



changing lives  
reducing crime

# 'Adding that much more'

## Researching Nacro volunteers



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Nacro believes that the diversity of its volunteers is to be celebrated, and encourages people from every part of the community to get involved.



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## ‘Adding that much more’: Researching Nacro volunteers

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# Introduction

***'The support, help and training I've had from Nacro have been fantastic. It's something that should be highlighted'***

Questionnaire response

Volunteers play a vital role in Nacro's youth projects, and a central role in Nacro's community mediation work, and its education and employment schemes. Nearly 500 volunteers offer their time, skills and experience. In return, Nacro offers training and a chance to get involved in positive and effective community work.

Volunteers help to run Nacro's youth projects, which are designed to develop young people's confidence, skills, and self-esteem and to guide them away from antisocial behaviour. In 2003/04, our staff and volunteers worked with more than 14,000 youngsters – many of them from broken families, excluded from school, or in trouble with the police. Volunteers are also involved in other Nacro projects to promote social inclusion and reduce crime and antisocial behaviour, including our conflict-mediation schemes, training and education projects.

People volunteer for Nacro for all sorts of reasons, both personal and professional. They might wish to give young people a good start in life, or put something back into the community. They might also wish to gain work experience, receive training, challenge themselves, and meet new people. As volunteers, they can get involved in a wide range of activities, such as coaching football teams, acting, helping people with job applications, mediating in disputes, and mentoring young people with behavioural problems.

Our youth projects were the first Nacro initiatives to involve volunteers, and they continue to attract the greatest numbers. We now run more than 50 projects that rely on their help. These are funded by the Department of Health, local learning and skills councils, the Football Foundation, Sport England, the Home Office Positive Futures

programme, the New Deal for Communities programme, the Neighbourhood Support Fund and other government and non-governmental sources.

## Researching volunteers

In December 2003 – funded by the Department for Education and Skills – we conducted our first England-wide survey of Nacro's volunteers. Nacro researchers constructed the research, initially distributing questionnaires to every project that engages volunteers. They received anonymous responses from 176 volunteers, over a third of the total number involved in Nacro's work. They then conducted in-depth interviews with 28 volunteers and 10 staff members at nine projects.

Of those surveyed:

- 51% are aged under 26 and 16% are under 19
- 58% are male; 42% are female
- 20% are black or Asian; 76% are white
- 8% consider themselves to have a disability
- 38% attend college or university, 27% are in full-time employment, 19% are in part-time employment, 21% are unemployed, and 9% are fully occupied caring for their family
- 80% left school or college with a qualification
- 9% are ex-offenders
- 37% are parents. Some respondents' children take part as participants or volunteers in the same project

What do these results tell us? They show that young people are committed to changing their communities. They show that people from all walks of life, including ex-offenders, are prepared to give up their time to help people. They show that unemployed people play a significant role in voluntary projects. In fact, the very people who are often denounced for their lack of community spirit play an important role in Nacro projects.



The survey also shows that there is no ‘typical’ volunteer. Volunteers come from different backgrounds, they have different skills, and they are attracted to Nacro’s work for different reasons; from a commitment to their community to gaining experience for a future career or wanting to give youngsters a good start in life. We value all the volunteers who work with us. And as our survey shows, they value us.

We will continue to encourage people to participate in our work. It does all of us – Nacro, volunteers, and communities – a power of good.

# Becoming a volunteer

***‘The volunteers are incredibly varied, which is important because it gives young people contact with people they might never otherwise have had contact with. We have a volunteer who is an ex-manager in a steelworks. He was really worried that he’d be out of touch – he’d say, “What do I know about young people today?” – but he’s brilliant. I’d rather have millions of different types because it adds that much more’*** Volunteer co-ordinator, Sheffield Youth Activity Project

How do people hear about Nacro? Our survey shows that over a third of volunteers find out about us through friends or family (including their children) while another 17% find out through the media or other publicity. Others hear about us through work or university, and through the courts and probation services.



