



**Youth Advisory Team Report  
Salesian Involvement Survey**

The Youth Advisory Team (YAT) was given a remit by the SDB Provincial to investigate issues surrounding ‘volunteer retention’. The premise of this investigation was that whilst significant numbers of people volunteer or take part in a Salesian mission activity on one occasion, much smaller numbers subsequently stay involved by taking roles in future years or on other mission activities. YAT was asked to look at what could be done to address this issue and improve volunteer retention.

***“Just more opportunities for young Salesian adults to meet up, do something positive, take part and facilitate events ”***

To investigate the issues underpinning volunteer retention, YAT produced a survey entitled ‘Salesian Involvement’, to capture the opinions of as many volunteers as possible. This was distributed to past volunteers from approximately the last 5 years, of Savio House, Brettargh Holt, BOVA, SOS, VIDES amongst others. The survey was accessible online and respondents were kept anonymous. We received 37 completed surveys in total, 10 from males and 27 from females. It should be noted that there is inherently an element of bias in these results as individuals taking the time to respond to the questionnaire request are likely to be those who already see some value in the Salesian Network. However these results are possibly all the more useful as they capture the views of those individuals who would likely respond to changes in practices around volunteer’s experiences.

**In the following report we will seek to outline the issues raised in the collective results of the surveys.**

**In order to make reference to the respondents of the survey more concisely we will call them ‘Young Lay Salesians’ or YLS’s. The 36 YLS’s who disclosed their age were between 18 and 31 years old. 32 out of 36 respondents said that they identified themselves as part of the Salesian family/network. The remaining 4 respondents were less committal, without saying no, about their identity as Salesians due to a lack of current involvement.**

## **Current Involvement**

**At the outset it should be noted that of the 36 respondents to ‘Are you currently involved with a Salesian project?’ 17 responded in the affirmative and 19 responded to the negative. Those that responded no were from as wide a variety of past volunteering activities (BOVA, Brettargh Holt, Savio House, SOS, VIDES) as those that responded yes.**

**The question which followed was ‘If not, why did you feel unable to continue?’ which highlighted two main issues for YLS’s. The first is a perceived lack of Salesian presence or projects in their regional area to get involved with (9 out of 19 respondents). In this situation, YLS’s cited the travel constraints (cost and/or distance) of getting to existing projects as reasons for not continuing with involvement. The second issue outlined was that after initial periods of volunteering other commitments had taken priority. For some this was university (5 out of 19) and for others work or other commitments (6 out of 19).**

# The Way Forward

In reflection on the collective responses received, the issues raised can be split into four groups. Perhaps unsurprisingly these groups would logically be described best in terms of the four Salesian windows

- Home
- School
- Playground
- Church

It is in this format that we will address them.

***“When I am involved actually at Salesian events I really enjoy it and love it, but I do find that when I return to my own network I often feel more isolated again and get stuck in my ways. I’d like more regular get-togethers ”***

## Home - Involvement, Community

***“I think it’s difficult to live as a Salesian outside a community, some kind of on going outreach work (be that through people, letters, emails etc) could be quite nice”***

As described above 32 out of 36 respondents identified themselves as part of the Salesian family/network. This ratio seems comparatively high considering that only 17 out of 36 respondents were currently involved in a Salesian Project. This would seem to suggest that a strong Salesian identity is produced in many volunteers and that this provides an opportunity for continued involvement. One YLS commented “When I am involved actually at Salesian events I really enjoy it and love it, but I do find that when I return to my own network I often feel more isolated again and get stuck in my ways. I’d like more regular get-togethers.” [Female, 24]

The majority of responses requested to meet up in some way with others involved in the Salesian network. Some suggested this through more mission opportunities, others through formation or development events and others through social activities. Most YLS's suggested all of these options, but one YLS summed it up most succinctly when he simply requested "More opportunities for the whole Salesian network to be together." [Male, 19]

Another issue raised was that of feeling wanted, or invited. As one YLS stated "It'd be great to have all volunteers invited to do things...it's through being invited to do stuff like this [parish retreat] that people really start to stick around" [Male, unknown age]. YAT suggests that by reaching out to past volunteers and inviting them individually to get involved in specific activities they would receive affirmation and confidence in their gifts as youth workers, especially after time away from active involvement, and be more likely to take part.

