurring. Patience is wearing.
Must be time to STOP?
Living my life on the edge of a knife...

I wish I could STOP!

Extract of poem from issue four of *LockDown* magazine (available online at www.yjb.gov.uk/lockdown).
Who can volunteer?

As the list below indicates, anyone can volunteer.

**People of all ages**
There is no lower or upper legal age restriction on volunteering, although you do need to be over 18 for some volunteer roles, like being an ‘appropriate adult’ (see page 11) or a member of a youth offender panel (see page 10).

**People from all backgrounds**
The youth justice system promotes equality and diversity and welcomes volunteers from all cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds. Volunteers who have a disability are supported by the youth justice system.

Young people in the youth justice system come from all backgrounds. If a volunteer comes from a similar background to a young person, it can often lead to a greater understanding on both sides.

**People on benefits**
If you receive benefits, talk to Jobcentre Plus before you start volunteering to make sure you still meet the terms for getting your benefits. People on benefits can volunteer and, in nearly all cases, their benefits will not be affected. It's ok to be paid expenses but tell Jobcentre Plus what you get and remember to keep your receipts. Through volunteering you can gain skills and experience that can be useful when looking for paid work. For more information about volunteering while receiving benefits, see the Jobcentre Plus website, [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) or look up their details in the phone book.

**People with criminal convictions**
People with criminal convictions can volunteer but their opportunities may be restricted. For instance, those with a conviction for offences against children can’t work with young people under 18. Anyone wanting to volunteer in the youth justice system would need to have a Criminal Records Bureau check in order to protect young people (this will be arranged by the organisation that you volunteer through).

**How much of my time will it take?**
You don’t necessarily need to give up a great deal of your time – it depends on what role you volunteer for. For some roles you may need to commit to a certain length of time, even if you only volunteer for a few hours a month, so that you provide the young person with the continuity and stability that they often lack.

**Skills**
The following skills and qualities are useful when volunteering:

- the ability to relate to young people
- good listening and communication skills
- the ability to maintain confidentiality
- sensitivity, patience and tact
- the ability to work as part of a team
- commitment, reliability and flexibility.
Aside from knowing that you’ve made a difference to the lives of young people, your community and victims, there are other benefits to volunteering.

Youth offending teams and secure establishments have been given guidance by the YJB that volunteers should receive induction and training before they start, and then be supported by professional youth justice workers. Youth offending teams and secure establishments should also have volunteer policies that explain the recruitment, selection and screening process; support and supervision; confidentiality; expenses; health and safety; insurance; and how problems are resolved. You should be given detailed task descriptions (similar to job descriptions) for your role so that it’s clear what you’re contributing to.

**Training**
You’ll receive training to help you develop your skills as a volunteer.

**The Foundation Programme**
When you volunteer with a youth offending team and some other youth justice agencies, you’ll take part in the Foundation Programme. This covers the issues and topics that are important to understanding and working with young people who have offended (or who are at risk of doing so). The programme includes:

- three group training days (focusing on young people and crime; communicating effectively; and intervening effectively). The training can usually fit around your work and other commitments, and day sessions could be split over several days
- background reading and self-directed exercises for participants
- information about additional workshops and training opportunities.

Some roles, such as ‘appropriate adult’ (see page 11) and youth offender panel members (see page 10) require additional training. To become a youth offender panel member, you’ll need to do the three days Foundation Programme training and, in addition, four days Panel Matters training.
Professional development
Some volunteers want to develop careers within the youth justice system. Volunteers who want to continue their training can undertake the course, ‘Exploring the Youth Justice System: An Introduction’. (Talk to your youth offending team and regional workforce development adviser if you’re interested in doing this course.) Volunteers can then study the foundation degree in youth justice or, if they prefer, could just study the module entitled 'Effective Practice in Youth Justice', which leads to the award of 'The Professional Certificate in Effective Practice (Youth Justice)'. These courses are run by the Open University. For more information, see the 'Workforce Development' section of the YJB’s website, [www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/practitioners/workforcedevelopment](http://www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/practitioners/workforcedevelopment).

The youth justice system doesn’t usually fund these additional courses but if you’re thinking of pursuing a career in the youth justice system or a related field, volunteering can give you valuable experience and training, and help you decide whether to attend additional courses.

Support and supervision
Professional staff in youth offending teams and secure establishments should support volunteers and help them develop their skills. Volunteers generally have regular formal or informal supervision in which they receive feedback about what’s going well and what areas could be developed further.

Expenses
You should always check with your adviser before incurring costs but, generally speaking, the following expenses will be repaid if receipts are provided:

- reasonable travel costs to and from the site where an activity is undertaken
- travel and meals during the course of volunteering
- care of dependants during the period of voluntary work
- reasonable costs of protective or specialist clothing, where needed for the activity with the young person.

