



Volunteering Safely

*A Guide To Safe Practice
For All Volunteers,
Especially Those With Particular Needs*



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After induction, who remembers what they were told? This little booklet will help volunteers to remember the important issues, keep safe and make the experience of volunteering a positive and rewarding part of their lives. Some volunteers may have difficulties with reading and form filling and may need discreet help to use this booklet.

This guide is intended for all charities, for use with their volunteers, especially those with particular need for support. Larger organisations should already be aware of most of the issues addressed herein. However this is a convenient place for volunteers to note information specific to your organisation. This might be the name of the person who is mentoring or supervising the volunteer, the location of the first aid box, a reminder of particular Health and Safety issues or any other information specific to your organisation and the individual volunteer.

Volunteers are the life blood of voluntary work and should be valued for the precious resource they are. This may seem obvious but it involves actions as well as words. Valuing a volunteer includes checks being made on their 'job satisfaction' – are they matched to the right job? Volunteering gives many people an opportunity which they might not otherwise have, to be, or continue to be, part of the wider world. Isolation can be a real problem, especially in rural areas, so transport provision may be important for some of your volunteer workers.

Volunteers come in all shapes and sizes and with widely differing abilities. Some may have particular needs which require special consideration. Very few people cannot be matched to an opportunity. Some volunteers have had a lifetime of experience in business, industry or other professions. They should be encouraged to share their knowledge and have the opportunity to be involved in decision making in an organisation.

What training opportunities are given to volunteers by your organisation? Is the volunteer aware who to go to in the first instance with a problem or a complaint? Or of legislation with which they must comply, like the Data Protection Act and Confidentiality? Or Health and Safety issues? There are explanatory notes in this booklet and spaces to fill in relevant information. At the end of the booklet are web page references, where much more information can be gathered by the organisation or the individual on the subjects in each section.

Health and Safety and Insurance

The health and safety of paid members of staff is covered by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. Although volunteers are not defined as employees, the organisation for which you volunteer still has a duty of care towards you. Volunteers should be made aware of health and safety issues relevant to the job you will undertake and to the premises where you will be required to work. Your training/induction programme should include looking at the organisation's health and safety guidelines and you should be allowed access to the relevant reference manuals, where appropriate.

As a volunteer you also have a duty of care to those people with whom you come into contact, which simply means that you should take reasonable care to avoid doing anything which will cause harm to others.

You should know who to inform if you or someone else is ill, or, if there has been an accident, who to go to for First Aid. All accidents should be entered in the accident book and the Accident Book and First Aid kit must be kept in an accessible place, with a notice in a well used area, saying where to find it. The first aid kit should only contain dressings, no drugs or ointments. First aiders are not even allowed to give Paracetamol, so if you are likely to need any you should bring your own.

You should know the quickest way out of the building in case of fire or bomb threat. It is helpful if you know

how to operate a fire extinguisher and if there is more than one kind, which type to use when. Water should never be used on electrical fires because of the danger of electric shock. Personal safety is more important than putting out a fire. If in doubt, get out.

If you become aware of a risk, for example faulty equipment, damaged plugs, trailing wires, poor lighting or anything which makes a task difficult or dangerous, find out who to go to, to report the fault.

Personal safety is an important issue which is often overlooked. If you are alone in a building even for a short space of time, you should lock the doors in case of intruders. It is also sensible to lock away valuables (handbags, wallets, laptops) especially in offices where there is free public access.

Volunteers working at clients' homes will have extra safety issues to deal with. You will need to know who else might be at a home you are going to, and be certain that you have gone to the right address. It is useful to have a 'buddy' system where someone at the organisation phones the volunteer to check that all is well. The 'buddies' pre-arrange a message to indicate that you need intervention from outside. A simple message like 'would you check in the blue folder in my top drawer' could be the cue for the 'buddy' to send for help. This may never be necessary but it is as well to have a system for dealing with the unexpected.

For further information, The Suzy Lamplugh Trust has

lots of advice and tips on how to stay safe on their website. They also run personal safety training courses individually tailored to the organisation and its needs. The web page has lots of useful tips on how to stay safe in all sorts of everyday situations. For example, it has tips on driving, safe parking, travelling on foot or by public transport, and personal safety when alone in the workplace.

