

Climate Squad – youth volunteering opportunities on climate change

Abstract

This workshop will explore the volunteering opportunities available through the new Climate Squad volunteering initiative for young people (16-25 yrs), current research outcomes on young people's attitudes towards volunteering and climate change action and the importance of youth ownership and consultation of such projects.

The UK is currently in the middle of a serious economic downturn, which is likely to last for at least another year or two. Alongside that we are experiencing global effects of climate change, which are predicted to become much more serious. Young people are affected critically by both of these issues since employment opportunities are on the decline for those leaving education and they are the future generation who will be living with the most damaging effects of climate change.

There is a growing need to equip young people with the skills and confidence to build sustainable communities, gain future employment, particularly in the environment sector, and cope with ever-changing circumstances. In addition, YouGov's research on young people's views on climate change (2009) indicates that 75% of 16-25 year olds want to do something about climate change and a whopping 94% feel it is important that communities work together to prevent the worst effects of climate change. In response, the Climate Squad programme (launched in Summer 2009) will develop young people as leaders on sustainability in their communities through an accredited training course and a wide range of creative and engaging volunteering opportunities, across England. Young people will be given the opportunity to lead on sustainable community initiatives and inspire others to take action on climate change. The programme will engage young people aged 16 - 25, with a particular focus on those new to and under-represented in mainstream environmental volunteering, and aims for 50% of volunteers to be not in employment, education or training (NEET).

By participating in Climate Squad, young people will be encouraged to raise awareness in their local and online communities and to engage in the political agenda on green issues. The Climate Squad aims to address serious issues in a fun, creative and engaging way. It is a movement for young people to join and to belong to; it is a way to communicate young people's concerns on climate change and a call to action.

Climate Squad Volunteering Opportunities will...

1. **INSPIRE** and support young people in the development of leadership and employability skills, enabling them to recruit and motivate additional volunteers to work with them on local sustainability projects, and providing links to 'green' jobs.
2. **ENABLE** young people to take action, leading and participating in behaviour change and outdoor environmental activities in their communities to make tangible and measureable differences to carbon emission levels and their local environment.
3. **STRENGTHEN** social links between young people (as community leaders) and their local community, encouraging active participation in sustainability action.
4. **PROVIDE** young people with the opportunity to promote green messages and achievements through creative communications and a dynamic online community.
5. **ENGAGE** young people with the political agenda on environmental issues.

Climate Squad is creating a range of exciting new initiatives in consultation with young people who are typically under-represented or disengaged from volunteering opportunities. The carbon impact of all Climate Squad actions will be measured and the Squad will work towards an overall carbon reduction target of 4,000 tonnes in the first two years.