

Theatre and art are best way to encourage model citizens, says first large-scale survey of youth volunteering

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Taking your children to the theatre or an art gallery is the best way of turning them into active community-minded citizens, even more so than to religious services, a new study has found.

The British Sociological Association annual conference in London heard today [Wednesday 3 April] that [young people](#) who frequently took part in cultural activities were much more likely to do voluntary or community work.

Matthew Bennett, of the Third Sector Research Centre, University of Southampton, and Meenakshi Parameshwaran, of the University of Oxford, analysed survey data on 4,760 people aged 10-15 for the study, the first large-scale [quantitative analysis](#) of volunteering among youths in the UK.

Mr Bennett told the conference that 4% of 10-15 year-olds did voluntary work on most days, 6% did it once a week or more, another 8% once a month or more, and 33% did it once or several times a year. He said that these rates were comparable with results from similar US studies.

The researchers found that:

- Girls were 50% more likely to volunteer than boys
- Children from ethnic minorities were 27% more likely to volunteer than white British youths
- Young people in the countryside were 20% more likely to volunteer than those from large towns and cities
- Having a parent who volunteered made it 21% more likely that a [young person](#) would volunteer.

The researchers also found that attending cultural

or [sports events](#) was the largest predictor of civic engagement. Young people who said they went "often" to the theatre, ballet, classical music concerts, museums, art galleries or sports events were 65% more likely to taken part in voluntary work than those who went less often.

Young people who attended weekly [religious services](#) were no more likely to do voluntary or community work than those who did not, and the religious denomination of young people made no difference to their willingness to volunteer. However those who attended religious extracurricular classes were 37% more likely to do voluntary work than others.

"This research provides the first comprehensive analysis of the factors predicting the frequency of youth civic engagement," Mr Bennett, told the conference.

"Taking part in cultural activities indicates distinguished tastes and preferences among young people, and it may be that this leads them to think that taking part in [voluntary work](#) will also distinguish them.

"Our analysis found, by contrast, that there are no significant differences between Christians, non-Christians and the non-religious, or among those who regularly attend church services, compared with those who do not.

"There are no differences between denominations, and the lack of difference between non-religious and religious groups overall might suggest that secularization isn't detrimental to civic engagement.

"However those attending religious classes showed a greater willingness to volunteer, so religion does still play a role in [youth](#) engagement. Religious

classes make more of a difference than simple church attendance, perhaps because [religious](#) classes formalise civic opportunities and gear them more towards youths.

"The research is important because academics, politicians and policy-makers have raised concerns over the apparent apathy among youths towards civic engagement – it is typically thought that an alienated and disengaged generation of youths today is detrimental to a flourishing civil society tomorrow. The sample of youths in this study demonstrates that they are not alienated or disengaged.

"It is important to engage young people in volunteering because there are many positive outcomes associated with [civic engagement](#), such as increased health and wellbeing, and benefits for careers and educational attainment. Young people will not be able to benefit from these outcomes if they lack the opportunities to engage. Our models also suggest that more work needs to be done to engage boys, white youths, urban youths and working class youths.

"Furthermore, our findings demonstrate that youths may learn civic roles via their parents – parents that are involved in volunteering are more likely to have children who volunteer. So policy could also focus on mentoring programs that provide opportunities for youths to be involved, especially those who do not have parents that are engaged themselves."

The researchers used data on 4,760 young people in 3,626 households, collected in 2010 and 2011 in the Wave 2 of the Understanding Society survey.

Provided by British Sociological Association

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