Volunteers working in outreach situations will have all the usual hazards to watch out for, in a strange place. Lighting, heating, ventilation, seating and trailing wires from overhead projectors or ICT equipment need to be considered carefully. Lifting heavy items in and out of vehicles may mean that you should be familiar with the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992, obtainable from the Health and Safety Executive.

If an accident should happen, to equipment, or to a volunteer or a client, you will need to complete an accident report form. Organisations have a legal duty to keep a record of details of all accidents. Volunteers must be covered by Employers Liability Insurance while working for an organisation whether onsite, at a client's home or at an outreach site. You will need to know whether any equipment you transport in your own vehicle is covered by the organisation's insurance.

In the organisation for which I volunteer

If I am ill I need to inform:

The First Aid Officer or Appointed Person is:

The First Aid Box and Accident Book are:

In case of fire, I know where the emergency exits are and will leave the building and assemble at:

Faulty equipment/hazards should be reported to:

I can lock my valuables in:

If there is anything I don't understand, I can ask:

Have you looked at the Suzy Lamplugh website for more safety tips?

www.suzylamplugh.org/home/index.shtml

Equal Opportunities

Volunteers come from all walks of life, backgrounds and cultures. Having a variety of volunteers with different requirements adds to the richness of the organisation, which can be seen to be putting its equal opportunities policy into practice.

If you have with less need for practical support you might consider becoming a 'volunteer enabler', giving support to someone lacking the confidence or practical skills to volunteer unaided. There are very few people who could not find a suitable placement within one of the many organisations needing help.

Sometimes even a person with a particular need for support can fulfil a small role in an organisation, which can be of mutual benefit. The organisation gets help with a routine task, such as envelope filling, and the volunteer feels that he or she is making a valuable contribution and gains confidence.

As a volunteer you need to be aware of your responsibility to uphold the organisation's equal opportunity policy. Equal opportunities covers issues such as disability, age, gender, race, religious and political beliefs and sexual orientation. Most of these issues are covered by law (for example the Disability Discrimination Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act). All are online at the Office of Public Sector Information:

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/stat.htm>

You will not be expected to know the acts in detail but some discussion of the issues involved and how they affect the organisation's approach towards staff, volunteers and clients would be useful to make the issues clear and unambiguous.



Disability awareness

A disability is the reduction of functions such as walking, hearing and seeing or the presence of symptoms which make life more difficult for the individual, such as chronic pain, muscle weakness or mental health problems.

According to the Disability Rights Commission, the latest figures (2002) show that there are about 6.9 million disabled people of working age in Great Britain, accounting for nearly one fifth of the working age population. This is not the total figure because it excludes those whose disability is not on record. Mental ill health for example still carries a social stigma and sufferers are reluctant to admit to their symptoms while they can still struggle on.

Until very recently society did not take account of people with disabilities and special needs. Apart from having to live with a disabling condition, the difficulty of trying to cope in a society constructed by, and for, able bodied people made life even more difficult. Simply negotiating steps to enter a building or reaching things from a wheelchair, or needing a toilet which would accommodate a wheelchair or provide a rail to aid balance, made it easier to stay at home and thereby contributed to public perception of the disabled person as someone who was 'handicapped'. Even the old term 'invalid' for someone with a permanent condition held the negative connotation of 'in-valid'.

Since the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) it has been unlawful for employers to discriminate against job applicants on the grounds of disability and provision must be made to ensure that a disabled person is not placed at a disadvantage in comparison with employees who are not disabled.

As a volunteer you are not covered by such legislation, as it would not be cost effective to make physical adaptations to the requirements of one volunteer, who may then decide to leave the placement.

However organisations are bound by law to take such steps as are reasonable to provide access for disabled persons to services provided by that organisation. Clients of an organisation must have their needs taken into consideration and provision should be made so that they can receive the same services as an able bodied person.

Arrangements may already be in place, for example for wheelchair access. Adapted or modified equipment may already be in use. A volunteer with a disability is able to provide a valuable view of the organisation's provision for clients with a similar disability.

Security of information

Security of information within an organisation is very important, particularly since the Data Protection Act (1988). Sensitive personal information is protected under the Act and every organisation and business in the land is obliged to follow the rules set out in the Act. Any information collected about any individual may only be kept for the purposes for which it was collected and with the express permission of the person concerned. It is not sufficient to assume that because they have given you information about themselves they agree with you keeping a record or sharing the information with anyone else. Their permission must always be obtained.

