

Free Spirit

AMY PICKERING SHARES SEVEN GREAT REASONS WHY VOLUNTEERING IS ACTIVELY ENCOURAGED AT DAVENANT FOUNDATION SCHOOL...

Organising student volunteering can be time-consuming, but the benefits to teaching and learning – as well as a student's personal development – make it all worthwhile. At Davenant Foundation School we offer volunteering opportunities to students to support our ethos of nurturing mind, body and spirit.

I manage the Sixth Form Enrichment Programme, which provides a range of extra-curricular activities including volunteering placements. These give students a chance to volunteer at local charities and businesses, assist in care homes, and work at local primary schools to help with reading, as well as opportunities to mentor in school. Outside the Enrichment Programme there are a wide range of sporting volunteering opportunities. For instance, last year students were selected to volunteer at the London 2012 games and supported paralympians, which included working in the Great British Garden.

The skills students gain through volunteering transfer to the classroom and can make a noticeable difference to engagement, behaviour and progress. Volunteering helps students to develop in confidence, improve their communication skills, and mature as individuals.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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There are many ways this can materialise and outlined below are some of the things we see most often at Davenant:

1 Getting organised

Understanding the importance of planning and self-management is not something that every young person can appreciate! However, volunteering in a care home or working in a charity shop means learning to arrive punctually and be prepared. Any teacher will recognise that these are also essential skills for school life whether it be studying in class, completing homework or simply arriving on time. We find that volunteering can make a positive difference and help students to prioritise and get organised.

2 Learning to commit

As students prepare for GCSEs, A-levels and other exams there is a growing need to 'stick with it' over a sustained period of time. Volunteering can be a great way to develop students' capacity for persistence and hard work.

For instance, our students are involved in Get Set to Make a Change, the new youth volunteering programme from the British Olympic Association and British Paralympic Association, which runs until the end of 2015. Students need to deliver at least two community projects and it is inevitable that during the process they will encounter challenges. However, dealing with these gives them valuable experience that they can also apply to day-to-day study, revision and exams.



3 Boosting confidence

Teenagers can sometimes be shy and lack confidence but we find that volunteering makes a considerable difference. Overcoming nerves to share a conversation with an elderly resident in a care home, or simply being expected to talk to the general public, can boost confidence enormously. In turn, this increases confidence in the classroom with students participating in class and playing a more active role in lessons.

4 Additional qualifications

One of the most tangible ways that volunteering supports learning is that it can lead to extra qualifications. Davenant signed up recently to deliver the Level 3 Community Volunteering Qualification (CVQ), which enables students to earn recognition for their volunteering activities. In addition, the CVQ is worth a valuable 50 UCAS points and is equivalent to a grade B at AS.

5 A sense of responsibility

One of the great things about volunteering is that students grasp first-hand the contribution that they can make in the world. Whether it be helping to assist KS3 students through school life issues as part of peer mentoring, or adapting to working on new and unfamiliar tasks as part of a work experience placement, it is a brilliant way for students to see the noticeable and satisfying difference they can make. This helps to nurture a greater sense of personal responsibility, which in turn, leads to a more positive attitude to their learning.

6 Ready to take the lead

At Davenant we feel that every young person has the potential to be a leader in society and volunteering is a valuable way to nurture this. Encouraging students to develop their leadership skills (and to apply these in their own learning) empowers them to be more active learners, to articulate their needs more clearly, and to support their peers more effectively.

★ GET SET TO MAKE A CHANGE

If you want to get your students volunteering, the new initiative from the British Olympic Association and British Paralympic Association might fit the bill. It is on a mission to inspire students to get more involved in their local communities. More than 200 projects, led by young people known as Legacy Leaders, are planned to take place across the UK and will be focused on sports participation and a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

The website has lots of resources for students to plan volunteering projects, get inspiration and to 'make a pledge' for their own community project:

<http://roadshow.makeachange.org.uk/resources/>

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7 Investment in the future

As in any school, the future of each of our students is very important and we feel that volunteering is valuable experience. Whether they hope to study at university, secure an apprenticeship or seek employment, competition is fierce and experience gained through volunteering can help them to stand out. The skills students learn in volunteering nurture their development, and are central to what learning and teaching is ultimately all about – helping our young people to have a successful future.