

# What it Means to be a Youth Leader

**This section will enable you to:**

- become aware of and evaluate your reasons for working in the Youth Program;
- raise your awareness of the moral, ethical and legal responsibilities to provide safe, well-managed services.



Most St. John Ambulance Youth Leaders put a lot into what they do and get a lot out of being a positive force in the lives of youth and in the greater community. Even though some evenings they may arrive home tired, they feel exhilarated from the satisfaction of knowing that they are a positive influence; boosting the self-esteem of youth, helping youth to positively and productively channel their energy, help them develop their skills and find a direction for life.

On other occasions, they arrive home exhausted and are tempted to ask why they became involved in the first place.

It is important for you to carefully examine your reasons for being a youth leader.



See [Exercise 1](#)  
*Why I want to work with St. John Youth*

Young people are an invaluable asset to St. John Ambulance. They can learn the skills necessary to become active citizens in the future when leaders:

- treat them with respect;
- value them as resources;
- give them appropriate support;
- provide them with realistic experiences that allow them to better understand both themselves and the world around them;
- provide them with opportunities for personal growth, practical work experience and skills development.

When youth talent, energy and creativity are channelled into St. John Ambulance, social responsibility is developed, and will continue when the youth become adults. Young people are the future, and their future lies in the present.

## B.1 BECOMING A YOUTH LEADER

St. John Ambulance Youth Leaders hold positions of significant trust with vulnerable youth. Canadians are increasingly aware of the reality and frequency of child abuse. Child abuse in its many forms occurs every day in families, in homes, in schools, and even in volunteer organizations. As adults responsible for the safety of young people, it is important to consider what we can do to make growing up a fun and safe process.

All St. John Ambulance Brigade volunteers have a responsibility to protect the clients they serve and to uphold the reputation of St. John Ambulance. St. John Ambulance will not tolerate any form of assault, harassment, or abuse, or any other offence that may raise concern in the minds of the staff, clients or other volunteers as to issues of safety, well-being or security.

### B.1.1 SCREENING



See **StJCI 2-9-2** on *Screening*



See **DID YOU KNOW?**, on *Screening Volunteers*, Vol. 3, No. 7, July 1996, Vol. 3, No. 8, August 1996 and *Interviews*, Vol. 4, No. 6, June 1997

St. John Ambulance has an obligation to provide safe, well-managed services to the community. All applicants aged 18 years and up, and upon their first appointment to a leadership position, must be screened according to the following procedures:

1. complete and sign an application form and authorization for police records check
2. undergo an interview process.

Until receipt of all appropriate screening documents, an applicant should maintain probationary status. In addition, youth leaders should undergo an annual performance appraisal.

## B.2 THE ROLE OF A YOUTH LEADER



See **SJA Brigade Leadership Manual** for more information on *Coaching and Counselling*, 1996

Your attitude towards young people will affect everything that you do and is crucial to the success of your Division. Young people tend to respond positively in situations where roles are clearly defined and power is shared. Since youth is a time for exploration, an understanding youth leader can have a tremendous impact on the outcome of this exploration. Ideally, the youth leader should play a role similar to that of a coach.

Skills:

- ability to relate well to others
- ability to communicate effectively
- ability to listen
- ability to motivate and empower others to perform well
- ability to involve youth in positive ways
- commitment
- understanding

**B.2.1 VOLUNTEER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Every member of St. John Ambulance, including every youth member, has certain rights and responsibilities. The following information should be made available to all members.

**Rights of volunteers**

1. St. John Ambulance recognizes the diverse and multicultural composition of its volunteer environment and its workplace, and appreciates the dignity, worth and contribution of each member. Equal rights and opportunities are provided for all members.
2. All volunteers of St. John Ambulance have the right to:
  - a. be regarded as a person with individuality, uniqueness and value, regardless of race, ancestry, national or ethnic origin, citizenship, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, pardoned offence, physical disability or mental disability;
  - b. equal treatment with respect to services, without discrimination;
  - c. equal treatment with respect to volunteer employment, without discrimination;
  - d. be carefully interviewed and to have programs clearly explained;
  - e. be appropriately assigned to a job that is rewarding to them;
  - f. expect training and supervision to enable them to perform their job well;
  - g. suggest to their supervisor ways to make their job more fulfilling;
  - h. discuss potential reassignment with their supervisor;
  - i. receive recognition for their services; and
  - j. be educated concerning health and occupational risks and how to minimize those risks.
3. Harassment on the basis of any items listed in point 2(a) will not be tolerated within St. John Ambulance.



