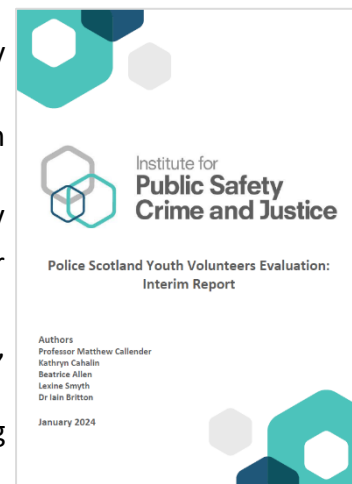


Policy Brief: Police Scotland Youth Volunteers – Benefits to Young People

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the benefits of PSYV for youth volunteers highlighted within in the first interim evaluation report of the PSYV programme; further information on this research can be found at:

Key Insights:

- ❖ Findings demonstrated significant positive feedback on how PSYV nurtures skills and creates new opportunities and experiences which the volunteers would otherwise not have.
- ❖ Many youth volunteers valued the impact PSYV could have on their future as they viewed it as enhancing their skills and confidence.
- ❖ Volunteers significantly enjoyed the social and community aspects of PSYV, with many wanting more opportunities to volunteer at a variety of events.
- ❖ Some youth volunteers did not feel they have a say or influence over the PSYV programme and felt there could be greater opportunities to develop their leadership skills.
- ❖ Volunteers enjoyed most activities, especially team building and group tasks, games and learning about the police.
- ❖ It is recommended to diversify the range of group night activities, learning modules, speakers, and games to keep youth volunteers actively engaged.



Introduction: The Police Scotland Youth Volunteer (PSYV) programme aims to strengthen the relationship with the police, young people, and their community. The PSYV programme is made up of groups of up to 24 young people based across Scotland supported by adult volunteers. Young people are given a chance to be heard, develop skills, and are encouraged to promote good citizenship by participating positively within their communities.

This paper draws on the findings of the first interim evaluation of the PSYV programme by the Institute of Public Safety, Crime and Justice. The main objectives of the evaluation are to understand the views and experiences of youth and adult volunteers; explore whether PSYV enables positive transitions as young people grow up; and explore the impact of PSYV for youths over a longer term. Overall, most youth volunteers provided positive answers in terms of their experiences as a PSYV, with 91% responding that ‘PSYV is run well’. Though, areas of improvement were identified and evidence-based recommendations are made below.

Method: The mixed-method evaluation began with online surveys, distributed in November 2023 to PSYV youth volunteers, adult staff, and alumni to obtain data on their experiences at PSYV, what they feel they have gained and what can be improved. The youth survey received a 30% response rate with 248 youth volunteers completing it. This survey is the first of three surveys which will track young people’s journeys as PSYVs and monitor how being a PSYV impacts young people’s trust and confidence in the police, their own confidence, resilience, ability to cope with transition and their feelings of citizenship. Qualitative case studies will be conducted in the summer of 2024 and 2025 involving focus groups and creative methods to engage young people in further defining strengths and weaknesses of the programme and how PSYV can be improved.