Records should be kept in a locked filing cabinet or behind a password on a computer and only those with a need to know should be allowed to access them. Anything unique to the individual, even their name and address, is considered to be sensitive personal information. If somebody wants to contact a person ask if you may pass their contact details on to that person, giving them a choice whether or not to respond.

If your organisation wants to publish photographs of meetings and events, it is always necessary to ask the permission of those concerned. It is especially important to protect information relating to children. The child's parent should give written permission for the child's photograph to be printed or shown on

a web page. This is for the child's safety and also to prevent non-custodial parents from tracing children who may have been removed to another location for the safety of custodial parent and/or their child or children.

As a volunteer you need to know your organisation's policy on confidentiality and should be given a copy of their guidelines. It should include information on how that policy affect you in your role. It should explain who decides what is confidential and who takes responsibility for that decision. Please make sure you read and understand any instructions given to you.

If you feel overwhelmed by the information a client reveals to you, you should discuss it with your Volunteer Supervisor. There are some circumstances when you should share information given to you, if you are aware that a child is at risk, or if the client is at risk of harming themselves, for example. Your supervisor will take the matter from there. This is more applicable in some roles than others. In most voluntary roles there is not that level of personal sharing.

You will also need to explain to a client at the outset, how any information they give you will be used and to whom it will be disclosed. This is particularly important if the client is sharing very personal information with you as, for example when being counselled. Confidentiality also extends to information you gather during the course of your

work about staff and volunteers. Their personal information is also sensitive and should not be shared.

Your own personal information should be treated in the same way, as sensitive and private. However, if you are working with certain vulnerable client groups, you may be asked if your organisation can do what is known as a 'police check' or 'CRB' (Criminal Records Bureau) check. This is to safeguard the welfare of children and other vulnerable people and is a legal requirement. Don't be offended if you are asked to consent, as organisations cannot employ volunteers or staff without considering their responsibilities under the law. You will be sent a copy of the report.

Copyright Law is another security item to consider when sharing written and/or printed information with clients or allowing clients to use reproductive facilities within the organisation. Most information is covered by copyright laws and it is illegal to make reproductions or even to copy sections of an article without written permission from the copyright owner.

Copyright laws apply to information published in printed form or on the Internet. Unless there is a clear indication within the document that it is available for you to copy freely, then it isn't. Exceptions include limited copying for research or private study and making copies for visually impaired persons (with restrictions).

Some organisations may have a copyright licence, obtainable from the Copyright Licensing Agency.

All sensitive information should be disposed of as soon as the purpose for which is kept no longer applies.



Responsibility and Decision Making

The organisation for which you volunteer is accountable to its clients, managers, funding bodies and the law. As a volunteer you are accountable to your organisation. What that accountability involves depends on the nature of your role.

Someone in a counselling role, or one which involves processing personal information, for example, would need to be very mindful of confidentiality. Other volunteers may need to be especially careful of equal opportunities and disability awareness. Some roles just need basic common sense, as in not doing anything that may cause harm to yourself or someone else.

You need to have a clear knowledge of what your responsibilities are to your client and to your organisation and also where those responsibilities end. Duplication is a waste of energy and resources and confusing for the client. You should not feel overburdened with responsibility, nor should you take the burden of a client's problems home with you. Share any concerns you have with your Volunteer Supervisor.

Each organisation should have procedures for dealing with disagreements and discussing conflicts and it may be necessary to hold a meeting with the individuals concerned. You are entitled to voice your opinion and give feedback to paid staff.

Information should be shared within the boundaries of the organisation's confidentiality procedures. This allows for professional guidance and supervision of the volunteer and also lets the volunteer share any concerns. Everyone involved then has a clear picture of what is happening with a client. Any uncertainties or misgivings you have about a client, however small, should be reported to the Volunteer Supervisor because they help to build a bigger picture of what could potentially develop into a problem.

Volunteers need to adhere to the organisation's policy on dealing with outside agencies. Is there a standard referrals procedure? The client's consent must always be obtained before passing on any information to other sources of help. Details should not be discussed with other agencies, even informally, without the client's permission. A client may not wish to reveal to another agency things which she or he has revealed to you.

Benefits of Volunteering

It may seem that volunteering is all responsibility and no reward but this is certainly not the case. Given proper support and supervision a volunteer may be able to develop and flourish through the work he or she does. Many volunteers are retired from paid work and have a lifetime of experience to share. Volunteering enables them to still feel a valued part of their local community. Sometimes volunteers work for a charity in which they have a particular interest because it caters for a need of which they or their loved ones have had a personal experience.

