

Managing volunteers in homelessness services

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link, Minories House, 2-5 Minories, London EC3N 1BJ | 020 7840 4430

www.homeless.org.uk | Twitter: @Homelesslink | Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink

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Introduction

Most homelessness services simply couldn't run without their volunteers. This is especially true of day centres and drop-ins who are heavily dependent on their volunteers. Volunteers help to cook, clean and maintain premises. They offer support and advice to the people using services. They also add a range of talents, skills and experiences into the mix, enriching and enhancing homelessness services.

Good volunteering should also benefit the volunteer. It can be an opportunity to gain confidence, have fun, meet new people, build new skills and can be a stepping stone to future employment. That is why, more and more services are encouraging the people who use their services to take up volunteering, in-house or with other providers. Not only can this be a positive experience for the individual but the service gains the richness of their experience and other people using the service gain a greater sense of empathy and a source of inspiration.

Supporting and managing your volunteers takes time and energy. The smaller the budget of your organisation, the more you may rely on volunteers but the fewer resources may be available to support them. Volunteers need to be recruited, trained, motivated, supported and developed. Volunteers can be your greatest asset but it takes significant investment to ensure that they are working to the best of their capacity.

As more people are concerned about the issue of rough sleeping in their communities, new groups are starting up, aiming to support homeless people. It is more essential than ever that we take volunteer management seriously. Whether your group has only just started up and is being run by others who are volunteers themselves, or whether you are a large professional organisation with a human resources team, the principles of volunteer management are the same. Recruit, induct and support your volunteers in the right way, and you will have a dedicated skilled group of people supporting the work of your services and, crucially, the people who use them.

This guidance is intended to be both a checklist and a source of ideas to support day centres to enable their volunteers and services to thrive. There is a considerable emphasis on volunteers with lived experience of homelessness of your service which runs throughout the guidance.

Why use volunteers?

Volunteers should be more than an unpaid source of manpower. Volunteers bring skills and talents from a range of different places and add them to your organisation. They may speak additional languages, have various skills or come from employment sectors that don't often come into contact with homelessness services.

Volunteers also give you the opportunity to enrich the lives of the people who use your services by introducing them to the wider community. Research has highlighted that social disaffiliation is an impact of homelessness – this means that people's social connections are broken, both with their own friends and families and with the wider community. Key to addressing this is re-integrating people into their local communities. Having volunteers from the local community in your service can be a step towards doing this¹.

Volunteering can empower and support the individual volunteer, whether this is someone from the local community or someone with lived experience from your service. Volunteers learn new skills, get used to new

¹ Goodman, L.A., Save, L. and Harvey, M. (1991) *Homelessness as psychological trauma: Broadening perspectives*. *American Psychologist*, 46 (11), 1219-1225

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working environments and develop new interests. For some people, volunteering can be a stepping stone to employment within the sector and, for others, the newfound confidence it may bring can help them to move forwards in other areas of their life.

Volunteers with lived experience

Volunteers with lived experience can bring an enormous amount of expertise into your service. Their experiences give them invaluable insight into the experience of homelessness and how services operate. If they have moved on with their lives, they can provide inspiration to other people using their services. In addition, volunteering can empower current service users and help them to move forwards.

In a series of focus groups held by Homeless Link over the past year, people with lived experience of homelessness have highlighted some of the benefits of having volunteers with lived experience in services:

“[When I was homeless and using drugs], I just thought this was as good as it gets. There’s an element of hope when you speak to someone who you know has been there...a physical presence of what’s possible”

“I can confidently say that the only reason I’m sitting here and not in addiction is because I’ve followed peoples’ lived experiences from being at that point where I’m really stuck not knowing what to do, to now sitting here with a job, with somewhere to live.”

“When the personal experience comes in, you don’t even have to say it generally, when you’re with somebody there’s a connection I feel without even voicing it.”

“You know you’re not going to be judged and you know there’s not going to be any stigma there. There is still judgement and stigma in services. Whether it’s very subconscious, we’ve all experienced it and if you’re working with someone who’s been there and done that, that isn’t there. Even if you just perceived that you’re being judged that can stop you”

“They say it really quick ‘oh you have to do this and that’ instead of ‘stage 1, stage 2 etc’ the way a professional speaks. Speak quicker and get it all over with. It’s a different way of conversation.”

“Volunteering puts a positive aspect on things. You’re not a down and out any more. You’re helping each other, you’re bouncing off each other, you get a buzz, you’re a lot happier than when you came in”

“There are so many openings now for people with life experiences in these jobs and that’s why services are getting better. Because homeless people understand homeless people. Addicts understand addicts...”

“The good thing about [volunteering] is... they trust you...they look at you as a human being and not as a drop out in life... you end up going out of here with your head held high.”

“That is empowering people to do for themselves... We all do for each other and it’s giving that empowerment to show, you know, that sense of connection I can’t, we can.”

Knowing which volunteers you need

Volunteers Audit – knowing how volunteering supports the work of your service

Before recruiting volunteers, it is worth taking some time to consider the role that volunteers play within your organisation. This is essential for you as an organisation and is also useful for volunteers themselves, so that they have a clear understanding of the aims of the organisation and their role within it.

When you are drawing up your Theory of Change, Strategic Plan or Business Plan, it is worth considering how and where volunteers will be used to increase your capacity and deliver your mission. If these documents already exist you can do a quick exercise mapping your volunteering capacity and needs onto them. At a minimum, you could undertake a basic volunteering audit, to give a clear overview of your current volunteer use.