See [Sample 2 Youth Leader Skills Profile](#)



See ***DID YOU KNOW?***, on ***Leadership Qualities***, Vol. 2, No. 11, November 1995, and ***Successful Leadership***, Vol. 2, No. 7, July 1995



See **StJCI 2-1-1 Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities**



See ***DID YOU KNOW?***, on ***Discrimination***, Vol. 4, No. 1, January 1997

4. Employment-related obligations of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982) apply to volunteers as well as paid employees. This applies only to human rights legislation and not to other laws.

### Responsibilities of volunteers

Members of St. John Ambulance have the responsibility to:

- a. provide service to St. John Ambulance to assist in fulfilling its mission, which is *to enable Canadians to improve their health, safety and quality of life by providing training and community service*;
- b. be honest and open with other volunteers and with staff regarding their intent, goals, needs and skills;
- c. understand the requirements of time and duties of assignments before accepting them, and once accepted, fulfill the commitment to the very best of their ability;
- d. work as professionals and as respected members of a team;
- e. take the commitment seriously and participate in the training and learning opportunities made available;
- f. respect the confidentiality of St. John Ambulance and its members and clients; and
- g. seek and accept honest feedback on performance.

Members of the St. John Ambulance Brigade are also expected to carry out the following obligations:



See **StJCI 2-9-3**  
paragraphs 2-4  
*Members'*  
*Obligations*

- a) to read, become familiar and comply with St. John Canada Instructions - Part 2: Volunteers, and with all provincial/territorial, area or divisional rules or directives;
- b) to assist in maintaining the loyalty, goodwill and image essential to the well-being of the Brigade; and to carry out duties with enthusiasm, efficiency, decency, integrity and honesty, and in accordance with the law; and
- c) to participate in training provided by St. John Ambulance, to the level required for the community services performed.

### B.3 CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE DIVISION

- ❑ *Emphasize the common purpose by establishing a goal for the Division.* Involve youth in the process of developing the goal to create a sense of what the Division is trying to achieve. Ensure that the goal is something that an individual could not achieve alone. Develop a strategy/plan for achieving the goal, and make sure everyone understands it.
- ❑ *Set a good example.* Stay calm. Youth tend to imitate the leader's reactions under pressure. Show enthusiasm—it is contagious.
- ❑ *Encourage participation* in community service, games, activities, decision making and taking responsibility.
- ❑ *Use visible signs of belonging* (badges, posters, uniforms, etc.).
- ❑ *Make the atmosphere and program enjoyable and fun!* Create an atmosphere of acceptance where youth feel free to be themselves without criticism while maintaining a clear sense of what constitutes right and wrong behaviour.
- ❑ *Listen.* Offer understanding and support and make it okay to share feelings.
- ❑ *Provide opportunities to meet and exchange ideas,* both socially and during classroom learning/training.
- ❑ *Create a common language.* St. John Ambulance terms, jargon, and code words known only to Division members help to create a sense of being special.
- ❑ *Emphasize special features of membership* (Service Awards, training, friendships). The shared sense of giving time and uncommon effort to achieve more than the ordinary person creates a sense that the Division is special and helps youth feel that they have unique qualities.
- ❑ *Provide maximum training* so that each youth member is capable of independent, competent action, someone who can be depended upon and is needed by the group.
- ❑ *Incorporate diversity into the training* including first aid, health care, leadership skills, games, etc.
- ❑ *Establish a sense of "roots", permanence and stability.* Educate members about the history of St. John Ambulance and what it means to be a member of the Youth Program. Common memories bind people together.
- ❑ *Build trust.* Let members know that they are important and their concerns matter. Keep promises.
- ❑ *Minimize competition within the group* while promoting individual competitiveness outwardly on behalf of the group.



See **St. John Ambulance Brigade Leadership Manual**, 1996



**Secrets of Leadership** by Vineyard and Lynch, 1991



See **Exercise 2 Test Your Skill at Building Trust**

☐  
See Exercise 3  
*Test Your Skill at  
Building Self-Esteem*

- ☐ *Accent the positive when things do not go well,* emphasizing how the group/individual is now much better prepared to succeed. Avoid blaming individuals. Be consistent and act positively.
- ☐ *Celebrate group achievements,* recognizing all members equally and together so they can be proud of each other. Give each personal attention as required.

## B.4 YOUNG PEOPLE AND ST. JOHN AMBULANCE

The Division provides youth members with the opportunity to learn, develop themselves, meet their friends and do things they enjoy doing. Your role as a Youth Leader is to keep them interested and to encourage them to make the most of their opportunities as members of St. John Ambulance.