Repayment of actual expenses shouldn’t affect benefits.
Volunteers fill many different roles in the youth justice system, working alongside professional youth justice workers to help reduce crime and make a difference to young people’s lives. Below are some of the most common roles. More information is available at www.yjb.gov.uk/getinvolved. If you would like to volunteer in any of these roles, please contact the organisations listed on pages 16–17.

**Literacy skills**
*Helping children read, improving their life chances*

Young people who struggle with reading and writing are far more likely to offend than their peers. Literacy programmes are a vital way to prevent and reduce offending.

Volunteer reading coaches help young people in custody and the community to improve their literacy skills. Teaching young people to read and write can help keep them away from crime, and improve their life chances if they have already committed a crime.

**Mentoring**
*Being a positive role model*

Mentoring may involve coaching and encouraging, constructively criticising, explaining, listening and guiding. Mentors can have a variety of roles, from supporting young people going back into education and training, to helping them find a job or improving their literacy and numeracy skills. They also provide a young person with a stable influence and positive role model. Mentors can help divert the young person away from failure, and help them succeed.

**With a little help from my mentor...**

Mentoring can make an enormous difference to a young person’s life. As Amy, an 18-year-old who was recently released from 10 months in custody, said about her volunteer mentor, Gemma:

‘I feel like she’s someone I can talk to. Like, if I tell her something, she says, “maybe if you tried it this way”, and it always helps me out. If I have been stressing about something, it makes me feel better.’

> "I love it. It’s rewarding."

Gemma, volunteer mentor
Case study

Volunteer mentor helps a young person to read and write

Sabrina Qadir is a volunteer for Bradford Youth Offending Team and has been mentoring young people at the Ummid Project, which provides alternative education provision for 11 to 16-year-olds. She was nominated for the Bradford Telegraph and Argus award for outstanding commitment to volunteering, and attended a reception with the Prime Minister.

James: I was excluded from school. I met Sabrina [at the Ummid Project] and I felt at ease with her. She has made learning to read and write more interesting and much better than school. I can read more words now.

Sabrina: When I first met James I realised that he was very shy, nervous, had little confidence in himself and had no motivation of doing any work with me...I spent time with him, building a relationship and trust. Since then I have been helping at Ummid on a regular basis and I love it. I am proud of the progress that James has made. He can now read, which has given him confidence and self-esteem.
What opportunities are available?

**Youth offender panel member**

*Agreeing and overseeing a contract with a young person*

**What is a youth offender panel?**

Youth offender panels are a groundbreaking way of dealing with young people who commit crime. They allow young people to speak for themselves, and to take responsibility for their actions.

A young person is referred to the panel by the courts through a sentence called a Referral Order, which is usually given to 10 to 17-year-olds who plead guilty to a first court conviction, although from April 2009 it will be available to some other young people who offend. A Referral Order can be for three to 12 months, depending on the seriousness of the crime.

The panel is made up of two volunteers who are capable of representing the community, and one member of the local youth offending team.

**What do youth offender panel members do?**

The panel meets with the young person and their parents/carers to talk about the reasons for the young person’s offending behaviour and to discuss a way forward. The victim is encouraged to attend the meeting to tell the young person how the crime affected them. Youth offender panel members agree a contract with the young person. This will include activities that repair the harm caused to the victim or the community by the young person’s crime and that will address the causes of their behaviour.

To find out what it’s like to be a panel member, watch the *People Like You* video, which is available at [www.yjb.gov.uk/youthoffenderpanels](http://www.yjb.gov.uk/youthoffenderpanels).

“I want to help steer these young people away from crime and give them a chance in life.”

Pamella, 29, trainer

Volunteers need to be 18 years or over and may spend about three hours a fortnight working on the panel. Panel meetings can be arranged around your existing work and other commitments. If you decide to become a panel member, you’ll receive specific training on, for instance, how panels work and your role in the process; restorative justice (repairing the harm done) and agreeing a contract.
Why volunteer to be a youth offender panel member?
Volunteering on a youth offender panel can allow you to:
• help prevent further offending
• work with victims
• help protect the community
• help young people turn their lives around.

Appropriate adult
Supporting young people in police stations

An ‘appropriate adult’ attends the police station when the police wish to interview a young person and his or her parents/carers either won’t or can’t attend. The appropriate adult makes sure that the young person’s interests are represented and that his or her rights are protected, and helps communication between the police and young person. Appropriate adults receive training before carrying out this role.