Mapping or auditing the volunteers you are currently using against the activities of your centre, can help you to see clearly how volunteers are supporting your service and identify new opportunities. Aim to answer the following questions:

- What is the overall purpose of our service and how do volunteers contribute to this mission? Remember volunteering can help to deliver the mission by enabling your service users to gain new confidence and experience as well as by delivering the activities of your centre
- What outcomes do we aim to achieve and what activities do we need to undertake to achieve them?
- What activities do we undertake to achieve our outcomes? Are there any other activities we would like to undertake that we don't currently?
- What are the current roles of paid staff in delivering these activities?
- What are the current roles of volunteers in delivering these activities?
- What are the current gaps in terms of staffing or volunteering?
- What particular skills do your volunteers currently offer and what else might you require (i.e. foreign language skills, administration, communication and empathy)?
- What other tasks or activities would you like to undertake that might be undertaken by volunteers? (e.g. decorating a communal space, sorting the garden, running a short term workshop)
- Who is available to support existing volunteers and who would support any new ones?

Use your audit to put together a list of how many additional volunteers you need, what role they would fulfil and what skills or experience they need to undertake the role.

The different types of volunteer

When looking for volunteers to fulfil particular task it is worth bearing in mind that there are a few options available to you – each will be appropriate for different roles. All volunteers, regardless of how and when they were recruited, will require a level of training, support and supervision.

General volunteers with lived experience can be recruited from amongst the people who use your service or from other local services or the community. They will bring considerable expertise of homelessness and related services and will add a deeper level of understanding and empathy. If the volunteers are current or recent users of your service, you may need to consider how and when to offer the opportunity of becoming a

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volunteer: do you offer small volunteering tasks to all attendees or is volunteering something more formal that people need to progress onto? We will discuss this more throughout the guidance.

General volunteers without lived experience can be recruited from amongst the wider community. They can be recruited for specific roles or asked to undertake a range of generalised tasks. You will need to consider whether you are happy for any member of the public to volunteer, or whether you would like a certain level of experience. This may depend on what roles you wish them to fulfil and how much capacity you have for training and development.

Volunteers with a specific skill can be recruited to fulfil a particular task. For example, you may wish to recruit a lawyer who can give pro bono legal advice, someone who can teach a specific skill or a financial advisor to help the organisation develop a clearer financial plan. In this case, you may wish the individual volunteer to undertake a short-term project or to attend for defined sessions at specific times.

Students as general volunteers – if your service is in a University or College town, students can be a useful source of volunteers. They have good availability and may be learning skills that are relevant. However as many students are only present in term time, this may lead to a drop in numbers outside these dates. You will need to check their availability carefully and consider the impact of losing volunteers outside term time.

Student placements - services can benefit from having students on placement as part of their volunteer team. Counselling, social work and occupational therapy students often find placements in homelessness services. These placements can bring committed, reliable volunteers with specific skills and learning goals into the service, and in some cases the service will be paid for the placement. However, care should be taken to research the suitability of a student placement, as there may be additional paperwork and supervision which require the allocation of management hours.

Micro volunteering is defined by Knowhow Non-Profit as “small, bite-sized, with no commitment to repeat and with minimum formality. It usually involves short and specific actions that are quick to start and complete.”² These are tasks that require no induction or training. This might include asking people to tweet for you, write a letter or sign a petition.

Groups or corporate volunteers usually want to undertake a short, intense task over the course of a day or week. This can include businesses looking to contribute to a local charity. As most centres will know, it is a good idea to have a few potential tasks ready for when businesses ring up wanting to help. In some cases, businesses may even pay the organisation for providing a team-building day.

Partnerships with local businesses and industry forums In recent years, many homelessness organisations have built up successful partnerships with local businesses that have resulted in specialist volunteers providing services for clients. It is important to be able to present a range of opportunities to companies as often they are keen to support and need a clear ‘ask’ from homelessness services that matches their skills and expertise. This can include:

- Mock interviews for clients
- Coaching or mentoring
- Becoming trustees i.e. if employees have business, marketing or HR skills
- Supporting IT skills or providing technology (software/hardware)

² <https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2015/09/28/micro-volunteering-might-be-small-but-its-got-big-potential/>

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- Supporting business planning or the development of social enterprise
- Helping with marketing or website development
- Let you take advantage of savings they make from bulk purchased goods or services

Finding the right volunteers

It's a good idea to recruit volunteers regularly even if you currently have enough – having new people coming in can maintain a positive environment, bring new energy and ideas and reduce stress on existing volunteers.

Volunteer role descriptions and person specifications

Once you are clear about how volunteering supports the work of your organisation, you need to ensure you find the right people to fulfil the right roles. If you are specific about what you are looking for, you are more likely to find people who fit the criteria. Putting together role descriptions, person specifications and advertisements will help volunteers to know what is expected and will also ensure that you are clear about what you are asking for.

To write a role description, you will need to break down the overall aim of the volunteering into the different activities that need to be undertaken. Volunteer role descriptions lay out in more detail the precise characteristics of each role.

Take care not to imply volunteers are under contract

Although role descriptions can seem similar to job descriptions, there are clear and important differences. Volunteer role descriptions should only describe expectations and you need to be careful not to imply that volunteers are contractually obliged to perform certain tasks. If you do, you may find that your volunteers are entitled to full employment rights and that you are in breach of these. We will discuss this further in our section on Legal and Policy Issues below.

Descriptions should be consistent across your organisation and in line with your volunteer policies. See the list below for ideas of what should be included in your role descriptions.

About your organisation	
Mission statement/strategic goals	What your organisation aims to achieve overall e.g. prevent long-term homelessness amongst young rough sleepers or improve health outcomes for homeless people in your area
What your organisation does	Your main services and activities e.g. running an advice and resource centre which is open daily and provides housing and benefits advice, access to healthcare and employment training as well as hot food, showers and clean clothing.
How volunteering fits within the organisation	e.g. We have a team of 5 full-time staff supported by approximately 50 volunteers. There are approximately 10 volunteers on site each day undertaking activities ranging from fundraising and administration to cooking to supporting staff in the delivery of skills training.

