



# The Power of Volunteering

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How volunteering brings benefits to the lives of individuals and businesses.

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Career Ready is a national charity at the heart of a network of employers and educators who all believe that every young person, regardless of background, deserves the opportunity to kickstart a rewarding future. We work with employers to provide young people with a paid internship, mentor, workplace visits, skills masterclasses, and wider employability activities and support.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

This report was written by Anna Trocme Latter (Head of Impact & Continuous Improvement, Career Ready) and Tom Rippon (Communications Manager, Career Ready), with design by Emily Girvan (Career Ready).

We would like to give special thanks to all our volunteers and employers who completed surveys and were interviewed as part of this research.

# About this report

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We were founded in 2002 by leading business figures with a mission: to boost social mobility by connecting young people with volunteer support from the world of work.

Over the years we have built relationships with employers of all sizes and sectors to give young people the network of workplace support and opportunities they need to thrive in education, employment, and life. Through these relationships, young people on our programme develop vital workplace skills and experience, grow in confidence, and achieve higher academic and career attainment.

Volunteering is central to how we support young people. This includes one-to-one mentoring, skills masterclasses, Local Advisory Board membership, supervising interns, pro-bono skills-based volunteering, and industry insight activities.

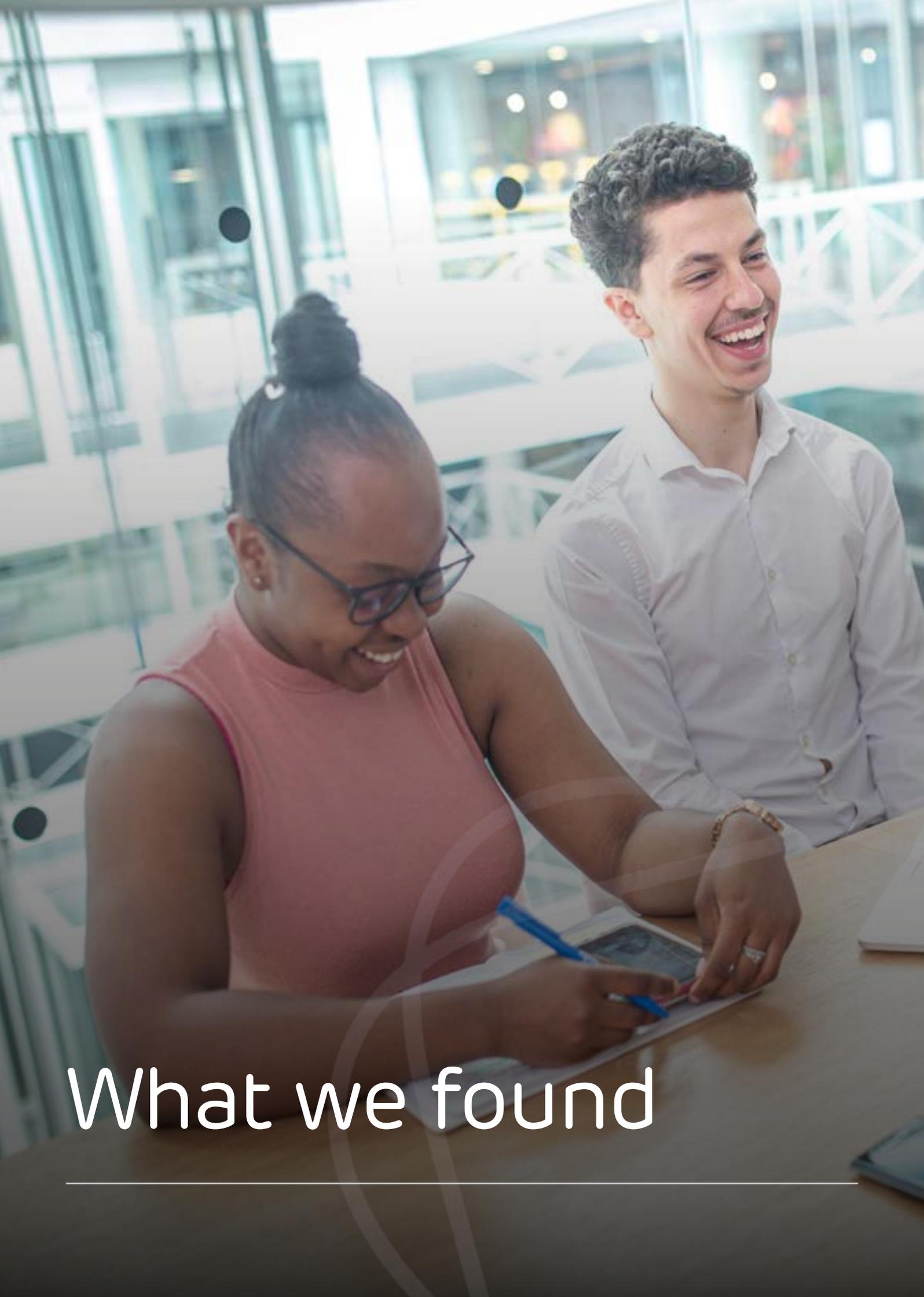
These opportunities are wide-ranging, and our volunteer and employer relationships reflect this. We work with employers of all sizes and sectors, and our volunteers come from a range of professional, personal, and geographic backgrounds. Likewise, the nature of our volunteering programme offer varies from structured, employer supported volunteering schemes to more individual relationships.

