The Impact of Volunteering on Individuals and Groups: Analytical Essay

Volunteering is where a person uses a considerable amount of their free time to support other individuals, groups and organisations (The Scottish Government, 2019). Volunteering supports good mental health and an individual's sense of empowerment (Atola, 2017; Tiessen and Herod, 2012; Stone and Duffy 2015; Talbot 2015; Butcher, 2017; Davies, 2018; The Scottish Government, 2019; Basi?ska and Jeran, 2014; Perkins & Zimmerman 1995). Empowerment is the fact or action of acquiring more control over one's life or circumstances through increased civil rights, independence, self-esteem, etc. (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Simpson and Weiner, 1989) Mental Health is the condition of a person or group in respect of the functioning of the mind (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Simpson and Weiner, 1989). A key theme throughout the literature was the beneficial impact volunteering had on participants' self-esteem and mental health. For example, participants reported a better sense of well-being physically and emotionally (Atola, 2017; Basi?ska and Jeran, 2014). Self-esteem increased and a sense of satisfaction with their lives was felt by those who volunteered. Additionally, those who had mental health conditions found the negative symptoms associated with their condition improved significantly through volunteering. (Atola, 2017; Basi?ska and Jeran, 2014; Davies, 2018). Individuals were found to be more effective at coping with the challenges of life due to the positive feelings attributed to themselves as an accomplishment of their voluntary work. There is a strong notion that volunteering promotes permanent and long-lasting improvements to participants' mental health as well as self-esteem, resilience and maintaining positive relationships. This in turn created a sense of empowerment whereby they find the skills and mechanisms to cope with life with confidence and courage (Atola, 2017; Basi?ska and Jeran, 2014). The ability to receive criticism and feedback improved and this was a catalyst for people who volunteer in these cases to be able to implement long lasting changes and develop self-confidence whereby they respect themselves and others. (Heatherton & Wyland 2003.) Research has shown that volunteering improved participants' mental health. The case study by Atola (2017) suggests that taking part in collective action and decision making promotes people's sense of empowerment, which in turn enables young people to build their sense of character and make positive changes to their lives. Young people who have the confidence to volunteer abroad in other countries also report to have substantial positive impacts to their lives as discussed in the literature that was reviewed on volunteering abroad (Tiessen and Herod, 2012; Butcher 2017; Basi?ska and Jeran; 2018).

Volunteering abroad

Volunteering abroad is particularly popular among young people who are currently students in Global North countries. For example, the UK, USA and Canada have sending organisations who promote programmes to students to "make a difference" in developing countries such as Africa and India (Butcher, 2017). These sending organisations send a large number of students on volunteer placements. For example, in Canada Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO) has placed more than 43,000 volunteers overseas since 1958 (Tiessen and Herod, 2012). There seems to be no lack of need for international development. Life for local people in developing countries has become worse over time. For example, in African countries over half the

population has been living below the poverty line (Heron, 2005). Additionally, Latin America is facing similar poverty extremes. Tiessen and Herod (2012) suggest that sending organisations have a major role in mitigating risk by delivering enhanced pre-departure training for willing volunteers. Tiessen and Herod (2012) also note, the vast majority of volunteering that takes place is based on short term placements rather than long term. However in a majority of these international volunteer programmes it is indicated that volunteers were making a significant contribution to the development of those countries into which they were placed (Tiessen and Herod, 2012). In a study by Butcher (2017) the notion of global citizenship and volunteer tourism note that the impact made on the global south should be subject to further scrutiny with regards to short term volunteer placements. For example, the increased amounts of poverty that is taking place overseas undoubtedly calls into question the ability of global citizenship programmes and whether they meet the objectives and targets set out by the governments and NGOs around the world with regards to alleviating poverty in developing nations (Tiessen and Herod, 2012). In one of the examples reviewed, up-to fifty Canadian youth volunteers recognised their effort in developing countries was a positive experience for themselves and the hosting communities (Tiessen and Herod, 2012). Reasons as to why their time and effort were beneficial included the fact that they had supported host communities to solve problems that they may have not been able to solve without the support of the volunteers (Sherraden et al. 2009).

In the studies by Boluk et al. (2017); Tiessen and Herod (2012) Volunteer perceived their impact to be somewhat a small contribution of their time, knowledge and skills. Volunteers worked extremely hard and made a real effort to accomplish outcomes for the host communities and themselves. Furthermore, the benefits of exchange, learning and cultural dialogue were found to be beneficial for host communities. For example being seen as an important role model to young generations in host communities, as well as promoting women’s rights in subtle ways in countries where women are deemed unworthy of manual labour or perceived to lack the same skills as men (Tiessen and Herod, 2012).