***“More opportunities for the whole Salesian network to be together ”***

# School - Mission Opportunities

***“It would be great if I was aware of more events taking place locally to become involved in ”***

The majority of YLS's asked for an increase in opportunities to get involved with active Salesian mission in the UK. Many YLS's described feeling that there were some Salesian related volunteering opportunities in other areas, but not near to where they lived. Others said they didn't think there were many volunteering options in the UK at all. Some YLS's made specific suggestions for new avenues of involvement; connections of past volunteers with local Salesian schools or communities, ways to get involved for smaller time periods than holiday events e.g. weekends, projects in 'refugee and asylum seeker communities', social action projects, more youth clubs.

For a large number of YLS's the distance to existing opportunities was a significant factor due to cost and/or time constraints of travel. YAT suggests that if provision could be made to assist YLS's with the financial implications of travel and accommodation they may find it easier to volunteer.

There appears to be a need for increased publicity of all that is already going on in the Salesian Network, and letting YLS's know of different ways for them to get involved. One YLS suggested a volunteer pool, "where people can advertise if they need help with a project among others that have involvement with the Salesians, rather than just asking people they know or relying on word of mouth" [Female, 22].

There is also a need for continued development and formation of the youth work skills of YLS's who stay involved. One YLS suggested "A conference type of event would be great, where people can gather to keep in touch with others and have some kind of development experience e.g. workshops/seminars on Salesian spirituality and youth work in general, maybe even the chance to work towards some kind of award"[Female, 22].

# Playground - Social, Networking

**“Big celebrations through the year bringing all Salesian people together”**

Many YLS's requested opportunities to meet up together, socialise and celebrate, with as one YLS put it, “young people who may be loosely connected to SDB/FMA” [Female, 24]. This YLS went on to suggest an “annual national festival”. Currently there are yearly meet-ups of two groups ‘Network North’ and ‘Salesian and living in the South’. Some form of more regular get-togethers would provide YLS's with opportunities to strengthen their network of Salesian connections, meeting up with current friends and making new ones, as well as with local SDB or FMA communities further strengthening ties within the Salesian Family. They would also be a chance to find out and sign up for new mission projects, share best practise ideas and resources.

# Church - Spirituality, Formation, Prayer

***“It would be nice if Salesian Spirituality courses/sessions could be more available for those who would be interested in learning/ understanding more ,”***


YLS's made a number of requests for opportunities to be formed in Salesian Spirituality in various ways. Some suggested development of the existing Salesian Family and Study Days, others requested retreats or conferences.

There was an emphasis on getting more people involved through increasing the frequency of formation events and offering opportunities in different locations around the UK.

# Conclusion

It seems clear to the YAT that some form of organised network of ex-volunteers is essential to foster a sense of inclusion in the Salesian family. An appointed ex-volunteers' coordinator could be the point of contact through which opportunities of all kinds could be made known to ex-volunteers, and willing volunteers could be made known to project leaders. This person would be responsible for making sure everyone who wanted to be involved was invited to do so. We envisage that they would have individual contact with people in the network and that all ex-volunteers would have a chance to opt into this network. The first job of the ex-volunteer's coordinator could be to organise the kind of ex-volunteer's event which is requested by the respondents of this survey. The nature of such an event is something which will need to be deliberated over. It could incorporate instruction in Salesian spirituality, sessions in youth work skills, or just a time for a retreat. On the other hand, a purely social event could naturally bring about a lot of the things that people are asking for in this survey.

Many who took the survey appeared to be excited that the Salesians were pro-actively interested in engaging past volunteers. It would be a terrible shame therefore, for both YLS's and the Salesians, if this enthusiasm were not captured.



**If you wish to find out any more about these issues, please don't hesitate to email us [YAT@SalesianYouthMinistry.com](mailto:YAT@SalesianYouthMinistry.com)**

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