Following the launch of our recent research into the long-term impact of our programme on young people, we want to explore the wider impact of our work. What does volunteering with Career Ready do for volunteers and their employers? By exploring this impact, we believe we can strengthen the partnerships needed to help deliver systemic change in education and employment.

For this research we surveyed 431 current and recent Career Ready volunteers from 172 employers across the UK. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative-based questions, they were asked about their motivations for volunteering, the impact it has had on them, what they have enjoyed, and what they would improve about their volunteering experience. Of our research participants:

- 95% were mentors
- 92% were employed at the time of volunteering (with the remaining 8% either self-employed or retired)
- Just under half were volunteering as part of their employer's volunteering scheme
- 77% are current volunteers, 16% last volunteered in the 2019-20 academic year, and 7% last volunteered in 2018-19

In addition to the survey responses, we held qualitative interviews with volunteers and employers to explore the findings in more detail.



# What we found

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# Case Study

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## Wojciech Iłowski is an Industry Operations Leader at Marsh and a Career Ready mentor.

At Marsh, our people want to give back, but they sometimes get stuck knowing how to do that. Structured programmes like Career Ready make it very easy– it's pretty much ready-made.

All we've got to do is source colleagues and Career Ready gives them structured, meaningful volunteering opportunities.

Career Ready's role is also a catalyst because they understand both the private sector and the school reality.

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Particularly during the pandemic, having the opportunity to volunteer and see your company make an active investment gives people a boost, it gives people purpose. They respect the company's commitment. And it's not just something that's at a board level in a strategy document, it translates to their level.

When I ask people to volunteer, I always get an enthusiastic yes – but they often feel a lack of confidence in their ability to do it. The number one concern is not the time commitment, it's 'can I add value to the student?' But as a mentor you see the student grow - just the fact that they have somebody from a big company talking to them and treating them as an equal helps them grow their confidence and the skills that follow, irrespective of anything else.

# What we found

The last year has posed challenges for everyone but, despite the global pandemic, our volunteers have been there for young people. In addition to the benefits volunteering has delivered for the young people on our programme, we have four key findings for individuals and businesses.

## 1. Shared values

Time and time again in our research and interviews, what shone through was that our volunteers are motivated by a desire to transform the lives of young people, sharing our values of empowering young lives. And they are motivated by wanting to give back to their community, either the local one they live in or – in a broader sense – the one they grew up in.



**My wellbeing has improved knowing that I'm helping a pupil through their final stages at school. Work life is exceptionally hectic these days and it's good to have time to spend focussing on something other than day-to-day work.**

Alison Mudie, Dundee City Council

It is affirming that these motivations to volunteer were met by the reality of the programme, as, when asked what made volunteering with Career Ready unique and enjoyable, the most cited response was the opportunity to directly support a young person. Indeed, the opportunity for volunteers to make a direct, tangible contribution using their own skills, experience, and networks is a powerful motivator, with 82% believing they have had a positive impact on a young person.