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About the role	
Role title	e.g. volunteer gardener; volunteer job coach etc
Role objectives	e.g to support our staff team with basic garden maintenance; to work alongside the people who use our services as they apply and prepare for work
Tasks and responsibilities	<p>List in as much detail as possible the different tasks and responsibilities you may expect. Be clear that these are expectations rather than obligations (see note on avoiding employment language above)</p> <p>e.g.</p> <p>Tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage and empower the people who use our services • Assist with basic IT skills • Support with writing CVs • Support with internet job searches • Assist our paid Support Worker with other tasks relating to employment and training as required <p>Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure the people who use our services feel empowered • To support the people who use our services to develop the job searching skills • To attend reliably at the agreed times
What the volunteer will gain from the role	Will the volunteer gain confidence or experience in a particular area? What do you expect them to get from volunteering at your service?
Induction and training information	Give basic information on any induction or training that will take place. e.g. All volunteers will receive a full induction into our service and training relevant to the role (specify what training where relevant).
Location	Where the volunteering will take place
Hours and time commitment	e.g. One weekly shift of 4 hours from 9am to 1pm.
Person Specification – any qualities, skills or qualifications required	<p>This may include general skills and attributes such as good communication and empathy, or specific skills and experience such as speaking Polish or experience of a particular working environment</p> <p>e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable with good time keeping • Able to communicate with a wide range of people • Basic IT literacy with knowledge of Microsoft Word and Excel • Speak Spanish to conversational standard <p>etc</p>
Any restrictions	e.g. age (i.e. over18) or gender

Volunteers with lived experience

It is important that all volunteers have a clear idea what is expected of them. This is no less true for volunteers who are currently or have recently used your services. It is important that lived experience volunteers are clear if there is a boundary between being a service user and a volunteer and if there are different expectations of them in their new role. It is also important that you don't ask more from your lived experience volunteers than you would from others and that you are clear what you are hoping the volunteer will gain from the experience.

Writing a role description will help both the organisation and the volunteer to understand the purpose of volunteering.

Advertising your role

There are a range of routes for recruiting volunteers, depending on the type of role you are looking to fill. You could create leaflets, place advertisements in particular places where you might expect to find volunteers (Universities, places of worship, libraries etc). You can make use of your website and social media. Think about who you want to recruit before planning your recruitment campaign. For example, if you are hoping for volunteers with a particular skill, you need to advertise in places that those people are likely to look.

Your advertisement will be more or less detailed depending on how you are promoting the position. Some social media adverts might just say a very brief heading and who to contact for more information. If you have a full page poster advertisement, try to include the headlines from your role description as well as who to contact for more information. The clearer your advertisement, the more likely you are to have applications from the right people.

The following methods can be used to advertise volunteer positions and are usually free:

1. Advertise through existing staff, volunteers or trustees, by asking them to send a letter or an email that they can forward to their contacts.
2. Send the advert or a letter/email to all local partner agencies.
3. Use local press (this may have a cost) or community websites and forums. If you can come up with a 'story' you may be able to use the local paper as a free source of advertising.
4. Advertise in local places of worship, colleges, community centres or libraries. Some institutions have newsletters and will let you advertise for free.
5. Attend an event such as a freshers' fair or local community event with a stall. Deliver talks.
6. You can advertise through your local Volunteer Centre. Find contact details for local volunteer centres here: www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/find-a-volunteer-centre
7. You can advertise using national organisations including the following:
 - Do-it, the online database of volunteer opportunities: www.do-it.org.uk
 - Timebank online portal for volunteers to pledge time and skills: www.timebank.org.uk
 - Volunteering Matters: <https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/want-to-volunteer/>

Advertising for volunteers from the people who use your services

If you are encouraging the people who use your services to volunteer, think about how you advertise this. It may be that you take an informal approach, encouraging people to undertake small tasks as and when required.

However, if you have a more formal volunteering process, you will need to think about whether the positions are open to everyone from the moment they first attend your service, or whether they are for those who have settled into the service or even moved on.

This will depend on the roles that volunteers are undertaking. In general, everyone who is interested should be encouraged to undertake informal volunteering tasks such as serving food or gardening as this helps people to feel valued and have a sense of ownership over the space. However, it may be that more detailed volunteering roles exist for those who are ready to undertake training and get more involved in the running of the centre.