**The Braintree Community Sports Project** in Essex promotes community-based sports as a way of tackling antisocial, self-destructive and criminal behaviour among young people. It is mainly funded by the Football Foundation, Positive Futures and the local authority, and runs five sessions a week for young people aged five to 25.

***‘Showing what someone in a wheelchair can do may inspire some of the people I work with’*** Alan, volunteer, Braintree Community Sports Project

The project is run with the help of nine regular volunteers from the local community. Among them is Alan, who represents Britain in the under-22 basketball team in a wheelchair. He is currently training for the Olympics, but he also coaches football and basketball at the Braintree project. He got involved to gain experience and confidence as a coach, and to give something back to the community.

Ray, another volunteer, has been with the Braintree project for over three years. He first visited with his son, who decided that the project was not for him. But Ray decided to get involved. With the training he has received as a Nacro volunteer, he is now a qualified football referee – not bad for someone who knew nothing about football before he joined. Ray came to Britain from Germany when he was nine, and feels that his experience of isolation back then helps him to relate to the young people on the project now.



- *58% of Nacro volunteers said that this was their first experience of volunteering*
- *Nearly one in 10 of Nacro's volunteers considered themselves to be disabled*

## Steps to becoming a volunteer

A person who wishes to become a volunteer will be asked to fill in an application form that requests the usual details, as well as references and information about previous offences. Then they will meet a member of staff and discuss Nacro's aims and objectives, their own skills and interests, what they hope to achieve within the project, the support and training they can expect, and Nacro's equality and diversity policy.

If both parties decide to go ahead, Nacro will run a reference and criminal record bureau check. This is standard procedure for everyone who works with young people, but it does not usually rule out anyone who has committed an unrelated offence in the past.

## Good practice pointers from the research

Targeted publicity attracts a good cross-section of people. Those who wish to contribute to local community activities can be recruited through residents' and tenants' associations, leisure and community centres, youth clubs and sports venues. Students can be recruited through colleges and universities; and unemployed people through job centres. Nacro also advertises in publications such as *The Voice* and *The Pink Paper*.

The largest proportion of volunteers find out about Nacro through word of mouth, so a project's good reputation with existing volunteers and participants is its best recruitment tool.

## Benefits to the community

Nacro volunteers play a vital role in oiling the wheels of community life.

- Volunteers can be 'social trailblazers', encouraging others to play an active problem-solving role in their area
- Volunteers are often strongly motivated by a desire to give opportunities to young people in disadvantaged communities
- Volunteers living locally can give sustainability to the work, through their commitment to maintain and develop services for young people and the wider community.
- Volunteers apply the skills they have acquired on Nacro projects to other local activities

***'I am helping victims of racism from my own community'*** Questionnaire response



Nottingham Mediation Service aims to help Nottingham residents resolve or manage disputes with their neighbours over issues such as boundaries, pets, young people, harassment, verbal abuse, loud music and threatening behaviour. Referrals to the service are made through Nottingham City Council's housing, environmental services and antisocial behaviour departments, as well as other housing providers and individuals.

The service is currently run with the help of 10 regular volunteers aged 18 and over. They have all experienced conflict and have learnt how to deal with it. Nacro helps to build on that experience.

***'I had a problem years ago with a neighbour, so I can relate to it. Also, I've got a family, so that helps me relate to problems with teenagers'*** Mary Ann, volunteer, Nottingham Mediation Service

After completing their training, volunteers work alongside paid staff to help neighbours find mutually acceptable agreements. Eventually, volunteers aim to mediate alongside other volunteers without the help of staff. Volunteers also assist with administrative work such as arranging meetings and writing up reports. Once trained in mediation methods, their skills are, and will continue to be, a benefit to their community.

***'I feel I am doing something towards reducing conflict at a grass-roots level to improve the experience of the wider community'*** Sue, volunteer, Nottingham Mediation Service



- *A fifth of volunteers are black or Asian; three-quarters are white*

## How does Nacro know that its projects are beneficial to communities?

Our research and evaluation teams, made up of criminologists and social researchers, monitor the effectiveness of our programmes and policies. They conduct research into project development, design monitoring systems and performance indicators, and carry out surveys, such as our survey of volunteers.