**I never had the easiest of upbringings and was the first in my extended family to go to university. I know there are others like that and I want to give back as much as I can. I come from a Learning and Development background and wanted to utilise my skills, knowledge and understanding in the best way possible whilst hopefully helping a young person's confidence and belief in themselves grow!**

Career Ready volunteer



**95% of survey respondents chose to volunteer to help a young person fulfil their potential**



**55% of survey respondents chose to volunteer to give something back to their community**

## 2. Volunteering adds business value

It goes without saying that the primary beneficiaries of volunteering are the young people themselves, yet our research highlights that these relationships are mutually beneficial. Indeed, volunteering is a fantastic opportunity for individuals and organisation to develop new skills, gain new perspectives, and enjoy greater wellbeing through their volunteering relationships and experiences.

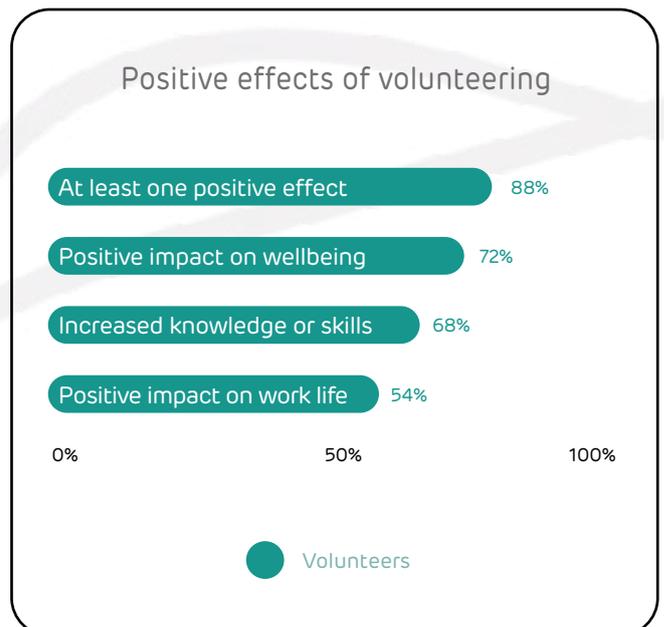
Overall, 88% of volunteers felt volunteering with Career Ready impacted positively on them in some way. More than two thirds cited an increase in their knowledge or skills, with 91% of those improving their coaching or mentoring skills. This has clear benefits to individuals, allowing them to harness and enhance their existing knowledge, but also to organisations who are looking to boost the capabilities of their workforce.

Furthermore, 83% of those with increased knowledge and skills said they better understood how to motivate young people, and 73% had increased knowledge of the challenges faced by young people.

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**As a business, I see benefits for some of our younger managers to be involved in mentoring as it allows them to develop their own skills.**  
Mike Bruce | Morrison Construction, Aberdeenshire

This highlights how volunteering is an important part of helping employees to become better colleagues and managers, especially of future Generation Z cohorts, and encouraging more diverse and inclusive workplaces. Indeed, given these clear business benefits, there is a very strong argument for every organisation to embed volunteering within their workplace culture and practices.

These benefits to business are not limited to the development of hard and soft skills; there are more holistic benefits to individuals' wellbeing and their relationship with work. 72% of respondents experienced a positive impact on their wellbeing and, in over half of cases, there was a positive impact on the volunteer's work life.



### 3. Volunteering has career-long benefits

As has been evidenced, volunteering has immense value to employees in terms of skill development and wellbeing, with the majority of volunteers reporting at least one positive impact. However, we also found that these benefits varied depending on the career stage of the volunteer.

Overall, those in more junior positions and at the early stages of their career were most likely to experience a positive impact and, most notably, they were 11% more likely than average to develop their knowledge or skills. Meanwhile, those at a mid-level point of their career were more likely to experience a positive impact on their work life, and volunteers at a more senior point were most likely to see an impact on their wellbeing.