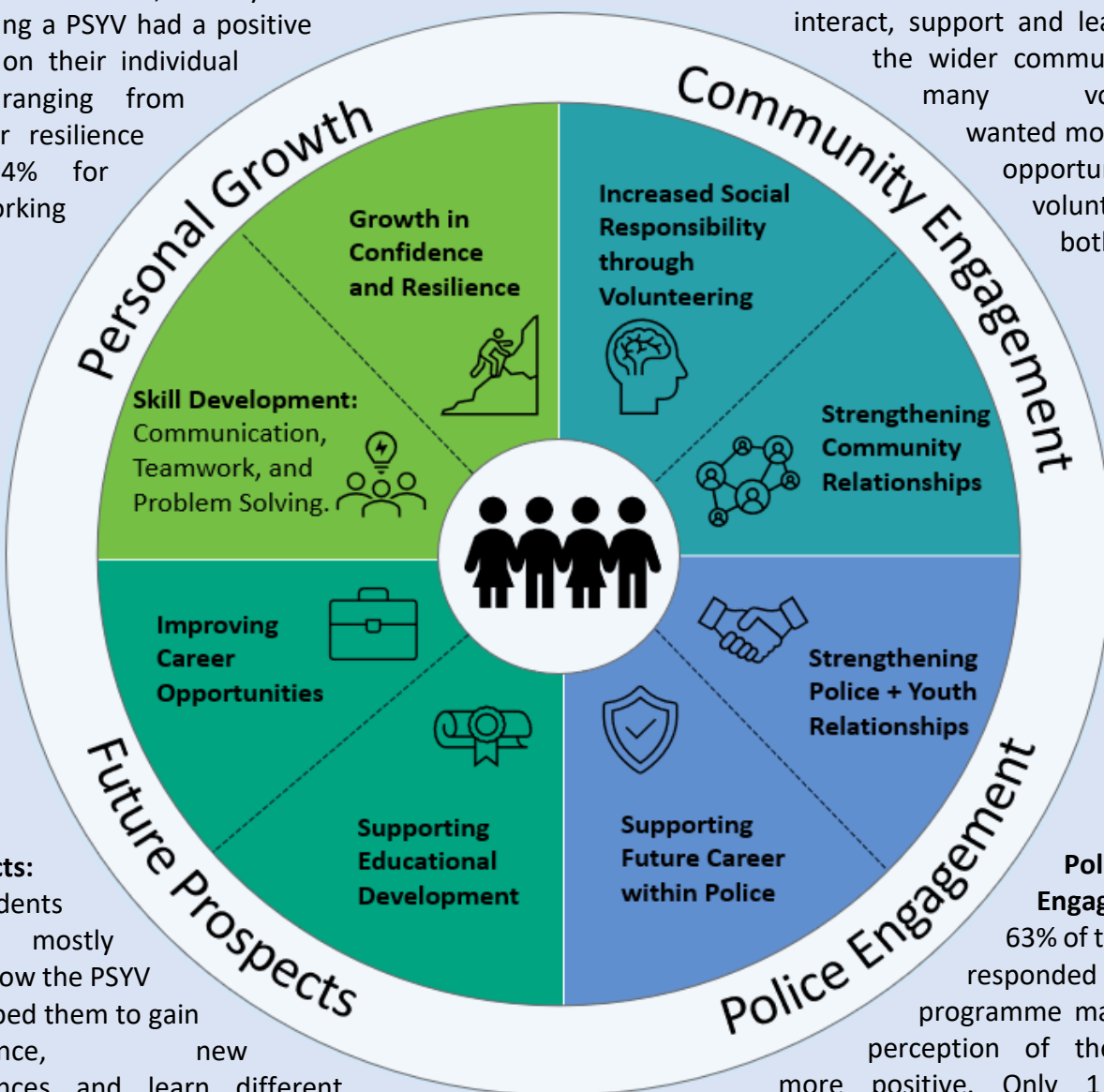
Importantly, young people actively participated in the evaluation design and delivery by testing and providing feedback on the annual surveys; saying what they would like the programme leaders to be asked; and producing a short video introducing the research to their fellow PSYVs.

Personal Growth:

When asked what they gain from PSYV there were over 60 references to skills including communication, social, leadership, teamwork, problem solving and overall life skills. A significant positive outcome is 8 in 10 (83%) PSYVs felt being a PSYV had a positive impact on their confidence, similarly 96% of 26 respondents who completed the alumni survey said PSYV had a positive impact on confidence. Also, most youth volunteers felt that being a PSYV had a positive impact on their individual skills, ranging from 81% for resilience and 94% for teamworking skills.

Community Engagement:

Over 95% of youth volunteers gave positive responses regarding being a PSYV and their sense of social responsibility, life experience and being able to make a positive contribution to their community. When asked what they gain from volunteering as a PSYV, the PSYVs were often referred to the social aspects such as belonging to a family, gaining a sense of community, and making friends. Further responses discussed getting to interact, support and learn from the wider community and many volunteers wanted more varied opportunities to volunteer at both local and national events.



