

# Voluntary/ Community Sector Work

Work in the voluntary/community sector (sometimes referred to as "Third Sector" or "Social Economy") is often an essential prerequisite for entering careers such as social work where you are expected to have detailed knowledge of work activities, proof of particular skills and empathy with clients. Similarly, if you hope to pursue a career in the Media, Arts and Design industry, voluntary work with such groups will be a great asset. The practical experience that can be gained through voluntary / community sector work will not only help you get a graduate job but may also help you choose your career if you are undecided about occupations.

Organisations value the help given by students who demonstrate reliability, commitment, enthusiasm, patience and flexibility.

## **Benefits of voluntary and community sector work**

- In an increasingly competitive market, it's a good idea to have something to set yourself apart from the pack. Work experience and further study are both useful, but a recent study from Reed Executive found that three quarters of employers prefer to recruit candidates with volunteering experience on their CV.
- It helps you demonstrate self-reliant skills such as taking responsibility for your own career and personal development and people skills such as team working and communication.

- It allows you to practice volunteerism and 'give something back to society'.
- The Third Sector or Social Economy is expanding rapidly, and organisations in the sector are interested in recruiting more graduates. Having previous experience as a volunteer and gaining knowledge of the organisation and its ethos may give you an advantage at the selection stage.

## **What jobs could I do?**

Voluntary and community sector work tends to fall into the following categories:

- Administrator
- Advice worker / advocate for client groups
- Children / youth work / education
- Conservation & environmental projects
- International aid / Development Worker
- Lobbying / campaigning / fundraising / research
- Social / probation work
- Training and development officer/manager
- Working with the sick / people with a disability

There are opportunities available for short and long-term involvement.

## Voluntary and community sector work with local organisations

There are many organisations in your area or near your campus that welcome students and graduates for a semester or an academic year. Check the contacts on this leaflet.

Many organisations offer training to help you cope and some (e.g. Praxis, Women's Aid) provide courses in counselling skills. There are many interesting opportunities at home or abroad available on the Internet. Residential voluntary work can be the easiest as it provides accommodation, food and travel expenses. Often you get pocket money or local wages if working abroad. You work closely within a well supported team of like minded individuals.

## Volunteering abroad

Working overseas gives you the chance to demonstrate skills like adaptability, resilience and independence.

If you are looking for opportunity in the voluntary sector overseas, you will need to ask yourself:

- Do you have the right to work in that country?
- Can you speak the language?
- Is there volunteer support in the country where you want to work?

There are various organisations with projects as diverse as working with autistic children in Maryland to conservation in Vietnam. It is best to check out the organisation fully before you commit yourself, particularly issues such as health insurance, return travel, payment for accommodation and food, as well as your actual activities. Confirm all arrangements in writing and try to talk to someone who has been to the same location with the same, or a similar, organisation.

## Additional benefits of voluntary work abroad

- Employers will be impressed by your initiative in gaining a job abroad, your motivation to follow this through and make it a success, and the self-reliance inevitably developed by working abroad.
- The ability to communicate and work as a team with people from a broad range of cultural backgrounds is an invaluable skill that will look great on you CV.
- Working within a different social, political and economic system will give you new insights and an international perspective.

Always check the Foreign and Commonwealth Office [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) when going overseas to be sure your destination is considered safe.

Any work experience is valuable and if you've done your research and identified your objectives, the more positive your experience is likely to be. A most successful learning experience can be gained when you are clear as to your contribution to an organisation and what you learn from the experience. This can be enhanced if you register on the '**Employability through Work Experience**' module and get credit and a certificate for the work you do. (There is no charge for this module.)

Through this module we can help you to:

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- Find short term and part-time employment
- Get recognition for part-time work you are doing
- Enhance work experience already on your CV
- Build and record your employability skills development

### What will you have to do?

- Register online with the Work Experience Development Unit:  
**[http://workexperience.ulster.ac.uk/pdf/registration\\_form.phtml.htm](http://workexperience.ulster.ac.uk/pdf/registration_form.phtml.htm)**
- Participate in a short briefing session to introduce you to the module.
- Complete 80 hours work experience.
- Create a short e-portfolio describing outcomes from your experience.