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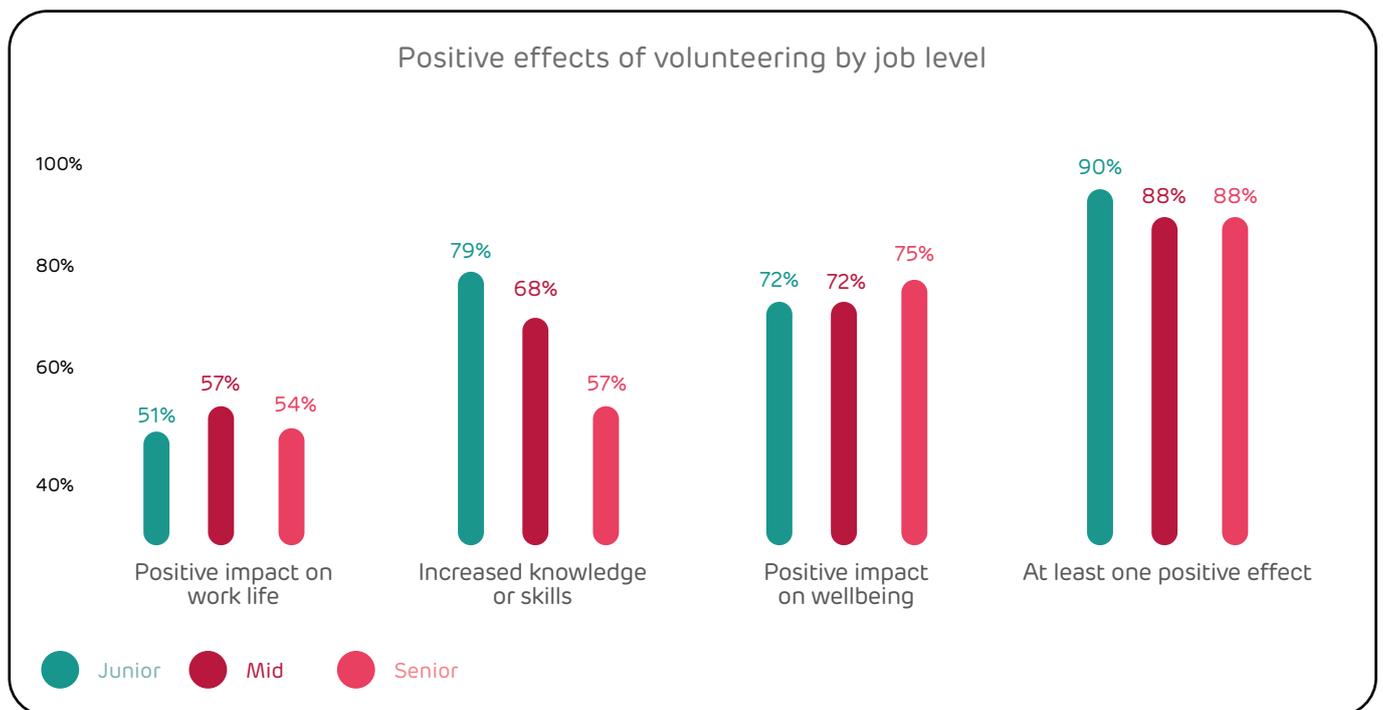
Being able to guide a young person through the year and develop their skills and opportunities is a quasi-manager relationship that gives me experience I am unlikely to receive in the workplace for some time.

Career Ready volunteer

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Working with Career Ready is a great way to help our junior staff develop the skills needed to become managers, and it gives me the opportunity to see what potential team leaders I've got.

