

Case Study: Fife Voluntary Action

The Power of Volunteering



In spring 2024, Fife Voluntary Action (FVA), in partnership with Balwearie High School, launched a pilot programme to increase student engagement, develop leadership skills, and embed volunteering in the curriculum. The initiative arose from discussions between FVA and local education leads, identifying a gap in youth volunteering pathways and a need to strengthen links between education and the third sector.

Balwearie was selected due to its strong existing relationship with FVA, enabling effective collaboration and increasing the likelihood of success. The pilot aimed to create a model that could be replicated across Fife’s high schools.

This partnership working extended further than just FVA and Balwearie. Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) and Active Schools also played an important role in making this pilot a success, as they have an understanding of the opportunities available in school, the needs of the school cohort and how to maximise achievement and attainment. This partnership working allowed each organisation to bring their own specialist knowledge, improving the collective benefit for pupils.

“For some learners, volunteering was a rewarding addition to their life, for others it became their main focus, central to developing their confidence, growing their skills and feeding into their career pathway.”

-Depute Head Teacher



About The Programme

The volunteer pilot programme aimed to foster a culture of service, leadership, and responsibility within the school while strengthening the opportunities available to young people. The programme sought to empower students by enabling them to take on leadership roles and actively engage in community-focused initiatives.

The main aims of the programme as highlighted by FVA were:

- **Encourage civic engagement:** Offer students opportunities to contribute meaningfully to their local - and school - communities.
- **Develop employability skills:** Provide students with enhancements to current learning opportunities.
- **Develop leadership skills:** Provide students with the tools and experience needed to lead teams, organise events, and work collaboratively on projects.
- **Foster school spirit:** Build a sense of pride and responsibility toward the school by involving students in decision-making and initiatives that directly impact the school culture.
- **Bridge the gap between education and real-world experience:** Help students apply classroom learning to real-world contexts by engaging with community projects, local organisations, and school events.

The programme aimed to empower students by allowing them to take on leadership roles and actively participate in community-driven initiatives.

Student volunteer ambassador roles were created to promote participation, with the Depute Head aligning the project to school priorities, the curriculum, student wellbeing, and the development of life skills. This aimed to support a sustainable model, and help young people build confidence and social responsibility.



“Our partners at Fife Voluntary Action provided close, regular support to a small group of S6 learners, fuelling their enthusiasm, sharing expertise and resources so that the young leaders could promote volunteering across the school community, and making themselves available to interested pupils, staff and parents”

- Teacher



Role of Ambassadors

FVA and partners developed numerous roles for ambassadors, which included:

- **Recruitment and promotion:** Ambassadors were responsible for recruiting new participants by presenting the programme at assemblies and in classes, organising information sessions, and using social media to promote the initiative by setting up an Instagram account.
- **Coordination of volunteer activities:** They played a central role in organising volunteer events, liaising with community organisations, and ensuring that logistical details such as transportation and permission slips were in place.
- **Mentorship:** Ambassadors acted as mentors for new participants, helping to orientate them to the program and offering support throughout the volunteer process.
- **Feedback and evaluation:** The Ambassadors were also responsible for gathering feedback from participants and providing suggestions for improvements to ensure that the programme continued to evolve and meet the needs of students and the community.

Partnership Work in Action: Why This Approach Works

The pilot in Balwearie High School is a fine showcase of partnership working across many organisations. Each brought specialist knowledge and experience. It's important in partnerships such as these, that communication is clear and consistent. FVA reflected on some key learnings about partnership working in a school environment:

Support and commitment from teachers from the outset is crucial for the volunteering programme and development to have longevity and a chance to succeed.

Highlighting and making clear to teachers the benefits of a volunteer programme within the school, and that the onus won't fall on them, they'll be supported through the partnership approach.

Working collaboratively with the school to design a programme that works for all involved. In the Balwearie pilot, after discussions to create student ambassador roles, the depute head aligned the volunteering programme to school goals, the curriculum, the wellbeing of the students and the enhancement of life skills.

Ensuring the roles and responsibilities of each partner are discussed and defined the start of the programme before proceeding forward.

Impact

Over the course of the one year pilot in Balwearie High School, the impact and benefits of this partnership were clear.

- Volunteering opportunities in school increased from 6 to over 40
- The number of young people recording Saltire hours increased from 27 to 230
- Students had an increased awareness of volunteering
- Data sharing was improved between partners
- Improved collaboration and partnership working
- Over 250 pupils took up meaningful volunteering roles
- A culture was created where volunteering is valued and supported by staff and pupils
- The pilot informed new frameworks and core elements of the DYW Fife Strategy
- Supported young people to develop the skills they need for their future

"Volunteer Ambassadors and Development Officers working directly with students have not only raised awareness but helped young people find meaningful placements that build real-world skills."



- DYW worker

"The success of this approach has shaped the Steps into Volunteering programme and a new framework to ensure volunteering is recognised as a core activity in preparing young people for life, learning, and work."



- DYW worker



Conclusion

Fife Voluntary Action and their pilot in Balwearie High School is an excellent showcase of a local TSI working collaboratively with a school to foster and create a volunteering culture within a school setting. Bringing other organisations like DYW and Active Schools into the partnership further enhanced the ability of this culture to be created. Each organisation and the school brought their unique knowledge and skillset, and their collaborative working saw volunteering engagement and uptake amongst pupils soar.