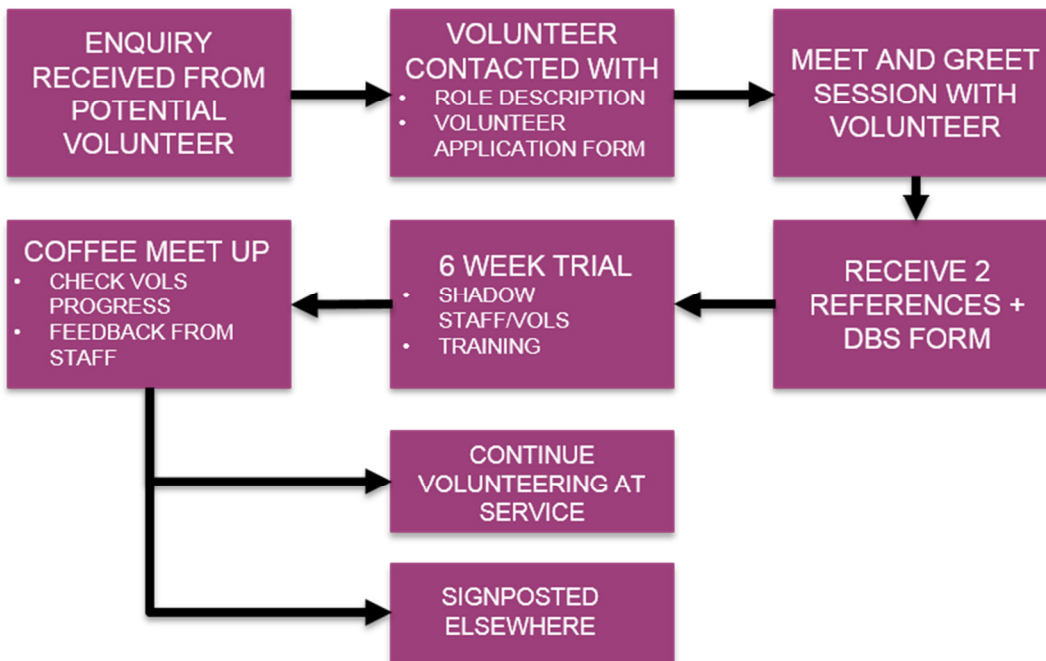
How you manage this is best decided with reference to your overall Theory of Change and Strategy and in collaboration with the people who use your services.

The recruitment process

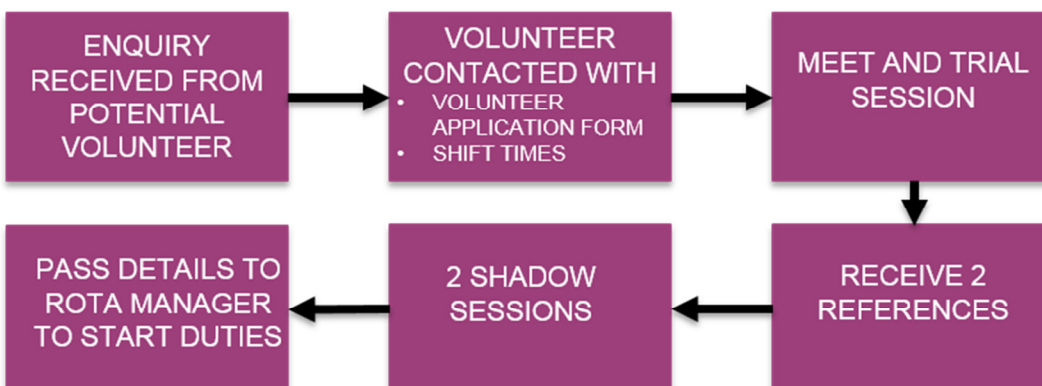
Getting your recruitment process right is essential to ensuring that you select the right volunteers and that your volunteers feel confident and supported. We also have a responsibility to the people who use services to make sure that everyone volunteering in the service has a good understanding of their role. If you haven't already, it is worth mapping out your recruitment process to see whether there are any gaps and to make sure you follow the process consistently with all new recruits.

Example recruitment processes

Example 1: medium-sized organisation with large team of professional staff



Example 2: small volunteer-led organisation



Note: Volunteers are not undertaking lone working or one-to-one support work within this organisation.

The application process

Before you start, make sure you know who is going to be responsible for responding to any queries, selecting and interviewing candidates. This will ensure you are able to respond to potential volunteers as quickly as possible. It's important to respond, even if it is just to acknowledge their email or enquiry – one of the most common complaints received by local volunteering centres from potential volunteers is that they don't receive a timely response to their enquiry. People often feel enthusiastic when they apply for a voluntary role and we want to tap into this energy. Some people who apply may be lacking in confidence and a swift and friendly response can help to reassure them.

When advertising volunteer roles you can either ask for a CV with a covering letter, asking people to explain why they want to volunteer and how their skills and experience match those set out in the person specification, or provide a simple application form asking similar things.

Think about what skills and experience you want from your volunteers and how you will test this against the information you ask for in their application so that you can decide who to shortlist. For example, if you need people to demonstrate relevant skills or experience, ensure you have asked for this in the CV and cover letter or form.

You can provide a closing date for submission or have an ongoing recruitment window, depending on turnover and whether you are recruiting volunteers for a specific time period. If there is a closing date, you may want to also advertise the date of the ongoing selection activities.

It is good practice for shortlisting (deciding who you see for volunteer interviews) to be done by more than one person. You don't have to let people know if they were unsuccessful in the process but it is polite to do so if you have time.

Volunteer interviews

It is important to interview all potential volunteers, although this may be less formal than if you were interviewing a paid employee. While you don't want to frighten off potential volunteers, you need the chance to find out if they are suitable and give them the opportunity to learn more about the organisation.

The interview is an opportunity to test for motivation and level of commitment, to find out more about their skills and experience, and to check if their attitude and values are consistent with the ethos of the project (i.e. the project's approach to challenging certain types of behaviour, or expectations around professional boundaries). It is good practice to involve current volunteers and service users in the interview process. If you are interviewing for a lot of volunteers at once, then you could carry out part or all of the interview as a group session.

If you have doubts about suitability, for any of the reasons tested, it is better to act on this than take people on who are not suitable, as this could be a difficult experience for you and the volunteer. Unsuccessful volunteers should be informed and ideally offered feedback.

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Reach Volunteering has compiled this list of suggested questions to ask in a volunteer interview³:

Their interest

- What is it about our particular organisation or cause that appeals to you – and what do you know about us? What would you like to get out of this opportunity?
- What about the role appeals to you?
- Are there any elements of the role you have reservations about?

