Volunteer Development Scotland is Scotland’s National Centre for Excellence in Volunteering.

We are pleased to respond to the Health and Sport Committee call for evidence on Mental Health Services for Young People.

Our intention is to highlight volunteering as an activity which can positively enhance the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

The experience of being a volunteer has the potential to address the mental health needs of children and young people in the following areas:

- Confidence building
- To avoid the routine use of medication
- To be able to express themselves
- To be able to contribute positively to their communities – and thus reduce any negative labeling of young people with mental health issues
- To become peer educators and supporters to give crucial advice and help to other children and young people.
- To build the skills, experiences and self-esteem which can enable the transition to adulthood

It should also be emphasized that volunteers themselves play a vital part in providing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS)

Our hope is that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Scotland can move towards integrating volunteering more prominently into the services they provide.

We have outlined below some general information on volunteering and mental health, which we trust the Committee will find useful.
Volunteering and Mental Health

Volunteer Development Scotland believes volunteering has much to offer this agenda and therefore should feature prominently in the Action Plan. There is evidence which suggests that volunteering can:

• Help people to experience those things (social networks, sense of purpose and belonging) which are accepted as contributing to maintaining good mental health;

• Be an important part in helping people with mild to moderate mental health issues to better cope and/or recover;

• Be a means by which a person can gain confidence, develop skills and knowledge, and get a current reference which might help them out of state benefits into a paid job or education or training;

• Be a way in which the people of Scotland can actively participate in this agenda by volunteering to support and/or work alongside people with mental health issues;

• Bring people together (for example from across the mental health continuum or from different backgrounds) so that they can learn more about one and other and at least have the potential to developed views of others based on practical experience.

Volunteering should be viewed as a very practical thing children and young people can do to help maintain and/or improve their mental health and the mental health of others. It needs to be better recognised as an action which can contribute towards better community wellbeing, solidarity and social cohesion. Helping other people and making a useful contribution to their life is one of the most powerful activities a person can do to improve their own sense of self esteem.

What do we mean by volunteering?

By volunteering we mean activity which a person freely enters into and gives of their time, is not undertaken to achieve financial gain and which seeks to benefit people outwith ones immediate family or to benefit a cause, for example, the environment.

There are four types of volunteering as defined by the United Nations – service giving, mutual aid/self help, civic engagement and campaigning.

In Scotland volunteering occurs in both the public sector and in the voluntary sector. Some private sector employers (and public ones too) provide help for
staff to volunteer through what is known as Employer Supported Volunteer initiatives.

There are two main ways in which people volunteer their time, formally or informally – sometimes referred to as managed or self managed volunteering. Managed volunteering is when a person volunteers through a third party, normally an organisation for example a mental health association or their local NHS or their local authority’s social work department. Self managed volunteering is when a person helps another person directly for example helping a neighbour by cutting their grass, doing shopping for them or driving them to GP surgeries.
**Policy Connections**
Getting volunteering more prominently featured in this agenda can, in part, be achieved by connecting it to:

- the recently published Scottish Government, Refreshed Strategy for Volunteering in the NHS, which is referenced in the Scottish Government’s Better Health Better Care Action Plan, December 2007;

- the current Scottish Government Strategy for Volunteering published in 2004, and;

- the section on Volunteering in “With Inclusion in Mind” – the local authority’s role in promoting wellbeing and social development- Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act Sections 25-31 published in October 2007. The list of actions on volunteering on page 34 of this document should be mapped into the proposed Mental Health Action Plan.

The Refreshed Strategy for Volunteering in the NHS requires all NHS Boards to produce a strategic action plan on volunteering, to seek to have it incorporated within Community Planning Partnerships and to explore with other Community Planning partners the need for a strategic overarching plan for volunteering. Volunteer Development Scotland is aware of work of this kind already underway in some Community Planning Partnerships for example Edinburgh, Angus, Dundee and Glasgow. There is an opportunity to have a more strategic approach to volunteering and mental health by making it a key part of any overarching volunteering strategy developed by a Community Planning Partnership.

Volunteering needs to be part of any local co-ordination. Local Volunteer Centres should be invited to participate in CAMHS if not already involved.

Work needs to be done to ensure/ check that key agencies have the right knowledge and skills to refer young people into volunteering and that those organisations who involve young volunteers in their work have the knowledge, skills and resources to involve those with mental health issues effectively and positively.

Community Health Partnerships should develop a more strategic approach to volunteering and CAMHS and be clearer about how volunteering can help them to achieve the intended outcomes in promoting mental health and wellbeing.

We would be very willing to discuss volunteering as an effective intervention in child and Adolescent Mental Health Services with the Committee. Please contact: