



## Finalist's case study



# Van Mildert College, Durham University Community

## Open Doors, Open Minds: Community Outreach at Van Mildert College



Van Mildert College

### Profile

- Higher Education
- A College of Durham University
- 6300 volunteer hours
- 200 students
- Outreach and Volunteering

### About the project

#### Summary

Van Mildert College Outreach encompasses six different projects working in the wider Durham community. These student-led projects include working with, and educating, children, visiting the elderly, visiting young offenders and working in the environment with primary school children and rehabilitating drug users. Between the projects, over the past academic year, we have already clocked up over 6300 hours of volunteers with over 200 student volunteers. This is more than any other Durham College and accounts for nearly 50% of the University-wide total.

#### Project partners

From the teachers in the schools we visit, to the families of the children we support on 'Carers Respite Committee', we have a wide network of project partners, which continues to expand. They are listed below:

- St Patrick's School (Langley Moor)
- Blue Coat Primary School
- Finchdale Primary School
- Framwellgate Moor Primary School
- St Hild's Primary School
- Langley Park Primary School
- Joseph Swan Academy (Gateshead)
- St Hild's C of E School (Hartlepool)
- St Oswald's Institute and St Oswald's Church (Durham)
- Aycliffe Secure Centre
- Centre for Change (Durham)
- Bearpark Primary School

Within the College, the projects each have their own Director. As a collective the projects are overseen by the JCR Outreach Officer who is supported by the College staff including the College Environment Champion.



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## The results

### The problem

As students at Durham University, we realize there are certain groups within the community who could benefit from a few hours of our time, once a week. The communities around Durham face significant challenge and our projects reach out to them in a number of ways which not only benefit them in the short-term but also motivate and inspire future generations. There are many lonely elderly members of the community and younger children/teenagers who require a little support and guidance from willing volunteers. Loneliness is growing problem within society. However, simple measures can have a huge impact on the wellbeing of those most vulnerable within communities such as ours. Equally, our environmental project (Environmental Conservation Committee) sees the necessity for sustainable living and the important of caring for the local area, which is especially key in a very vibrant, student city like Durham! Ultimately the projects seek to break down barriers between the local community and the student population. Learning takes place on both sides – the community benefits from our work while we also develop skills for life, engage with different perspectives and feel the benefits of giving back to a city that we call home for the duration of our studies.

### The approach

Six teams of volunteers spend a few hours each week aiming to tackle some of the issues outlined above. Loneliness, lack of parental support/guidance, the necessity for a break from caring for more demanding children and importance of caring for the environment (and educating others on how to do the same) are all key issues in the Durham community. Our volunteers interview for a position on the projects and then dedicate some of their free time over the course of the academic year to try and make a difference.

### Our goals

- Support those in the local community who are most vulnerable
- Motivate others to be the best they can be
- Care for the environment and teaching young children the value of doing so
- Encourage students and community members to engage with other perspectives and views

### Obstacles and solutions

Community partners being willing to engage with our schemes	Building trust with key stakeholders and being willing to commit to long-term volunteering, not just one-off contributions.
Long-standing culture development	Giving the students full ownership of the projects but ensuring that staff are available to facilitate if required builds momentum and long-term establishment of volunteering and outreach as a social norm.
Fundraising	Linking with major local business to secure sponsorship and match funding. This also motivates the students to raise a much money as they can!
Meeting student demand	Ensuring we are continuously promoting the projects to ensure that we evolve and grow out network of community partners. The more partners we work with, the more capacity we have for student involvement.



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## Performance and results

- Fantastic dedication is shown week by week by all students towards all six projects stretching back over 20 years.
- Action to break down barriers between the student population and long-standing local community has resulted in local residents feeling supported and appreciated by the student population and vice versa.
- Huge amounts of money has been raised through fundraising events to support and continue the projects.
- Over 6300 hours of volunteering took place during the last academic year.
- The skills developed and experiences gained through the projects have shaped the future careers paths of a great number of Van Mildert College students.

## The future

### Lessons learned

Student-led outreach and volunteering is the most impactful. The students create a culture in which 'giving back' becomes the accepted norm and this sustains the work they do. While initial activities may therefore be driven by staff it is important that their role remains peripheral in order that student leaders might create the appropriate culture but also develop vital skills themselves as the culture of outreach and volunteering evolves.

### Top 3 learnings from implementing your project

- A small amount of time volunteering with a vulnerable group creates a massive impact upon the people it targets.
- A hands-on approach to educating the younger generation on the importance of sustainability and environmental awareness is vital.
- Student ownership of the projects ensures their success and develops a culture in which outreach and volunteering becomes part of what we do every day!

### Sharing your project

Every year we hold an annual Outreach Showcase, where members of the College, as well as community partners, donors and other guests are invited. With talks from each Project Director showcasing the work we do, many who attend help our projects not only financially, but also by sharing information about our work widely. Furthermore, the Van Mildert College Outreach Impact Report was published in July 2017. This report details Open Doors, Open Minds in full and its impact on our students, the University and the local community. Copies of the Impact Report have been distributed widely across the North-East and have been very well received. An electronic version is available at [issuu.com/van.mildert.college.alumni](http://issuu.com/van.mildert.college.alumni). Additionally, both the Principal and Deputy Principal have spoken at a range of conferences about Van Mildert's outreach and volunteering work including: the international Collegiate Way Conference, Durham Teaching and Learning Conference, HE Day for International Schools in Brussels, Belgium, and in Galway, Ireland. We have discussed the work with national and international colleagues. Through these talks, departments from across the University have expressed in linking with our schemes. Externally, several new schools are interested in joining the PSP and YPP. Our projects are also well promoted via social media and the student leadership plays a key role in ensuring that new volunteers join the schemes each year. This includes an Outreach Fair at the beginning of each year. The number of students wanting to take part in the schemes rises each year. We are therefore seeking to expand in order to meet with the student demand and need which is clearly expressed by the interest from prospective community partners.

### What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

It's a huge honor to be a Green Gown Award finalist as it shows our students and volunteers that our work is very valuable and being recognized. It gives us motivation and determination to continue with everything we do!



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### Further information

Outreach Impact Report - [issuu.com/van.mildert.college.alumni](https://issuu.com/van.mildert.college.alumni)

Van Mildert College Twitter - [@vanmildert1965](https://twitter.com/vanmildert1965)

College website - <https://www.dur.ac.uk/van-mildert.college/>

[www.greengownawards.org.uk](http://www.greengownawards.org.uk)

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