Nacro's research and evaluation specialists are also contracted by government departments and local and regional organisations to investigate and analyse initiatives across the whole spectrum of crime reduction and the criminal justice system. This reinforces our expertise in, and understanding of, effective ways to tackle crime.

## Good practice pointers from the research

Volunteers are putting something into their community and this is one of their principle reasons for volunteering in the first place. There is a virtuous circle between the value of the work to the community and the volunteers' motivation. Make sure volunteers' contribution to the community is acknowledged in your feedback to them, in 'celebration events' to mark their work, and highlighted in other project publicity.

# Benefits to the volunteer

Volunteers reap all sorts of benefits from working with Nacro. They participate in interesting and challenging work. They work alongside supportive and dedicated members of staff. Their skills are enhanced through training courses and first-hand experience. They are given regular, constructive feedback. In short, they are part of the team.

In our survey, we asked people what they felt had been the benefits of volunteering for Nacro. Over four-fifths replied that it had improved their knowledge and skills. Over two-thirds said it had improved their self-esteem. More than half said that the experience could help them find employment.

We believe in developing volunteers' skills through training. That's why 80% of regular volunteers in Nacro's youth projects receive certificated training. Just under half of the volunteers who participated in the survey had been trained in child protection. Other training courses with high levels of participation included drugs awareness (36%), sports coaching (32%), first aid (32%), health and safety (31%), youth work (27%), equality and diversity (23%), risk assessment (23%), community work

(21%), and alcohol awareness (20%).

***'I feel that I am putting something back into the community. This is rewarded highly by having the chance to participate on coaching courses'*** Questionnaire response

***'With Nacro I have been able to broaden my horizons and have had full backing to get qualifications'*** Questionnaire response

As well as providing training, Nacro offers volunteers day-to-day support through supervision and feedback. In our survey, we found that nearly all survey respondents (96%) had been offered support from project staff in addition to training, and that nearly all of them also felt that the level of support they received was sufficient. Over three-fifths had had one-to-one supervisions with a staff member, and two-fifths had had group supervisions. Staff had also helped volunteers with training and courses, CVs and job applications, and had given responsive support when needed, either by phone or in person.

***'The level of support is more than sufficient, it is marvellous'*** Thulani, volunteer, Nottingham Mediation Scheme



**St Helen's Mentoring Project** in Lancashire takes young people aged 10 to 17 who are at risk of reoffending and matches them with trained volunteer mentors. It aims to reduce their offending and truancy by providing role models and positive examples of lifestyle and leisure pursuits. Young people are usually referred to the project by the youth offending or restorative justice services, or school-based youth inclusion projects; but their participation is entirely voluntary.

Some 23 trained volunteers are engaged in the project's work. Mentoring is a special form of volunteering because contact between the volunteer and the young person is one-to-one and unsupervised, so a thorough risk assessment is carried out to protect the safety of both parties. Finding a suitable match for each referral can be time-consuming, but the project nevertheless attracts a large number of volunteers who are hoping to embark on careers in social care and are eager to gain experience.

At the St Helen's project, volunteers are recruited through a process involving an interview, a skills and interests questionnaire, and a police and reference check. Each volunteer then attends a training programme involving six weekly sessions. This process helps to identify those who are suitable and sufficiently motivated to mentor. Volunteers describe the training course as interesting and enjoyable. One volunteer who had just completed the training felt that she was properly equipped to deal with drugs, sexual health or child protection issues were they to arise.



- *Two-thirds of respondents felt that being a volunteer with Nacro had matched their expectations, while over a quarter felt it was even better than they had expected*

Almost all the respondents (97%) said they felt valued as volunteers. They felt welcomed and treated as part of the team. They were given responsibility, feedback, encouragement and awards. The staff had expressed appreciation and so had the young people they worked with.