☐  
See Exercise 4  
*Know Your Members*

- It is invaluable for you to know:
- ⇒ your youth members
  - ⇒ their needs
  - ⇒ the way they act when they are together as a group
  - ⇒ the way they respond to you and other volunteers
  - ⇒ how you respond to them

Young people today face unprecedented pressures as they prepare for the future:

- ⇒ developing a self-identity
- ⇒ establishing peer relationships
- ⇒ separation from parents
- ⇒ dealing with their emerging sexuality
- ⇒ preparing for a career
- ⇒ increasing challenges and workload at school

Despite appearances, young people tend to have very fragile egos. They may try to determine who they are and how they make a difference in the world. They know they need to educate themselves and gain experience, yet may easily get discouraged. Acceptance by a peer group becomes a real need, and parental influence drops. Young people may look at themselves as the world and their friends see them in the attempt to develop an identity. Hormonal levels fluctuate and emotions overwhelm. Many youth feel that whatever is happening to them is totally unique.



Many do not view this as the best time of their lives. Two career parents, economic restraints and sometimes divorce may strain their family life. Demanding teachers and schoolwork can be rough on a young person's self-esteem. Jobs are particularly hard to find for those who have few skills and the unemployment rate for the 16-to-24 age group is much higher than for older Canadians. The workplace of the future demands highly skilled and creative workers who are flexible enough to adapt to constant change.

More and more jobs require employees who can:

- communicate effectively
- work well in a team environment
- make sound decisions
- solve problems
- demonstrate creativity.

In addition to economic pressures, social factors also affect today's youth. Society compels young people to spend many more years in formal education, deferring their entry into adult roles. During this period, there are limited opportunities to take on responsibilities, do meaningful work and make a positive contribution to the community. Ironically, while most young people are being isolated from participating in productive tasks of society, they are also beginning to define their self-worth in terms of what they are able to do and not do and what kind of impact they have on their surroundings.



**See A Springboard to Tomorrow:**

*Creating Volunteer Programs for Youth that Encourage the Development of Skills*

by Janet Lautenschlager, Voluntary Action Program Government of Canada, 1994

St. John Ambulance Youth Programs can help young people explore alternatives that will give them a meaningful role in our society, provide them with some independence, increase their self esteem and increase their capacity to take action. The feelings of making a difference and doing a job well are nourishment to their self-esteem. We all need positive feedback, however, working with youth requires particular attention to building self-confidence and fostering self-esteem.

### B.4.1 INEXPERIENCE

Remember that unlike adult Brigade members, many youth do not have workplace experience. If you are recruiting youth, this may be their first "job" in an official setting. Acceptable behaviour that is second nature to you needs to be spelled out in your orientation and training to youth. Strive to determine the fine line between allowing flexibility to develop responsibility, and the rules that govern behaviour.



Young people may also lack interpersonal skills appropriate to the workplace. Be sure to specify who is the appropriate person to ask for advice, and how to interact with other volunteers and staff. Lead by example.

## B.5 A CLIMATE OF SUPPORT



Creating the right environment is the key to having a successful program. Everyone involved must regard young people as valuable resources that can make a significant contribution to St. John Ambulance and to the community they serve. Youth members must be treated with genuine respect and trust.



See [Exercise 5](#)  
*What Motivates Youth*



See **DID YOU KNOW?**, on *Understanding Motivation*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1995 and *Tips on Motivation*, Vol. 2, No. 2, February 1995



See **DID YOU KNOW?**, on *Position Descriptions*, Vol. 2, No.10, October 1995



See [Sample 3 & 4](#)  
*Position Descriptions*

Before you begin involving youth volunteers, you will need to:

- ⇒ have an understanding of what motivates youth;
- ⇒ design volunteer positions suitable for youth;
- ⇒ create a youth-oriented program;
- ⇒ revisit your volunteer application form, orientation, etc., to ensure that the information is suitable for and understandable to youth;
- ⇒ plan for recruitment: Why? How? Where? When?

Young people need structure and guidance without excessive supervision:

- provide clear instructions on what is expected of them;
- provide the freedom to explore areas that were not planned in advance;
- encourage youth to try new things;
- give assignments that meet real needs and have real consequences (not redundant, menial tasks or 'make work' projects);
- whenever possible, offer a range of options so that they can choose a meaningful and challenging position that best meets their needs, interests and abilities (developmental assignments designed to build skills and provide opportunities for advancement);

- involve youth as active partners in the process of developing or refining the youth program;
- encourage feedback and suggestions on an on-going basis;
- invite discussions about motivations, goals, feelings, accomplishments and problems;
- provide opportunities to gain experience in decision-making.



See [Exercise 6](#)  
*Getting Ideas For  
Activities*



See [Exercise 7](#)  
*Communication*

Help youth to discover their individual interests and talents, to recognize the skills they currently possess, and to help them understand how these may be used to help individuals, groups or causes. Tell them about the range of skills that they can acquire through St. John Ambulance. Brainstorm ways they could develop these skills.

Youth volunteers must be recruited, placed, motivated, trained, supervised and evaluated in roles appropriate to their interests and abilities. Youth, like anyone else, need to feel a sense of accomplishment and receive recognition for their efforts.