Their skills and experience

- Do you have the right skills and experiences, as outlined in the person specification? What life and career experiences have you had that might be useful to you in working with us?
- Have you had any previous experience as a volunteer? If so, with what organisations, and what kind of volunteering did you do?

Their availability and some practical considerations

- Are you able to commit to the time needed for this project or role? Do you expect your circumstances to change during the duration of this role? If so, would you still be able to do the role?
- Are there any resources you will need, such as accommodations for disabilities?
- Could you supply the names of referees and let us know when you could start [if you offer them the role]

What you need to tell them

This is a good time to give potential volunteers an insight into how your organisation works. You may want to let them know:

- The organisation's aims and beneficiaries
- The organisation's culture
- The role/task description
- How volunteers fit into your organisation and the training and support offered
- Which elements of the role/task description can be negotiated and which are essential. Can the opportunity be broken down into phases allowing you and the volunteer to try it out?
- How the volunteer will be supported in this specific role
- Why the role is important for the work of the organisation

Verifying information

References

2 references should be requested for all successful volunteer candidates from a work, volunteering or academic supervisor or another professional (but be flexible enough about who provides references so that you don't exclude people who have been unemployed).

Checking Qualifications

If volunteers have applied to fill a specific post based on a qualification (i.e. teaching, counselling or coaching) check certification and insurance cover.

³ <https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/knowledge-centre/support-charities/how-recruit-effectively/interviewing-your-volunteer>

DBS Checks

As a minimum, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks should be carried out for all volunteers who will be lone working with vulnerable people. DBS checks replaced Criminal Records Bureau or CRB checks in 2012.

If your organisation undertakes 100 or more DBS checks per year (on either volunteers or staff) then you may be eligible to register directly with the DBS and carry out checks yourself. Otherwise you will need to use an umbrella organisation to do this for you. A DBS check is free for volunteers but umbrella organisations will charge a fee per application. There are a large number of umbrella organisations listed on the DBS website and it's not easy to compare them, so it might be best to get a recommendation from another local charity. There is more information on the DBS website:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service

You have a Duty to Refer back to the DBS if a volunteer who is undertaking regulated activity (which includes social care work with vulnerable adults) is dismissed from your service (or would have been dismissed but left first) because they harmed or presented a risk to your service users. This overrides any confidentiality policies.

Volunteers from overseas

There is a difference between 'volunteering' and 'voluntary work' (see section on legal status below).

There is no requirement for people from overseas to have the right to work in the UK in order to undertake volunteering and you are not required to make any checks. However, restrictions do apply to non-EEA nationals undertaking 'voluntary work' and checks are required for this.

The difference between volunteering and voluntary work is connected to whether the individual could be considered to be under contract and whether they are remunerated in some way (other than financial). However the lines can be blurred. To find out more about the difference between volunteering and voluntary work and which groups might not have the right to undertake voluntary work go to:

<https://knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers/recruiting/volunteers-from-overseas>

Inducting and training your volunteers

The aim of the induction is to keep your new volunteers excited and enthusiastic about your service while ensuring they have all the knowledge and skills they need to undertake their new role effectively. They will need to gain a greater understanding of your organisation and how you work. They will need to learn to find their way around and use any relevant equipment and to get a thorough understanding of what their responsibilities will be and who will be supporting them.

There are 5 main elements to inducting and training volunteers:

- Volunteer handbook
- Induction
- Introductory volunteer training
- Ongoing volunteer training
- Volunteer agreement

Volunteer Handbook

It's a good idea to have a volunteer handbook or welcome pack that can be given to volunteers (or emailed) once they have been recruited. Volunteers won't be able to remember everything they are told on induction and the handbook gives volunteers an opportunity to have something that they can refer back to, which outlines the main things they need to understand as a volunteer.

Volunteer handbooks can be relatively simple. At a minimum they should include information about your organisation, guidelines to volunteering including boundaries, details of the volunteer coordinator or person who will be supporting them, shift times and duties and any relevant policies such as how to claim expenses and make a complaint.

Remember to update your Volunteer Handbook as necessary and to re-circulate it to current volunteers when you have made changes.

Induction

It's important to plan your induction properly – in a busy service it can easily be overlooked. Make sure you set aside enough time to induct any new volunteers and have someone assigned to do this.

Hold group induction sessions with a few volunteers if possible, as this can help people to feel part of a team from the beginning. An induction should mirror a staff induction and your organisation should provide an induction checklist, as it may go over more than one session.

A good practice induction should include:

- Giving out the welcome pack or volunteer handbook (which includes relevant contact details)
- Recording people's personal contact details and an emergency contact if you don't already have this.
- Talking about the role description and setting out key tasks – you will need to do this again in the induction even if this has been discussed at interview and is laid out in the handbook.
- Going over your code of conduct, covering issues such as confidentiality and acceptable behaviour
- Aims, ethos and intended outcomes of the organisation and project

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- Setting out a volunteer agreement – this should outline what is expected of volunteers and what they can expect from you. Take care however not to confuse this with an employment contract or you could find yourself subject to legal challenge.
- A tour of the work place, with an introduction to clients, staff and volunteers
- Clear guidance on health and safety, including fire regulations and first aid
- The organisational structure – ensure they know who to talk to if an issue comes up and where to get support.

It is important to note that all training must be relevant to the role and there should be no obligation for volunteers to pay for the courses or to reimburse the organisation for the cost of training, if they don't continue their voluntary role. This is to avoid creating a de facto employment contract with employees which would entitle them to additional employment rights.

Introductory volunteer training

In an ideal world, all your volunteers should receive training before starting volunteering in your organisation. Volunteer training needs to be tailored to your organisation but, at a minimum, it should give a basic introduction to working with your client group including professional boundaries and how volunteers should respond to safeguarding concerns, and it should familiarise them with the ethos of your organisation.