***'Everybody works together as a team and everyone supports each other. Everyone thanks each other for their time. This makes me feel valued'*** Questionnaire response

***'I'm enjoying it because the people are very friendly and they make you feel welcome'*** Questionnaire response

***'I love my work at Nacro and have had very positive help and feedback from all the staff. I have also had very positive comments from the kids I work with'*** Questionnaire response

***'The staff I work with are very friendly and supportive. They always thank me for doing jobs for them and are very keen to show their appreciation.'*** Questionnaire response

***'Before, I didn't feel like I was anybody, but now I know I'm part of a team'*** Volunteer, Great Yarmouth Youth Activity Project

***'[Volunteering for Nacro] gave me a completely new direction in life'*** Dave, volunteer and sessional worker, Nottingham Youth Activity Project

Many students, especially those who plan to pursue a career in youth work, the criminal justice services, and the social sciences,

volunteer for Nacro as part of their university or college course. They gain insights and first-hand experience.

***'I started off [at Nacro] thinking it was just something to add to my CV. Then I started working at the school and found I loved the mentoring side of things. I'd like to do Camp America for those with learning difficulties, and now feel that I can go into it with some knowledge of specific learning difficulties like ADHD, and that's been relevant to my psychology degree'*** Naomi, Nacro volunteer at Dr John Worrall School in Sheffield

***'I love my volunteering work with Nacro and would recommend it to anyone. I hope to work in this field and Nacro has provided me with very valuable experience'*** Questionnaire response

Many people volunteer for Nacro because they want to get work experience and build up their CV in order to find or change their employment, or take up a course at college or university. Indeed, quite a number of volunteers have chosen to take up paid employment with Nacro itself. Through the survey, we found that the vast majority of volunteers (86%) would consider applying for a job with Nacro in the future.

***'My involvement has helped me to get a job'*** Questionnaire response

***'I'm working now, got an actual job, so it's been a really positive thing for me'*** Kelly, volunteer and sessional worker, Nottingham Youth Activity Project

## Benefits to the volunteer **continued**



The **education and employment project in Brighton** runs courses such as Re:refresh, an Entry to Employment (e2e) course for young people aged 16 to 18, and the Intensive Activity Period course for people on the New Deal 25 plus. The Re:refresh programme includes courses on life skills, painting and decorating, IT and communication skills, and conservation. The 13-week Intensive Activity Period course aims to encourage participants to develop job search, work experience and vocational skills.

The project is presently being run with the help of nine regular volunteers, aged 18 and over, recruited from local universities, the local volunteer bureau and by word of mouth. The volunteer co-ordinator feels that the most suitable volunteers are resilient, can work without direction, and are prepared to sit back and let trainees develop at their own pace. Volunteers say that they are valued, encouraged to attend staff meetings, and are generally treated as part of the team.

***'I've enjoyed being here at Nacro, been welcomed, have had the chance to take part in so many things I would not have if I wasn't a volunteer'*** Volunteer, Brighton

***The staff make me feel a valuable member of the team and are very encouraging. They also do a really good job in highlighting the value of volunteers to the trainees. Consequently I feel very respected by all whom I come into contact with there'*** Volunteer, Brighton

***'I have volunteered at other organisations and have felt like a bit of a spare part. At Nacro I feel actively involved all the time'*** Volunteer, Brighton

### Good practice pointers from the research

Every volunteer needs a tailor-made action plan. Shortly after they have started, the volunteer and a staff member discuss how things are going and devise an action plan for their future involvement. This is reviewed regularly.

Training matters. Volunteers should not be asked to do anything that they have not been trained to do – either through formal training sessions or through clear demonstrations and support from staff.

# Benefits to Nacro

Nacro values its volunteers. We recognise that volunteers are better suited to some kinds of work than staff members. We always try to ensure that voluntary work is complementary, not supplementary, to staff work. We believe that a volunteer is an important and responsible member of the team, never just a spare pair of hands.

What extra dimension do volunteers bring to Nacro projects?