“*The appropriate adult can have a positive effect on what happens to a young person on arrest.*”

Katie, volunteer appropriate adult
**Magistrate**  
*Dispensing justice*

Magistrates are volunteers who come from a range of backgrounds and occupations. They deal with over 95% of all criminal cases in England and Wales.

To be a magistrate you don’t need formal qualifications or legal knowledge (there is always a legally qualified Justices’ Clerk to advise on the law), but you do need to be able to demonstrate six key qualities:

- good character
- understanding and communication
- social awareness
- maturity and sound temperament
- sound judgement
- commitment and reliability.

Magistrates can be appointed from the age of 18 and retire at 70. However, the Lord Chancellor will not generally appoint anyone over the age of 65.

Magistrates must sit for a minimum of 26 half days each year, which is the equivalent of just over one day per month. Your employer is legally obliged to give you reasonable time off to complete magistrates’ duties. Although employers don’t have to pay employees on magistrate duty, many do so in recognition of the important contribution magistrates make.
Opportunities in the secure estate
Making a difference to young people in the secure estate

Independent Monitoring Board volunteer
Independent Monitoring Boards are made up of volunteers who visit secure establishments and meet with the young people to help monitor aspects of their life in custody, such as living conditions. They monitor to ensure that standards are maintained, identify concerns and issues, discuss these at board meetings and recommend actions.

Independent Monitoring Board members volunteer for an average of two to three days per month, although this can vary slightly.

Resettlement and Aftercare Provision
This programme works with young people with drug and alcohol problems, in custody and the community. As a volunteer, you’d visit or write to young people in custody, before making contact again when they’re released. This provides them with continuity, and helps them to resettle when they leave custody.

Other ways to get involved
There are many other ways to volunteer in the secure estate, including being a mentor or helping young people to read.

“It has been a life changing experience seeing things from the side of the young person, their families and the victims as opposed to the views presented by the media.”
Jenny, volunteer youth offender panel member
Employer-supported volunteering
Benefits employers, volunteers and young people
Programmes called ‘employer-supported volunteering’ help businesses and public sector organisations to support their employees to volunteer, during work hours or in their own time. This allows employers to contribute to their local communities, develop the skills and morale of their workforce and improve their image. Employees have the opportunity to give something back to society, develop new skills and improve their existing ones.

Why not ask your employer to support your volunteering?

Young volunteers
If you’re a young person, you can volunteer in a range of roles, for instance, in community projects. Many young people enjoy mentoring other young people as they are often able to relate well to each other.

Other volunteering opportunities
There are many other opportunities for volunteering according to where you live and your skills. Other opportunities include coaching sport.

It’s worth remembering that youth offending teams and voluntary sector organisations may offer different opportunities and may have different volunteer policies. Wherever you volunteer, your experience should be a fulfilling and worthwhile one.
How do I become a volunteer?

Where can I find out more?
The YJB
To find out more about volunteering, visit www.yjb.gov.uk/getinvolved.

Youth offending teams
Youth offending teams offer many types of volunteer roles (see pages 16–17). The details of your local youth offending team are available at www.yjb.gov.uk/yots and are listed in the phone book.

do-it.org.uk
This is the UK’s leading volunteering database, hosting over one million opportunities to volunteer in charities and organisations across the UK.

Volunteer Centres
Your local Volunteer Centre can put you in touch with local organisations looking for volunteers. Look up contact details of your nearest Volunteer Centre in the phone book or, if you live in England, visit www.volunteering.org.uk/volunteer. If you live in Wales, visit www.volunteering-wales.net.

Offer to be a volunteer
When you offer to be a volunteer, you may be asked to complete a short application form, provide details of referees and attend an informal interview. The youth offending team or other relevant agency will carry out a Criminal Records Bureau check.

The table on the following pages provides contact details for each type of volunteer role.
### Contact details at a glance