Nancy Flint | Head of EMEA Corporate Access, Citi



## 4. Investing in employee volunteering pays dividends

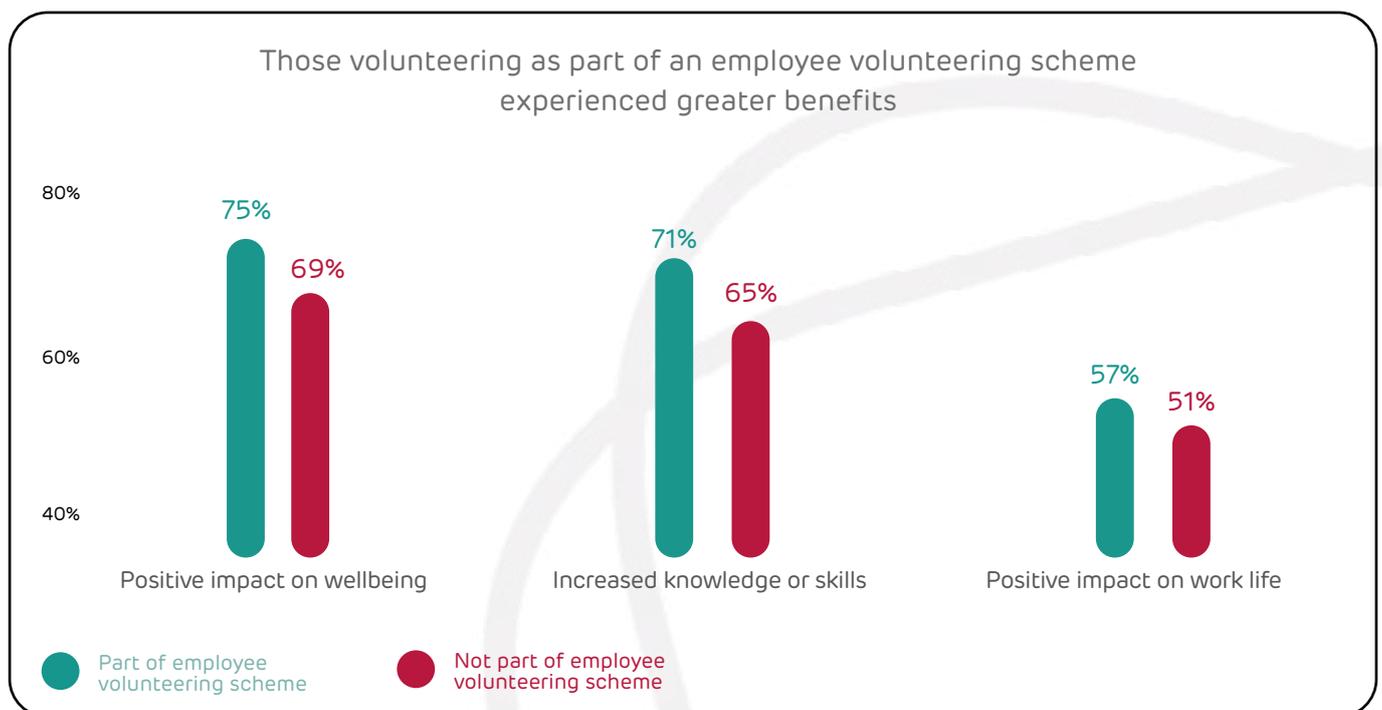
The business benefits that volunteering provides in terms of upskilling and wellbeing is more pronounced on those who are part of an employee volunteering scheme.

Indeed, across all areas, those who were part of an employee volunteering scheme experienced a greater impact than those who volunteered on an individual basis. More generally, three quarters of volunteers believe employee volunteering schemes have a positive impact on employers, rising to 84% for those who are already part of such a scheme.

These findings highlight how, through embedding volunteering schemes within their organisation, employers can enhance the existing business benefits of volunteering. Indeed, employers should not simply see volunteering as part of their CSR strategy, but rather a core element of their 'people culture' due to its evidenced impact on employee upskilling, workplace culture, and employee engagement.

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Wojciech Ilowski,  
Industry Operations Leader, Marsh





Who am I?

First job...

current

and my career

best  
about  
job...

An  
interesting  
fact about my  
career...

# Reflections and recommendations

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# Case Study

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## Jenny Pelling, Apprenticeship Partnerships Director at Kaplan Financial and a Career Ready mentor.