- *Knowledge* Volunteers come from the same community as the people who use the service, so they are familiar with local issues
- *Contacts* Volunteers already have social networks within the community
- *Longevity* Volunteers living locally can maintain long-term relationships with the service
- *Expertise* Volunteers bring different skills and experience to a project
- *Commitment* Volunteers are highly motivated, as shown by their willingness to work without pay
- *Soundness* The presence of volunteers from the local community can reassure people that the project is sound
- *Credibility* Volunteers' unofficial, unpaid status may be less threatening, and more credible, to people participating in the project

Volunteers from the community have a ready-made knowledge of local conditions, and often come from the same background as the people participating in the project. As a result, they are able to build up rapport with participants based on common experience. Their presence in a project can reassure the less confident and more vulnerable, especially young people, that the project is worth getting involved in. And the volunteers' unofficial status, appearance and approach can enhance their credibility among those participating.

**'Most of the kids wouldn't come here if it wasn't for us [volunteers] because they just wouldn't feel safe'** Volunteer, East Manchester Sport in the Community Project



- *Almost two-fifths of volunteers attend college or university. Around a quarter are in full-time employment, about a fifth are in part-time employment, and about a fifth are unemployed. A tenth are fully occupied caring for their family*

## Benefits to Nacro continued

***'[I have] one-on-one contact with children who perceive that everyone else who deals with them is paid to do so'*** Questionnaire response

***'If I was a neighbour and I felt insecure or threatened, I would rather see someone like me on the doorstep than someone in a suit, a formal-looking person. I bring a different style'*** Paulette, volunteer, Nottingham Mediation Service

As well as their local knowledge, volunteers bring to projects a wide array of skills. Take Joe, who volunteers for Nacro's project in Brighton. He found himself unable to cope with work in the IT sector after a bad patch in his personal life. The job centre sent him to Nacro's Intensive Activity Period course as a participant. Joe returned to work for the project as a volunteer. As well as giving his time and commitment, he

brings invaluable computing skills to the project.

In the survey, we asked volunteers what they contributed. Unsurprisingly, they said they brought their coaching, mentoring, parenting and other skills. But, interestingly, they laid equal stress on their personal attributes, such as enthusiasm, approachability and unflappability.

***'I contribute my flexibility, humour and ability not to get flustered at the unexpected'*** Questionnaire response

***'I bring reliability, commitment and experience'*** Questionnaire response

***'I can connect with the young people we work with – and humour I am good at'*** Questionnaire response

***'I listen well to children's needs'*** Questionnaire response



**Nottingham Youth Activities Project** runs eight projects designed to support young people and local communities. These include:

- Filling the Gap, an education project that aims to re-engage young people aged 13 to 16 who have been excluded, or are at risk of being excluded, from school
- Parent Point and Dads and Lads, which provide parenting courses, drop-in advice, and preventive support for families before they reach crisis point
- ICCP Mentoring, an Intense Control and Change Programme, is run with Nottingham's probation service, which refers young people aged 18 to 20 considered to be at high risk of reoffending

These projects are run with the help of some 60 active volunteers drawn from universities and colleges and the local community. Volunteers are crucial to the unit's work. It is a source of pride that some volunteers have subsequently been employed as staff while others have gone on to higher education and returned to volunteer for Nacro as part of their study modules.

***'The volunteers on Filling the Gap have been the backbone. The majority of workers who are in post at the moment were once volunteers'*** Volunteer co-ordinator, Nottingham Youth Activities Project



- *Almost every volunteer sampled (99 %) would encourage other people to become involved with Nacro projects*



**Sheffield Youth Activities Project** runs six youth projects designed to support young people and local communities. These include:

- The Bridge, a Sheffield-based project offering basic skills and positive activities to young people aged 14 to 16 who are either excluded from school, or at risk of exclusion and only attending school part-time
- The Network, a Rotherham-based drop-in centre for socially excluded 16 to 19-year-olds, which offers help with basic skills and job applications as well as outings, trips and social events

The project also provides volunteer classroom mentors to the Dr John Worrall School, a secondary school for young people with learning and behavioural problems who have been excluded from mainstream schooling.