Some day centres choose to give a range of training prior to volunteers starting. This can include topics listed below under ongoing training.

Training should be engaging and interactive. People learn in different ways so it's important to include a variety of styles in your session.

- Warming up the group – it's worth undertaking a short exercise at the beginning of the session to get people talking or at the very least to get everyone to say their names. After people have spoken once, they are usually more confident to speak again.
- Talking from the front – volunteers will want to hear from you and there will be information to impart but try not to talk 'at' your volunteers for long periods – they will find it hard to take in large amounts of information in one go. It's usually best to intersperse talking with other activities.
- Whole group discussions – if you ask specific questions of the group you may be able to get a group discussion started. Some groups take to this more easily than others. There are usually one or two people who are more confident about talking than others. You may find that this will work better and be more inclusive later in the session when people have got used to one another and to speaking in the environment.
- Small group discussions – get the group to discuss something in pairs or in a small group. This usually ensures more people are involved in the discussion. You can then feedback some of the key points they have raised (although be warned against getting people to feedback everything they have discussed as this can become long-winded and repetitive).
- Whole group exercises – it is a good idea to use at least once exercise that requires the group to stand and move around the room. This can include getting the group to arrange themselves according to how they agree with different statements
- Small group exercises – this can include organising cards or pieces of information or 'carousel' exercises that involve people moving around different activities.

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- Films – a short film can be a useful way of seeing and hearing about a topic. These should generally be shorter than 5 minutes and, ideally, closer to 3 minutes. Be warned – films can often be tricky to play, especially if you are using Powerpoint, so make sure you have tested and have a back-up plan. You will also need to think about sound – unless you have quite a sophisticated projection system, you may need to bring external speakers.

Ongoing volunteer training

In addition to introductory training, you may wish to have an ongoing programme of training for volunteers (and staff). As mentioned, some services offer a broader range of training topics prior to volunteers starting. An alternative is to run courses at regular intervals to give volunteers the chance to attend. It is up to you to decide which, if any, of these courses are compulsory. You can also arrange for volunteers to shadow other staff or teams, and to visit other local services.

A comprehensive training programme for volunteers is likely to include:

- General introduction
- Working with the specific client group
- Safeguarding of vulnerable adults (SOVA)
- Maintaining appropriate boundaries and confidentiality
- Advice and advocacy
- Managing conflict
- Introduction to drugs and alcohol
- Introduction to mental health issues
- Introduction to offending behaviour
- Homelessness Law and the role of the local authority
- Understanding the benefits system
- Understanding complex trauma and trauma informed care
- Strengths-based approaches

Volunteer agreement

It is a good idea to ask all new volunteers to sign an agreement outlining what is expected from them and what they can expect from us. It's important that this is not confused with a contract (getting this wrong could lead you liable to legal challenges) – the agreement should talk about expectations rather than obligations.

The agreement should include:

- Role title
- Role description
- Expectations including time commitment and behaviour
- Support provided by the organisation including training and supervision
- Details of their main contact

Managing and supporting your volunteers

Retention of volunteers

Retaining volunteers and, most importantly, keeping them motivated in their role is important. Successful retention is not necessarily the same as people staying as a volunteer for years; rather it means having motivated volunteers for a period that works well for the volunteer and the organisation. Research has shown that certain things aid retention:

- Adopting screening practices when selecting volunteers
- Matching volunteers to suitable roles
- Hosting recognition activities (e.g. thank you events) for volunteers
- Offering ongoing training and development opportunities to volunteers

Other things that are said to aid retention are allocating sufficient funds to support volunteer involvement, cultivating an organisational climate that is welcoming to volunteers, giving volunteers an experience worth sharing, and enlisting volunteers in recruiting other volunteers one-on-one.⁴

These tips can help:

- Allow volunteers access to organisational development opportunities such as team meetings and planning sessions, so they feel included and valued in their work.
- Put supervision and support mechanisms in place so any concerns and new ideas can be heard and acted on.
- Ensure volunteers are never out of pocket by paying reasonable expenses. For more information on expenses visit Volunteering England: www.volunteering.org.uk/resources/goodpracticebank/Core+Themes/expenses/Expenses+and+state+benefits.htm
- Show that you value your volunteers through 'thank you' events or awards. This could be as simple as a summer BBQ or a Christmas meal.
- Make sure you let people know about progression opportunities, such as letting volunteers know about paid vacancies or ways to increase their responsibility or vary their role as a volunteer.

Support and supervision

Offering regular support and supervision is essential to maintaining happy and productive volunteers. It helps to avoid volunteers 'stagnating' in their roles and is an opportunity to reinforce the values and aims of your organisation. This may be formal or informal depending on the nature of your organisation and the role. However, even if you choose to make supervision informal, it's essential to take the process seriously and act on any relevant information that comes up effectively – if volunteers need to make changes, or if they have complaints or concerns, these should be followed up.

The purpose of support and supervision is:

- To provide an opportunity to give and get feedback
- To review the contribution the volunteer is making
- To ensure that the work of the volunteer is in line with the aims and objectives of the organisation⁵

⁴ Hader, M. and Brudney, J. (2004) Volunteer Management Practices and Retention of Volunteers. The Urban Institute.

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If you don't have a volunteer coordinator, establish a mentoring support structure in the staff team, making sure they are supported to carry out supervision. This can also be an opportunity for staff to develop supervision skills.

- Plan weekly catch-ups at the beginning of someone's role
- Plan monthly catch-ups thereafter
- Use a template supervision structure (similar to a staff supervision) – this can be basic if that better suits the role but will ensure you give each volunteer the opportunity to feedback.
- Set targets and development roles
- Make sure you challenge inappropriate behaviour

If a volunteer does not follow organisational policies, it is important to bring this up, ensuring that you go back over the organisational code of conduct and induction information.