I started volunteering to help a young person fulfil their potential and now two years in, not only am I witnessing that impact, but it's also enriching my own sense of purpose.

I find mentoring a young person very fulfilling, working with them helps me tune into the concerns and challenges they are facing and that's certainly beneficial at work. Having the perspective of my mentee in mind broadens my thinking and frame of reference.

I do some other volunteering work, but Career Ready is different because of the extended

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contact with one individual. Sometimes volunteering work can feel like it's part of a very large whole, and you don't always see first-hand what impact your time has had. But with Career Ready - you can tell each month how someone has grown in confidence, so it feels more immediate and personal.

The continuity of the year-long relationship has led me to understand more of the things bothering my mentee. Each session, I get to know my mentee a little better and see the impact that our conversations are having. By seeing her every month, I can tell how much she has developed and that gives me a sense of pride in what she's achieving. I feel like my career means something more because I'm able to share my experiences and help someone who's about to start out in the world of work.

Kaplan have made it very easy for me. They are very supportive and allow staff to take two days a year to volunteer, so I could have done this in work time. That said, my role is pretty busy so my mentee and I usually speak at the end of the day. There are also other Career Ready mentors across Kaplan which means there's a network of people to share ideas with and that's worked really well.

# Reflections and recommendations

The evidence is clear that volunteering is a time commitment well spent. Not only do young people experience life changing outcomes, volunteers and employers are also rewarded for their investment.

Individuals see a boost in their skills, knowledge, and wellbeing, and employers can subsequently reap the personal and professional benefits they see in their staff. What is more, this impact is aligned with the career progression stage which individual volunteers are at, with junior staff members seeing higher boosts in terms of skill development, and senior staff primarily seeing benefits in terms of their wellbeing.

A further element of the findings was that individuals felt that their motivations to volunteer, which were overwhelmingly to transform the lives of young people, were fulfilled in their experience of our programme activities. Indeed, seeing the impact they were having on a young person's development is a key driver in the wellbeing and 'sense of reward' which volunteers experienced.

Finally, what stood out in feedback from respondents was that each volunteer felt they could offer something different based on their unique life experience, skills, and networks of support. Not only does this create an enhanced volunteering experience for the individual, where they feel their time is being put to effective use, but it has immense value to the young person who has access to personalised support.

Based upon the findings of our research, we have three core recommendations for how the power of volunteering can be enhanced further by employers, individuals, and volunteering organisations, including ourselves.

## 1. Empower employee volunteers

First, employers should empower their people to volunteer, especially their junior leaders. Volunteering should be embedded in organisations' 'people and culture' practices due to its positive effects on employee upskilling, wellbeing, and engagement. Employees should be given time and encouragement to volunteer on a regular basis, be made aware of opportunities via employee volunteering schemes, and have their efforts recognised as part of any 'learning and development' progress reviews. It is important to stress that embedding volunteering in the workplace is something which can be implemented by employers of all sizes and sectors. At Career Ready we have worked to do just that with organisations of all sizes, from multi-national banks to SMEs, delivering business value for all.

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**Being a manager and a leader involves the same skills as being a mentor. Listening, coaching, and building relationships; I decided to volunteer so that I could develop these skills as well as give something back**

Mark Axworth, Career Ready mentor, Aviva, Perth

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## 2. Embrace volunteering

Second, the recognition that everyone has something to give through volunteering, regardless of age or background. Volunteering, especially in forms such as professional mentoring, should not be seen as the preserve of those in stereotypically high-powered industries or job roles. We can each make a life-changing difference with our unique blend of life experience, skills, and insight. Let's embrace the difference we can make and get volunteering!