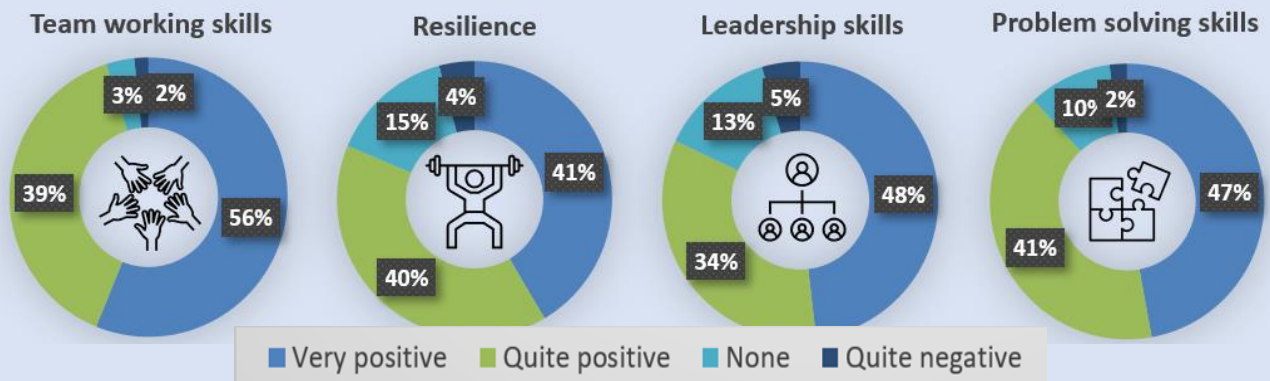
Future Prospects:

Respondents spoke mostly about how the PSYV has helped them to gain confidence, new experiences and learn different skills which would help them in the future in their education and for their career by increasing job opportunities. A further 28 volunteers said it would look good on their CV and 29 said it has helped them gain knowledge of what it is like to be in the police. 35 individual volunteer responses mentioned that being a PSYV would help them to get into the police force through connections and experience. In the alumni survey, out of 26 respondents 96% stated that their experience as a PSYV helped them in a job application, 80% in a job interview and 75% whilst studying.

Police Engagement:

63% of the PSYVs responded that the programme made their perception of the police more positive. Only 1 person selected that it had made it more negative. Youth volunteers referred to external influences (peers, family, media) and how interacting with police officers in the PSYV has allowed them to see a different side to the police than what is presented in the media. Through the PSYV they got to meet "friendly" police officers and understand more about what the police force does, which made them more respectful and empathetic of the police. Some of the adult staff and volunteers suggested there should be more police interaction and police related content within the programme.

Volunteer rated effect that PSYV has had on their skills and resilience.



Young People's Voices

"Builds my confidence and gets me out doing stuff when instead I would be sitting doing nothing".

"I enjoyed TRSMT Festival however I feel there could be more for us to do".

"I think it makes you understand how the police feel and work and humanises police officers".

"Able to give back to my community, and I gain a family".

"It will help you to get a job and be successful".

"I was nervous when I joined at first but now, I've made friendships, and now I socialise more because of PSYV".

Moving Forward

This paper has focused on the benefits of PSYV for youths and the observations below aim to enhance the value for all volunteers. All recommendations from the evaluation can be found in the full report.

> 23% of respondents did not feel that they have a say and influence over the programme and 18% did not feel that PSYV has a positive effect on their leadership skills. Youth volunteers should be empowered to have more of a say over the programme and advance their leadership skills.

> The volunteers' responses demonstrated the diversity in individuals' likes and dislikes of group night activities and volunteering events. It is recommended that PSYV vary and update the range of events, activities, learning modules, games, and speakers - so the youth volunteers remain engaged.

> Volunteers asked for more organisation and communication at events as some felt they were not given clear roles or tasks. It is recommended that at the start of an event, youth volunteers are provided with clear information regarding the organisation of the event and handed out responsibilities so that they feel they are providing valuable support.

> It is recommended that a national audit is undertaken to assess the participation of the different groups at events/campaigns to ensure equity of opportunity across the different local groups.

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