Dealing with complaints

On occasion you may need to deal with complaints from a volunteer. It's a good idea to have a policy in place although volunteers will not fall under the same disciplinary and grievance procedures as staff (this creates a small risk that they could be deemed to be under contract).

Broadly, your complaints policy for volunteers will be similar to that for service users. In the first instance they will make a verbal complaint to the volunteer manager or another suitable designated person. If the matter is not resolved they should put the complaint into writing and receive a written response within a designated timeframe. If necessary you should then arrange a more formal meeting to discuss it with a member of senior management or a trustee present.

Sometimes organisations will need to deal with a complaint against a volunteer or even to ask a volunteer to stop giving their time, if there is a serious or continued breach of policy. Any complaints should firstly be dealt with within your supervision structure but on occasion they may remain unresolved. Make sure that your volunteer policy has clear guidance if this happens, covering the steps that need to be taken. This should include ensuring that the volunteer has a chance to put their version of events forward, that meetings with the volunteer include the option for them to bring a representative/advocate and respect the volunteer's confidentiality, and that the reasons for the dismissal are clearly articulated verbally and followed up in writing.

Knowing when someone is volunteering too often

As well as considering the minimum amount of time you need volunteers to give, it is worth thinking about the maximum. It is important to avoid over-working your volunteers and to prevent anyone becoming dependent on the service in a negative way. All volunteering should be planned, with a clear idea of how much time is reasonable to ask from someone. This is especially important when people are volunteering for you more than once or twice per week.

⁵ Citizens Information Board, 2008

http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/downloads/training/Managing_Volunteers_08.pdf?_ga=2.240827075.1935219085.1515405307-34830421.1513685827

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There are circumstances in which people may volunteer for you more than once a week or even daily. This may include people with lived experience who are service user volunteers or people who are on student or other placements. Alternatively someone may volunteer daily for a set period of a few weeks or a month.

However, if someone is volunteering daily without any clear plan, it is worth asking whether you are over-using them and their time. In the first place, if they are fulfilling a specialist role that is required so often, you may need to consider whether the role has crossed over from 'volunteering' to 'voluntary work' (see section on legal status below) and whether you should be employing them or someone else to undertake that work.

In addition, some people who volunteer, both with lived experience and without, may be suffering from loneliness, a chronic lack of confidence or have other support needs. In these cases, people can become dependent on volunteering to support them in a way that it is not set up to do. It is worth thinking about how you can help them to continue volunteering an appropriate amount and to find other things to support them and fill the rest of their time another way. There may be cases where it is best for someone to move on from volunteering for you – in these cases, it would be a good idea to develop an exit plan for them to ensure they can move on to other things successfully.

If you have concerns about people who have formerly been service users becoming dependent on the service as volunteers, consider doing a 'volunteer swap' with other local services, enabling you to offer volunteering opportunities to one another's service users.

Case study

Frank was a volunteer driver at a homelessness project that had both day centre and hostels services, along with a group of other volunteers. Over time, the pool of volunteers shrank and there were fewer people to fulfil this role. He was frequently called upon to move donations, furniture and other items for the project. Frank was lonely and had a history of isolation. He became a daily fixture at the project, often there for longer hours than paid staff. This prevented him from making other social connections outside the centre. It became clear both that Frank was dependent on the service and that the service was using his services more than was reasonable. An exit plan was developed for Frank to build interests outside the service and get involved with different social and community groups. He moved on from volunteering towards pursuing interests that better met his needs.

Communication and risk management with volunteers

Volunteers will be in a service less frequently than paid staff, and might not be present for handovers. It is important that procedures exist to inform volunteers of key issues that occur during their absence, so that communication and support is consistent across the team. This is particularly important after an incident in order to promote effective risk management and give the volunteer the chance to discuss concerns.

This can be achieved by:

- Attending a handover meeting at the start of their shift or activity
- Reading the day book or log book
- Checking an incidents/risk assessment file with details of incidents and risk management actions
- Manager/duty worker updating volunteers by email/telephone following a significant incident or change
- Manager debriefs volunteers following a serious incident.

Legal and policy issues

When you use volunteers there are various legal and policy issues you have to consider. This is partly to ensure that you have thought through why and how you are using them and create an environment that works well for everyone. It is also to ensure that you are covered legally and act with good practice.

Developing policies

Organisations that recruit volunteers need to have the right policies in place to protect themselves and volunteers. Policies you will need to develop include a volunteer policy and volunteer agreement and an induction pack. Other organisational policies such as health and safety and equal opportunities may need to be adapted to include volunteers or be referenced within the volunteer policy. Knowhow Non Profit has produced this list of what to include in a Volunteer Policy⁶:

- Recruitment of volunteers, including equality and diversity
- Induction and training
- Expenses
- Supervision and support
- Health and safety
- Confidentiality and data protection
- Problem solving and complaint procedures for volunteers.

You can read more about writing Volunteer Policies on the NCVO Knowhow Nonprofit website at <https://knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers/keeping/policy>. There are various local volunteer centres that have model policies online but, if you use one, double check that it includes everything listed above. In addition, the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action have a range of example policies on their website including a model Volunteer Policy. This can be accessed at:

www.wcva.org.uk/volunteering/working-with-volunteers/model-policies

Volunteering and claiming benefits

It is still possible to volunteer if you are claiming benefits but there are certain requirements to fulfil to ensure that your claim is not affected. Take care that you (or your volunteers) are aware of these to avoid any issues.