Contact Work Experience Development Unit for help: email **[workexperience@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:workexperience@ulster.ac.uk)**  
telephone 028 9036 6280

The following could provide specific experience:

Tutoring and teaching can be gained through experience with students in a primary, secondary or special school:

- Tutoring in Schools helps you improve communication and interpersonal skills -  
**[www.ulster.ac.uk/teachlearn//access/tis](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/teachlearn//access/tis)**
- Young Enterprise allows you to combine making a difference to the community with gaining useful classroom experience - **[www.yeni.co.uk/](http://www.yeni.co.uk/)**
- Community and voluntary work gained through The Science Shop provides an opportunity for you to contribute to not-for-profit organisations by matching you to community based research requests - **[www.ulster.scienceshop.org](http://www.ulster.scienceshop.org)**
- Youth and cross community work in N Ireland: **[www.corrymeela.org](http://www.corrymeela.org)**
- Supporting children and adults with a learning disability: **[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)**
- Help and support to those with mental health needs: **[www.praxiscaregroup.org.uk](http://www.praxiscaregroup.org.uk)**
- Working with homeless people in Ireland: **[www.simoncommunity.org.uk](http://www.simoncommunity.org.uk)**
- Volunteer and education projects throughout Ireland and Overseas: **[www.suas.ie](http://www.suas.ie)**
- Nature conservation charity: **[www.ulsterwildlifetrust.org](http://www.ulsterwildlifetrust.org)**
- Encouraging people to take part in the arts or crafts: **[www.vaireland.org](http://www.vaireland.org)**

### Reference Materials

Available through the Career Development Centre

*How to work for a Charity:* Jan Brownfoot & Frances Wilks, Directory of Social Change

*Doing Voluntary Work Abroad* Mark Hempshell, How To Books

*Work & Study in Developing Countries:* Toby Milner, Vacation Work.

*Green Volunteers:* Fabio Ausenda, WorldView Publishing

*Voluntary Work: The Complete Guide to Voluntary Service,* Central Bureau

*World Volunteers (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition),* Edited by Fabio Ausenda/Erin McCloskey. Green Volunteer Publications.

*Volunteer (A Traveller's Guide to Making a Difference Around the World).* Lonely Planet.

*International Voluntary Work (10<sup>th</sup> Edition),* Victoria Pybus. Vacation Work Publications.

*The Guardian Guide to Volunteering in Association with Timebank.* Guardian Books.

### Useful Websites

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**www.volunteering-ni.org** - Volunteer Development Agency is the lead organisation for the promotion and development of volunteering across Northern Ireland.

**www.nicva.org** - NICVA is an umbrella body to make contact with voluntary, community and charitable groups in Northern Ireland.

**www.communityni.org** - Community NI is the central resource for information including vacancies in the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.

**www.activelink.ie** - Activelink is the online network for Irish non profit organisations. You can access information on seminars, events and general news relating to the Community and Voluntary sector.

**www.volunteering.org.uk** - National Centre for Volunteering - An essential on-line resource for volunteer managers, potential volunteers and anyone seeking up to date information on volunteering.

**www.volunteer.ie** - National organisation with responsibility for developing volunteering in Ireland, nationally and locally.

**www.volunteernow.co.uk** – This is the best place to start if you want to volunteer. It is quick and easy to use and there are thousands of volunteering opportunities available all over Northern Ireland.

You will find these and other links on the Work Experience Development Unit website

**<http://workexperience.ulster.ac.uk/students/voluntarylinks.phtml>**

Contact the Student Representation Coordinator at the University's Students' Union if you want to volunteer in any aspects of the union such as a course rep, starting a society or helping to run the union on campus.

For further advice and guidance contact the Career Development Advisers on campus or via the web **<http://careers.ulster.ac.uk/guidance>**