## 3. Equip volunteers to succeed

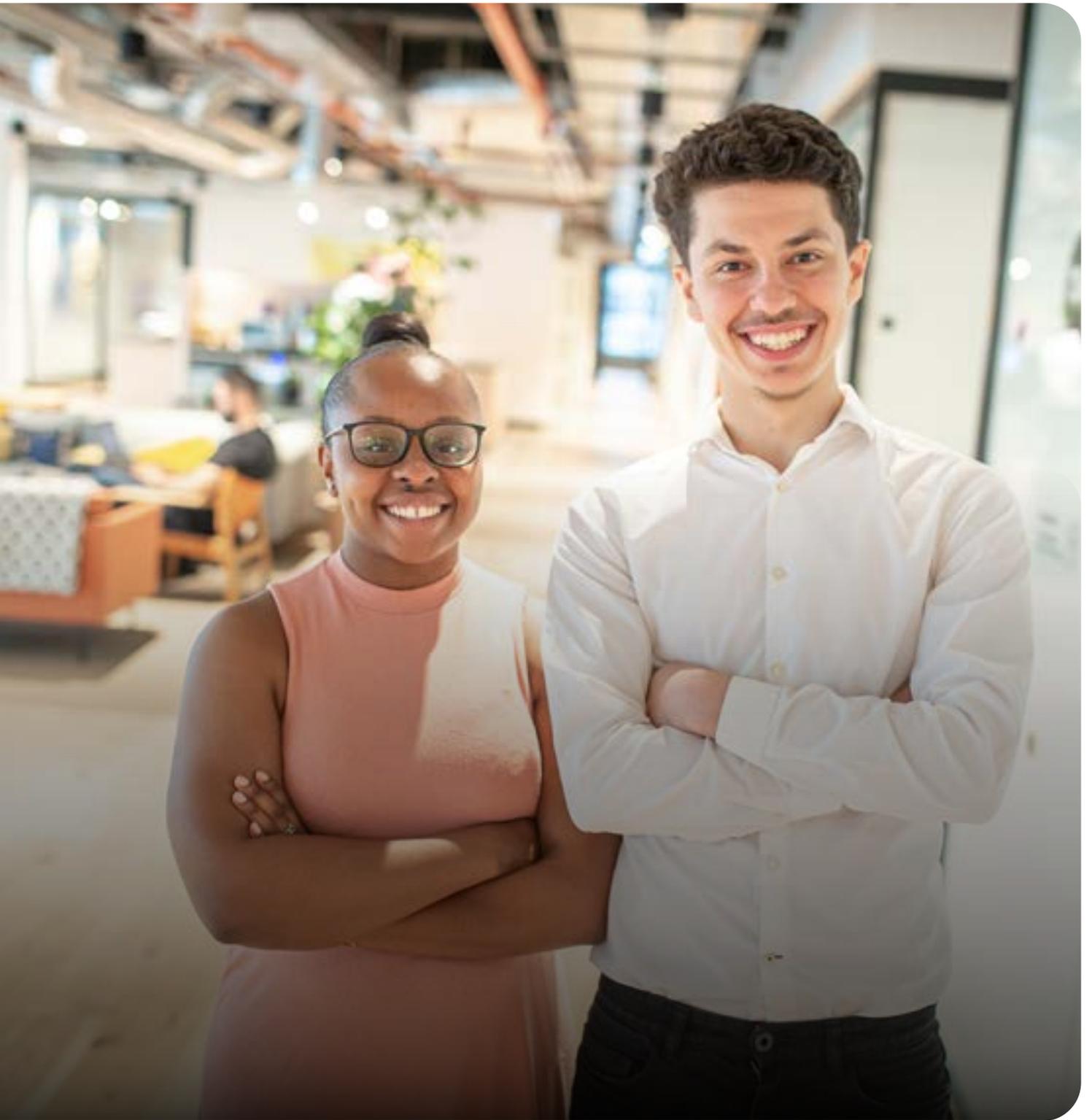
And finally, volunteering organisations, including Career Ready, need to ensure that, as well as celebrating the benefits of volunteering, we listen to volunteers about what could make their experience more impactful. Additional training and a desire to learn more about the education system, social mobility, and young people's challenges all ranked highly in our research. By further supporting volunteers in these areas, we will help them to become better and more inclusive colleagues, equip and empower them to drive change in their organisations, and work more effectively alongside employers to create system change.

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Jenny Pelling, Apprenticeship Partnerships Director, Kaplan Financial





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