1. The volunteering must meet the governments' definition of volunteering which is "when you choose to give your time and energy to benefit other people without being paid for it". You can volunteer for any organisation but you must not receive any payment other than out-of-pocket expenses, be under contract (volunteer agreements do not count as contracts) or be helping out a family member.
2. You must notify your benefits advisor
3. You cannot receive any payment other than for out-of-pocket expenses
4. You must continue to fulfil the terms of your benefits and any agreements you have in place – for example, if you are required to be available for a job interview with 48 hours' notice, you must continue to make yourself available. Tell your volunteer manager so that they are aware of this.
5. In some cases, your volunteering may count towards the weekly time you are required to spend looking for a job. This should be agreed in advance with your advisor to avoid any difficulties. It can count towards no more than 50% (so if you are required to look for work for 35 hours per week it can count as

⁶ Information from NCVO Knowhow Nonprofit, Volunteer Policies at <https://knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers/keeping/policy>

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no more than 17.5 hours even if you volunteer for more than this). This does not apply if you are in the no requirements, work-focused interview or work-preparation category.⁷

Please visit the NCVO website for more information at:

www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/volunteering-and-benefits

The legal status of volunteers

There is no clear legal definition of a volunteer. For this reason, it is important to ensure you maintain clear distinctions between volunteering, voluntary work and employment (see below). If your organisation employees at least five members of staff, you will be subject to government health and safety legislation and volunteers can expect the same level of commitment as any employee. Similarly, you will be required to have risk assessments and these should include volunteers. Volunteers also have the same rights as staff in relation to data protection.

Although all organisations should treat volunteers fairly, volunteers are not legally protected against discrimination and cannot bring cases of discrimination against the organisation.

The legal distinction between being a volunteer, being a voluntary worker and being an employee can be complex and problematic for agencies and volunteers as there is a risk that both parties may find themselves in a position that neither intended. Volunteers and voluntary workers should not have contracts but voluntary workers might receive more in terms of expenses than a regular volunteer. They might also have more expectations placed on them.

Care needs to be taken to avoid volunteering crossing over into employment, which would change your obligations towards the individual. It is worth considering the following points⁸:

- The volunteer is not under contract and care should be taken to ensure this is clear (contracts do not need to be written – this is more about the nature of the relationship). A volunteer may sign a volunteer agreement but avoid using the language of rights and responsibilities and make it clear that this is not a contract.
- You should reimburse reasonable expenses but make sure you only reimburse what has actually been spent (see below for more information). This avoids becoming a payment in kind.
- Any training that you offer should be necessary in order to perform the tasks required or to improve the volunteer's ability to carry out the role. This avoids it becoming a payment in kind (for example, if a volunteer was funded to undertake a detailed advice course, when she is not required to give advice to service users, this could constitute payment in kind).
- If you allow volunteers to refuse particular tasks or shifts and do not require notice periods or minimum terms of service, this can help to avoid a contractual arrangement.
- Avoid undertaking full disciplinary procedures with volunteers. Disputes should still be dealt with fairly and efficiently and you can still have policies in place but these should be separate from those you use with staff (see section on Dealing with Complaints above).

⁷ Information from NCVO, Volunteering and Benefits at www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/volunteering-and-benefits

⁸ This information is taken from the Out-Law website which is operated by Pinsent Mason LLP website and can be found at www.out-law.com/en/topics/employment/employment-status/how-to-ensure-that-volunteers-and-interns-do-not-acquire-employment-rights/

Paying expenses

Although you are under no obligation to pay expenses to your volunteers, it is good practice to reimburse any reasonable costs that are incurred from volunteering at your organisation. This would include:

- Travel to and from the location of volunteering or in the course of volunteering
- Meals taken while volunteering
- Care of dependants (including children) during volunteering
- Postage, phone calls, etc for the purpose of the voluntary role
- Cost of any equipment or protective clothing required for volunteering

You should only ever reimburse what the volunteer has actually spent (and if possible get receipts). If you need to give money in advance to the volunteer, you should get the receipt at a later date and collect any change. For example, if you have an allowance of £5 to be spent on lunch, you should not give £5 as a matter of course without expecting receipts or change. You must get a receipt and have any change returned to you or pay after the event. This will avoid your expenses being considered to be payment in kind and affecting the benefit claim of the volunteer.⁹

It is also good practice to have expense forms that can be completed and that you can keep a record of in case of any future queries.

Be sure to make it clear from the outset which expenses you can reimburse and how much you are prepared to pay. This will ensure that volunteers do not end up out of pocket.

Liability Insurance

Reach Volunteering suggests the following with regards to liability insurance.

“While there is no legal requirement to take out insurance in respect of the risk of a personal injury claim from a volunteer, it is advisable to extend employer’s liability insurance (which covers employees) to expressly include volunteers. Alternatively, the organisation’s public liability insurance could be extended to cover volunteers.

Employers are vicariously liable for the negligent acts of their employees. It is unclear whether this principle would also apply to a volunteer acting in the course of his/her work for an organisation. As a matter of good practice, it is advisable to protect volunteers from such claims. Liability insurance should be expressly extended to cover claims caused by the act or omission of a volunteer and should also include an indemnity for the volunteer in the event that a third party successfully pursues a claim against the volunteer.”¹⁰

⁹ www.volunteernow.co.uk/fs/doc/publications/volunteers-and-expenses-information-sheet.pdf

¹⁰ From: <https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/knowledge-centre/support-charities/legal-resources-charities/other-legal-issues-around-volunteer#Insurance>



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless or live with multiple and complex support needs. We work to improve services and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link
Minories House, 2-5 Minories
London EC3N 1BJ

020 7840 4430

www.homeless.org.uk

Twitter: @Homelesslink

Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink

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