The youth projects are run with the help of 29 active volunteers. As many projects employ just a handful of staff, the volunteers contribute enormously to the day-to-day running of activities.

***‘There are only two members of staff working on The Bridge project so we have at least two volunteers coming in each day. It’s vital because the young people need supervision and someone there to talk to them’*** Volunteer co-ordinator, Sheffield Youth Activities Project

## Good practice pointers from the research

When discussing a volunteer’s role and duties, staff must be specific: provide a job description setting out their role. Volunteers should never be treated as just a spare pair of hands.

Feedback is essential. It is important that all volunteers are given regular feedback to let them know how they are progressing, so that they can see the effects of their work, and feel that it is valued and appreciated.

# Parents as volunteers

Nacro believes that parents play a central role in supporting young people and preventing them from drifting towards crime and nuisance behaviour. Parents involved in Nacro projects work with their own children as well as others in the local community. They participate in a wide range of activities, from after-school clubs to literacy and numeracy work and sporting activities.

In our survey, we asked parents what they thought they contributed to Nacro projects. They replied that, as parents, they were well aware of the problems faced by young people, and, specifically, young parents.

***'I feel I can show the young people how to change their paths in life. I can show how if you don't follow the school-college-university [route] you can still go back later – and how having a child young does not stop you succeeding'*** Questionnaire response

***'[I contribute] my experience of bringing up my children and the problems they faced as a well as the problems that I faced bringing them up'*** Questionnaire response



Nacro encourages parents to volunteer for youth projects if their child is a participant. The benefits of this include:

- Parents and children having an additional shared interest
- Each being able to see the other in a different light (as a volunteer rather than as a mother or father; as a member of a group of young people rather than as a child)
- Parents and children getting to know other people and becoming embedded in the community
- Parents encouraging and assisting their children to acquire new skills
- Children feeling more confident about socialising in groups when their parent is in the background

In future, Nacro intends to train parents who wish to act as peer mentors, encouraging other parents to get involved in their children's education and development.

**Great Yarmouth Youth Activities Project**, in Norfolk, gives young people opportunities for personal development through sports such as football, skateboarding, music, sailing, and bull-tag rugby. It runs group residential visits, a motorbike project, youth forum meetings, drama projects, self-esteem work, gender-specific work, school holiday activities and a Positive Futures project.

These activities are run with the help of 26 active volunteers – both young people and parents. The project engages under-18s, whose energy and enthusiasm has attracted others of their age group as both participants and volunteers. The parents have also provided an important link to the community by encouraging other parents to participate.

Five members of one family currently volunteer for the Great Yarmouth project. One young man started volunteering after he saw a presentation about the project at college. Then his mother attended a meeting arranged by the project co-



- *Nearly two-fifths of Nacro volunteers are parents. Some volunteers' children take part as participants or volunteers in the same project*

ordinator to examine the needs of local young people, and got involved in the setting up and running of a weekly youth club. His father also started volunteering, and his two siblings are now junior volunteers. He has since been employed by Nacro as a sports development officer.

The volunteers' commitment and hard work has paid off. Not only have they enabled Nacro to develop its sports and leisure activities, but they have also used their experience with Nacro to offer solutions to other local problems. For example, several volunteers identified the need for childcare facilities for young people in the area, and went on to set up and run a successful childcare project.

***'Monday Club was set up by three parents (including myself). Team effort and support from Nacro has made the club successful. Children are given a safe, secure environment to enjoy activities they may not have experienced before'*** Volunteer, Great Yarmouth Youth Activities Project

## Good practice pointers from the research

Devolve responsibility. Volunteers may welcome the opportunity to be responsible for a stand-alone piece of work, such as planning and organising an activity.

