“Hello, my name is Kerry and I am 22 years old. I have worked for Barnardo’s Volunteer Development Team (VDT) for four years and it was through volunteering for Barnardo’s HR/People Team as an admin volunteer which helped me gain the skills to become employed in the role that I am currently in. I worked at the VDT part-time whilst studying Psychology and Early Childhood at university; I have now graduated and have increased my hours to full time.

I also volunteer of an evening or weekend for Barnardo’s psychology service and for Barnardo’s Christie Engagement service. Volunteering for these two services is helping me build up my experience to strengthen the theory I learnt at university. This will then make it possible for me to have the experience, skills and knowledge for future employment, working directly with children and families for the Voluntary Sector or Local Authority.

For me, volunteering not only gives me the opportunity to improve my chances of future employment but is also allowing me to try different roles to discover which career path to take. Volunteering has been crucial to my personal and professional development, without it I would not have been able to do the things I can do today”.

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Volunteering builds of a long tradition in Finland, as in a great number of other European countries. If you want to understand a society, and the values that are important to the people of that society: you need to look at what engages people, what they do based on their own free will, what socially oriented and altruistic activities citizens commit to on a regular basis, and what services people provide to help others, and how they contribute to or stabilize the society they are a part of? What are we willing to do to promote based solely on social reasons, without financial motives?

Historical background
In Finland, during the 20th century, for example, non-profit, political and religious organisations and associations built thousands of community halls and club houses – a built heritage based on volunteering, and especially on the informal volunteer work called talkoot* in Finnish (talko in Swedish). Today around 2 500 club houses and halls are still a very visible part of the Finnish landscape, and their future is dependent on volunteers who fill them with various activities, renovates them and strive to maintain a socially vivid way of life, particularly in the Finnish rural areas. Finland is a large country with a small population, where the urbanization and industrialization took off mainly after WWII, changing the social and economic structures of the countryside forever.

The popular movements and the talkoot were a part of the nation building project as well as a means towards creating a stable, well-functioning society – Finland gained its independence in December 1917 as a bi-product of the Russian revolution by the end of World War I – and like any other nation-in-the-making Finland did the same as the other new nations: relied to a vast extent on the civil movements that were a common part of the late 19th and the early 20th century in Northern Europe, namely the labour movement, the temperance movement, various religious revival movements, sports movements and the strong belief in public and equal education. The popular education movement and its substantial impact on the Finnish society has evolved throughout the decades, but its roots lay firmly in the ground of the work of many volunteers, alongside a small group of professionals.

End of history lesson
Today Finland faces the same problems as other European countries, a decreasing interest among young people in engaging in voluntary work, at least when it comes to the more traditional organisations. According to a survey made by Statistics Finland in 2009, the overall number of Finns participating in voluntary work is the same, but the groups aged 10-14 and 15-24 show a decreasing number of participants, whereas the age-group from 65 years and up has increased their share of the work. Around 30% of the people who took part of the survey said they had been volunteering one way or the other during the last four weeks. This percentage doesn’t look too impressive after having stated that volunteering has influenced almost every part of the social life in Finland, however, when asked how many had helped another household, neighbor or a person other than a family member, 59% said yes.

*talkoot or talkootyö has been defined as “Neighborly work”... on another’s behalf which is done in order to provide help and as an interest, without any expectation of earning pay. There is quite a long tradition of such work in Finland: in particular, use is made of the help of friends, acquaintances and relatives in building, repairing and carrying out alterations to homes by organizing "neighborly help days" (talkoopäiviä). Refreshments or meals offered on these occasions are not regarded as remuneration that would render it work within an employment relationship. Nowadays, voluntary work (vapaaehtoistyö) in the spirit of these communal occasions may also be done in the name of some association. The rules of labour law and social security law are not applicable to such work.
What we do?
Musikcafé After Eight is one example of how both formal and informal volunteering can help young people to find their place, as a café-worker, as a roadie during a music event, through the outreach youth work, or in working with immigrant students. A number of our employees today started as volunteers or as interns, now they are able to share their experiences with and work as tutors for other young people.

Further reading:
http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emire/FINLAND/ANCHOR-TALKOOTY-Ouml-TALKOARBETE-Fi.htm