Unit 5: Exercise 9

Complete the sentences with the correct endings in the box.

How young volunteers are making a difference

In a recent survey, thousands of young people were asked about their generation's attitudes to helping others, and what they thought about volunteering and charity work. The results were interesting and surprised the organisers. The survey revealed that most young people were, in comparison with their parents and grandparents, far more concerned about issues such as homelessness, the environment and crime. The rising number of young people who participate in voluntary work seems to support this. 'This increase goes against the negative stereotype that some older people have of teenagers and young adults,' suggests Professor Josh McKinnon, one of the organisers. 'They think younger people are selfish, but this seems not to be the case. They actually want to help and do something positive for the community. Unfortunately, many charities have the same wrong idea, and don't bother to find ways to recruit young people.'

On the 4th September 2010, an earthquake struck the city of Christchurch in New Zealand. Not only was there a great deal of damage to offices and homes, but many roads were made unusable. This was because the earthquake had turned solid earth into a liquid form – a process known as 'liquefaction'. Many New Zealanders watched the news on television, feeling like there was nothing they could do to help.

Sam Johnson, a 22-year-old local, felt differently. He used social media to contact his friends, asking them to help. The next day, over 150 students turned up to a Christchurch suburb and began clearing up the muddy earth. Local residents were amazed but also incredibly grateful. So what was it that made Johnson step up, and other young students rush to assist? Professor McKinnon comments that age was an important factor: 'In some situations where urgent action is required, older people often think, "That's terrible, I hope the government does something about it." But younger people don't share the same feelings. They're much quicker to go and get involved and do something to help.'

In February 2012, Christchurch suffered an even more serious earthquake, and Johnson organised a much bigger group of young volunteers. In the period that followed, he was leading around 13,000 volunteers a week. They cleaned up 360,000 tons of liquefaction, handed out food and water, helped people install emergency toilets and distributed information. One thing that really helped was some of Sam's friends' technical abilities. The apps they created to help organise the other volunteers meant that they worked efficiently and effectively. 'This is the kind of thing that many established charities should be paying attention to,' observes Tom Hordern, a lecturer in social politics. 'Today's young generation use digital platforms to raise money and encourage other people to contribute their time, bring in food or clothes and so on. This is an approach that works really well. Some forward-thinking charities have begun to realise this, and are deliberately hiring younger staff.' Today Sam Johnson is still active in helping other people in need. Together with other key members of his volunteer group, he is setting up volunteer structures around the world and encouraging other people to help, for example in Japan and the USA.

Other young people are volunteering in ways that aren't as high-profile as Sam Johnson, but which still make a difference. From cleaning parks, to baking cakes to raise money for new computers in schools, young volunteers are taking the lead in improving their communities. Nadia Paxman, author of *Community Minded*, believes that this is significant: 'This is what large charities need to understand. They forget that young

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people have limited time. They have school commitments, so you can't expect them to work for the charity every weekend for a whole year. Charities need to adjust and consider how young people can help in small ways, or take part in volunteer events occasionally.'

Paxman is sure that volunteering can have a positive effect. She speculates that if young people are given the chance to volunteer in small ways, and find the experience positive and rewarding, there is a high probability that in years to come they will participate in other volunteering activities. These will be more demanding and time-consuming, and are the ones that charities need most help with.

Young people volunteer for a number of different reasons. In the USA, for example, young people report that they consider doing voluntary work not only because they are passionate about a particular cause, but also because they feel that it will increase their employment prospects and they will gain skills that potential employers will find attractive. Nadia Paxman agrees: 'By working with, say, the elderly, or with dyslexic students, teenagers can develop a number of skills: effective communication, time management, teamwork. What's important is that the charity they are working for helps them to recognise their achievements, and shows them how to reflect on what they've learnt. It's something that can go on their résumé.'

Hordern highlights a different way in which young people can benefit from volunteer work, referring to a group of 16-year-olds in his daughter's high school. They have been helping out with the homework of young migrants whose first language isn't English. Hordern says that the experience is 'positive on both sides'. It seems that after helping out the younger children, the older ones feel better about their own abilities and value themselves more. 'The experience has shown them that they can make a difference. Their role in society isn't just going to school.'

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- are likely to improve their chances of finding a good job.
- are more interested in social problems than previous generations.
- are now involved in organising others interested in volunteering elsewhere.
- are very likely to take part in bigger volunteering projects in the future.
- find that their levels of self-confidence improve.
- may form relationships that will be useful later on.
- may go on to work for charities or voluntary organisations full-time.
- will require more training than charities tend to provide.

1 A recent survey has shown that young people

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2 Some young people who volunteered to help in Christchurch in 2012

3 According to Paxman, young people who have had a positive experience of volunteering

4 In the USA, young people feel that by doing voluntary work they

5 School-aged volunteers who work with migrants

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