Volunteers need clear guidelines, especially when dealing with young people. For example, it must be explained from the outset that:

- They must treat all young people fairly and equally
- They must be aware of their responsibility as a role model
- They should be sensitive to the needs of young people
- They should be reasonable in their expectations of young people
- They must never use physical punishment

# Ex-offenders as volunteers

Nacro welcomes the involvement of ex-offenders in its projects. Indeed, we often find that volunteers choose Nacro because they have been in trouble themselves in the past and want to stop young people from going down the same road.

Nacro encourages ex-offender participants in its projects to volunteer, because it gives them work experience, improves social and vocational skills, and strengthens their links to the community. Their contribution is useful to the project because, as volunteers, they are role models to others, showing that it is possible to turn their lives around.

***'I wasn't expecting the young people to be so polite and respectful, especially to the ex-offenders. They shared their experiences with me'*** Volunteer, East Manchester Sport in the Community Project

***'I have experienced similar things as these***

***young people, and I am able to help them learn from my and their mistakes'***

Questionnaire response

John, who had just served a five-and-a-half-year prison sentence, wanted to get involved in youth work. He heard about Nacro's Entry to Employment project in Brighton from another ex-offender. He was delighted when he first heard someone describe him as 'part of the team', and he says the experience has increased his self-belief. John is currently completing an access course and hopes to go on to study social science at university.

***'I've been made to feel part of the team, I've been in responsible situations, trusted, and thanked for the contribution I make'*** John, volunteer, Brighton Project

Nacro ensures that voluntary work is appropriate to both the ex-offender and the project they wish to work with.



The **East Manchester Sport in the Community Project** aims to steer local young people aged eight to 16 away from crime and anti-social behaviour and towards sporting activities. With funds from the Department of Health, it provides weekly training sessions in a range of sports including football, basketball and weight training, and organises tournaments, exchange trips and programmes during the school holidays.

The project is run with the help of 33 volunteers, many of whom are unemployed and some of whom are ex-offenders. Most volunteers are recruited locally by word of mouth; some are former participants in Nacro projects. Volunteers receive training on a range of issues, from child protection through to specialist accredited coaching courses provided by Manchester Leisure.

When we interviewed them about their involvement in the project, many volunteers expressed a desire to put something back in the community. Others wanted to get coaching qualifications or gain administrative experience in order to secure paid work.

Many said that they appreciated staff treating them as equals, and indicated that they were made to feel a valued part of the team. They recently received Millennium Volunteer certificates in recognition of their work, but they were equally gratified by the respect they got from the young people who participate in the project.

***'I want to help the kids round here who have not got a lot'***  
Volunteer, East Manchester Sport in the Community Project



- *About a tenth of Nacro volunteers are ex-offenders*

## Good practice pointers from the research

Publicise and celebrate the role of volunteers – including the positive contribution made to their communities by ex-offenders and people who may have caused trouble in their own neighbourhoods in the past.

It is no riskier recruiting people with non-relevant offences than other volunteers – you need to use the same systems for all potential volunteers to reduce risk: Criminal Record Bureau checks for those working with young people; checking references; and supervising their work.

# Young people as volunteers

Young people make a valuable contribution to Nacro's work. Indeed, our survey found that just over half of volunteers are under 26, and 16% are under 19. Contrary to some press and political opinion, young people are just as committed as older people to helping others and changing their communities.

We welcome university and college students who wish to volunteer as part of their course. We also encourage school students to participate in our arts, drama and sports projects. Our survey found that some young people choose to volunteer alongside their parents or other family members.

Young volunteers play an especially important role in some of Nacro's youth projects, where they work alongside people of the same age group, and act as role models. Nacro staff ensure that young volunteers are given the appropriate guidance, support and training.

***'Being relatively young myself, the young people are quite happy to talk to me about relationships'*** Questionnaire response



- *Over half of Nacro's volunteers are aged under 26*

## Good practice pointers from the research

Encourage young volunteers to get involved in youth projects. They offer valuable advice and examples of how to work with their peers. School age volunteers may require more guidance and room to make mistakes, and should not be expected to carry the same responsibilities as adults.