Some volunteers may have been out of the workplace due to raising a family, unemployment or long term health problems and volunteering helps give the confidence needed to contemplate further training and a return to work. Some voluntary roles incorporate training which leads to work-related qualifications. Organisations are often able to give references for volunteers applying for jobs or college placements. Volunteering for an organisation which does the kind of work you would like to do gives you a chance to try out the work environment without any commitment in the long term. For example, a young person hoping to work with animals can work for an animal rescue charity to experience what the work really entails.

For people with particular need for support, volunteering is made easier with a 'volunteer enabler'. That usually means another volunteer who keeps an eye on the new person and helps them to build their

skills and confidence. The enabler in turn learns about empowerment, facilitating and enabling. Empowerment is helping another person to become more confident, more responsible for their own choices, actions and decisions. It enables the supported volunteer to use resources they may not be aware they have, and to learn new social and/or practical skills. Facilitating and enabling are the skills used to help them plan how to handle difficult issues and how to set personal goals and achieve them. It is a process of confidence building.

Many people have latent skills but lack the confidence to use them. Volunteering allows the individual to use their talents in a relatively non-threatening environment while they adjust to being in a working situation. Retired people may have no intention of going back to the world of 9 to 5 but still want to be involved, to 'give something back' to the community in which they live.

It is good practice for volunteers to be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses. Volunteers should be offered, and encouraged to accept, reimbursement of their outlay. Paying someone's fare, for example, may mean the difference between them being able to volunteer or not. The Volunteering England publication 'Volunteers across the NHS' describes reimbursement as an equal opportunities issue.

Expenses should always be verified by receipts, public transport tickets and so on, so they cannot be classes as earnings, which would lead to difficulties

under the laws governing employment rights. Maximum mileage rates allowable for volunteers (and staff) can be checked on the HM Revenue website:

www.hmrc.gov.uk/rates/travel.htm

Training can only be offered if it is relevant to the volunteer's role in the organisation or, once again, it can be construed as a payment in kind, or wages in disguise.

Volunteering can sometimes be hard work, mentally and/or physically. There will be days when you wonder if it is worthwhile. Most of the time though, you know that you are using your unique combination of skills and talents to do something which otherwise probably would not get done. Without the hundreds of voluntary organisations in the UK, we would be living in a very different society.

Thank you for the contribution which you are choosing to make.

Further reading:

Copyright Licensing Agency

<http://www.cla.co.uk/copyright/copyrightlaw.html>

“CLA is responsible for looking after the interests of rights owners over the copying of books, journals, magazines and periodicals. CLA licenses business, education and government to copy extracts from books, journals, magazines and periodicals.”

Criminal Records Bureau

<http://www.crb.gov.uk/Default.aspx?page=381>

“If you are going to work as a paid employee or as a volunteer for an organisation and your work will bring you into contact with children or vulnerable adults, you may be asked to apply for a CRB check.”

Disability Rights Commission website:

<http://www.drc-gb.org/index.asp>

“The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) is an independent body established in April 2000 by Act of Parliament to stop discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for disabled people.”

For the number of disabled people of working age officially on record in summer 2002 (latest figure available)

<http://www.drc-gb.org/library/policydetails.asp?id=262§ionid=6§ion=oth>

HM Revenue website

www.hmrc.gov.uk/rates/travel.htm

For maximum car mileage rates

Ledbury and District Community Voluntary Action

www.voluntaryactionledbury.org.uk/about.htm

“Community Voluntary Action delivers the combined services of a Council For Voluntary Service and a Volunteer Bureau. Our Area of benefit encompasses the market town of Ledbury and twenty three surrounding rural Parishes of Herefordshire. In addition to the above we also deliver a number of Volunteer based community projects for the Ledbury area, details of which may be found on this website”

Office of Public Sector Information

www.opsi.gov.uk/stat.htm

Shows the text of all UK Statutory Instruments (laws), such as the Disability Discrimination Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, the Race Relations Act. Use the ‘search’ facility on the right hand side of the page to find a particular Act.

Volunteering England

www.volunteering.org.uk/

“Volunteering England works to promote volunteering as a powerful force for change, both for those who volunteer and for the wider community. This web site offers a range of resources for anyone who works with or manages volunteers as well as to those who want to volunteer.”

My Notes

Useful Contacts