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<tr>
<th>Volunteer role</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
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| **Reading coach**               | • if you live in England, contact Volunteer Reading Help, [www.vrh.org.uk](http://www.vrh.org.uk), whose reading helpers support primary aged children and looked-after children to overcome reading difficulties  
• Reading Matters projects are likely to run in 2009. Volunteer coaches are given training, support and resources. They help young people on the programme with their reading. If you would like to be a volunteer coach on future Reading Matters projects or have any questions, contact PLUS on 0845 22 33 102 or email plusinformation@ecotec.co.uk  
• find reading coach roles through [www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk)  
• your local Volunteer Centre can put you in touch with local organisations looking for volunteers. Look up contact details of your nearest Volunteer Centre in the phone book or visit [www.volunteering.org.uk/volunteer](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/volunteer) if you live in England, or [www.volunteering-wales.net](http://www.volunteering-wales.net) if you live in Wales |
| **Mentor**                      | • contact your local youth offending team through [www.yjb.gov.uk/yots](http://www.yjb.gov.uk/yots) or the phone book  
• find mentoring roles through [www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk)  
• contact Nacro [www.nacro.org.uk/about/volunteering.htm](http://www.nacro.org.uk/about/volunteering.htm), or email volunteering@nacro.org.uk  
• your local Volunteer Centre can put you in touch with local organisations looking for volunteers. Look up contact details of your nearest Volunteer Centre in the phone book or visit [www.volunteering.org.uk/volunteer](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/volunteer) if you live in England, or [www.volunteering-wales.net](http://www.volunteering-wales.net) if you live in Wales  
• contact Rainer Crime Concern (due to change its name in November 2008): [www.rainercrimeconcern.org.uk](http://www.rainercrimeconcern.org.uk)  
• for mentoring and other volunteer opportunities with young people visit [www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk) or call 0800 842 842 |
| **Youth offender panel member** | • contact your local youth offending team through [www.yjb.gov.uk/yots](http://www.yjb.gov.uk/yots) or the phone book  
• [www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk) provides a national database of volunteering opportunities, including being a youth offender panel member  
• visit [www.volunteering-wales.net](http://www.volunteering-wales.net) for details of Volunteer Centres in Wales |
| **Appropriate adult**           | • look up the details of your local youth offending team through [www.yjb.gov.uk/yots](http://www.yjb.gov.uk/yots) or the phone book  
• visit the National Appropriate Adult Network website, [www.appropriateadult.org.uk](http://www.appropriateadult.org.uk)  
• visit Rainer Crime Concern at [www.rainercrimeconcern.org.uk](http://www.rainercrimeconcern.org.uk)  
• look up appropriate adult roles through [www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk)  
• visit [www.volunteering-wales.net](http://www.volunteering-wales.net) for details of Volunteer Centres in Wales |
| **Magistrate**                  | • visit [www.direct.gov.uk/magistrates](http://www.direct.gov.uk/magistrates)  
• [www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk) provides a national database of volunteering opportunities, including opportunities to be a magistrate  
• visit [www.yjb.gov.uk/getinvolved](http://www.yjb.gov.uk/getinvolved)  
• visit [www.volunteering-wales.net](http://www.volunteering-wales.net) for details of Volunteer Centres in Wales |
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<td>Provision</td>
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<td>• visit <a href="http://www.volunteering-wales.net">www.volunteering-wales.net</a> for details of Volunteer Centres in Wales</td>
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<td>Other opportunities in the secure</td>
<td>• contact agencies, such as Nacro, the crime reduction charity, <a href="http://www.nacro.org.uk/about/volunteering.htm">www.nacro.org.uk/about/volunteering.htm</a> or email <a href="mailto:volunteering@nacro.org.uk">volunteering@nacro.org.uk</a>, which runs schemes within custody</td>
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<td>estate</td>
<td>• <a href="http://www.do-it.org.uk">www.do-it.org.uk</a> provides a national database of volunteering opportunities, including those in the secure estate</td>
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<td>Businesses and employers</td>
<td>• visit Volunteering England’s website at <a href="http://www.volunteering.org.uk/esv">www.volunteering.org.uk/esv</a> for resources and contacts that will help you set up an employer-supported volunteering scheme</td>
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<td>Young people</td>
<td>• visit <a href="http://www.vinspired.com">www.vinspired.com</a> or call their hotline on 0800 089 9000 (free from a landline but mobile charges may apply) or text 'v' to 80010 and someone will call you back</td>
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<td>• visit <a href="http://www.csv.org.uk/Volunteer/Young+Adults">www.csv.org.uk/Volunteer/Young+Adults</a></td>
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<td>• visit <a href="http://www.youthactionnetwork.org.uk">www.youthactionnetwork.org.uk</a> if you live in England</td>
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<td>• for information about helping victims of crime, visit: <a href="http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/vs_england_wales">www.victimsupport.org.uk/vs_england_wales</a></td>
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<td>• CSV offers a range of volunteering options, such as their full-time volunteering programme, to help move young people away from criminal behaviour; visit <a href="http://www.csv.org.uk/volunteer">www.csv.org.uk/volunteer</a></td>
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You can also find details of local volunteer projects through internet searches and through your local council website.
Visit [www.yjb.gov.uk/getinvolved](http://www.yjb.gov.uk/getinvolved) for more information about volunteering in the youth justice system.

The details of your local youth offending team are available through [www.yjb.gov.uk/yots](http://www.yjb.gov.uk/yots) and are listed in the phone book.

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A free poster (stock code B396) is also available to accompany this publication.

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