The **Boston Youth Activities Project** in Lincolnshire aims to give young people opportunities to work in a team and develop positive relationships with adults through its drama projects. Founded in 2001 with funding from the Department of Health, it runs projects for young people aged 12 to 24, including a youth theatre, the Theatre in Education project within schools, and after-school clubs focusing on drama for fun.

Theatre in Education tours schools and youth clubs performing plays about the issues faced by young people such as youth homelessness, drugs and alcohol, crime and anti-social behaviour, sexual health, and the transition from junior to secondary school.

Some 65 volunteers, many of them school students and performing arts students, have assisted the project since 2001. Volunteers are involved in all aspects of the work, such as writing and performing, administration, and constructing scenery and props. Many volunteers become involved in the project because they are interested in pursuing a career in performing arts or wish to gain experience as part of a college course.

***'I was a shy person, and the project has helped that. I have produced with others a work booklet for schools and I worked on a play that was shown to local youth centres. I have something to put on my CV as a major accomplishment'*** Volunteer, Boston Youth Activities Project

# Nacro's commitment to its volunteers

Nacro could not carry out its youth, education, training and mediation work among so many people without the help and commitment of its volunteers. We believe that:

- Volunteers make an important contribution to Nacro's work in communities, and that their contribution should be widely publicised
- Volunteers are committed and often longstanding team members, and that Nacro should continue to provide a supportive, inclusive and friendly work environment
- Many volunteers get involved as a stepping stone to employment, and that Nacro should continue to help them attend certificated training courses wherever possible
- Many volunteers go on to be employed by Nacro as sessional or salaried staff, and that Nacro should continue to encourage those who want to develop in that direction
- There is no such thing as a typical volunteer. Nacro sees this diversity as a source of strength, and will continue to encourage people from all backgrounds and walks of life to get involved

Here is what future volunteers can expect, based on the survey:

- Four-fifths of respondents felt that volunteering had improved their knowledge and skills
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents felt that being a volunteer with Nacro had matched their expectations, whilst over a quarter felt it was even better than they had expected
- Almost every respondent (97%) said they felt valued by Nacro
- 99% said they would encourage other people to get involved with Nacro projects



# About the research

The survey, case studies and analysis were undertaken by Nacro's research and evaluation teams and guided by a steering group comprising representatives of Nacro projects, including volunteers.

Questionnaires were posted and emailed to all Nacro projects that engage volunteers. Project staff ensured that all volunteers had access to the questionnaire and any support they needed to complete it. Questionnaires were returned to a Nacro Freepost address and were analysed using SPSS for Windows.

We received questionnaires back from 176 anonymous volunteers involved in 49 Nacro projects. This represents 37% of all Nacro volunteers.

Nine projects were subsequently selected from among those that engage volunteers, and 28 volunteers and 10 Nacro staff were interviewed using semi-structured interview schedules. Interview data was supplemented by project documentation and monitoring data. Projects were chosen on the basis of factors such as geographical spread; project type (youth activities, education and training, criminal justice); project client group (young people to adults, young women to young men); the diversity of volunteers' activities within the project; and the demographic profile of the volunteers.

More research findings are available on Nacro's website – [www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk). Please use the search facility and look for 'researching volunteers'.



***'I have turned a group of boys into a good football team. They have gone from winning nothing to winning most Nacro tournaments. I think I have given the players some self-belief'*** Questionnaire response

## **About Nacro**

Nacro, the crime reduction charity, is dedicated to making society safer. We have an unrivalled expertise in developing effective solutions to crime and stimulating fresh thinking on how best to reduce it, based on more than 40 years of experience. Combining practical services to individuals, communities and organisations with pioneering campaigns, Nacro lobbies for better ways to reduce crime, while demonstrating how this might be done in practice.



changing lives  
reducing crime

## **'Adding that much more'** Researching Nacro volunteers

Volunteers play a vital role in Nacro's youth, community mediation, education and employment schemes: 500 people from diverse backgrounds currently volunteer for Nacro. This report sets out the results of research about our volunteers, demonstrating the benefits to communities, to Nacro and to the volunteers themselves.

£7.50