



## **Southampton Voluntary Services**

### **COVID-19**

# **Good Practice Guide to Involving Volunteers**

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## **Introduction**

This guide is intended to support volunteer involving organisations with the effective recruitment, management and retention of volunteers. Good practice does not require any specialist knowledge or experience, but rather a willingness to work with volunteers in a fair and considerate way.

Given the current crisis across the world with the Covid-19 virus, lots of organisations are having to think about working with volunteers in different ways, as well as balancing the needs of their service users in uncertain times.

## **Keeping People Safe when Supporting Community Action**

Lots of people are keen to offer support to people in their community at this difficult time. Lots of people will appreciate and rely on this help. This advice note is intended to provide general advice on how to keep people offering and receiving help safe.

Preventing harm and abuse is often referred to as 'safeguarding' and specifically for children, 'child protection'.

Some people are more vulnerable to harm and abuse than others – children, people with care needs, people who have difficulties such as dementia, people who do not have a good social network and are isolated. These are people who may be particularly vulnerable as volunteering arrangements become less formal.

The vast majority of people offer their help for genuine reasons; however, we have to acknowledge that people with other motivations will use opportunities like a crisis to seek out vulnerable people for exploitative or abusive purposes.

Many community organisations will already have child protection and adult safeguarding policies and procedures. This advice note does not seek to change any existing policies but provides general advice for self-organised volunteer groups and more informal arrangements during the Corona Virus outbreak.



## **People organising and offering help**

**People organising local volunteer action should consider carefully the activity they will wish volunteers to undertake:**

- Is the activity being delivered in isolation – e.g. one on one – or within the home?
- What sort of help is being provided – simple tasks such as delivering shopping, telephoning people to keep in touch or running video get together are less risky than help within the home environment.
- Are there financial risks – think about how people can stay safe. Can people organise internet shopping for collection rather than handing over cash?
- If money is being exchanged, think about two people doing this and simple receipting books to keep and give a record
- Avoid using people not already well known to the individual for intimate personal care, such as lone childcare, helping people to keep clean or use bathroom facilities – these are high risk activities for the person giving and receiving help.
- Are there any other risks that need to be taken into account to look after all involved?
- How can you ensure the activity complies with government guidance on social distancing? – Avoiding Volunteers face to face approach. Leaving personal care tasks for NHS care workers and professionals.

## **Think about the people offering help:**

- What does the volunteer need to carry out their activities? Can you ensure they have access to everything they need?
- Is the volunteer already known to the person needing help?
- What steps could you take to avoid situations where volunteers who are not known to the person needing help are working by themselves – can people visit in pairs?
- Do you have people who are already checked by the Disclosures and Barring Service (DBS), such as schools staff, sports coaches, care workers – anyone who usually



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works with children or vulnerable adults. Prioritise these people to volunteer with at risk families or adults.

- How are people matched – can supported introductions be made to ensure people are comfortable with the help being offered and from who?
- What advice and guidelines will you provide people about behaving carefully when volunteering – maintaining personal space, avoiding inappropriate conversations, not placing themselves in risky situations e.g. not being alone in a part of someone's property?
- How can you offer support and supervision to people? Will this be phone calls, emails, text messages etc?
- Does the volunteer have any support needs or health conditions that you need to be aware of?
- What steps could you take to support people who are carrying out activities on their own?
- Ensure you give people offering help the basic information about child protection and safeguarding – what it is, what to look for, how to report concerns. This is available via (add link)

### **Raising Worries**

- Make sure that people offering help and people receiving help know how to raise a concern
- General worries should be directed to a nominated volunteer support lead
- Specific concerns about incidents of abuse or harm that may be identified by volunteers should be reported to the Council through usual routes (see link)

### **Key Steps in Recruiting Volunteers**

#### **Identifying Need**

Given the current situation, there are lots of different needs within local communities and across services, so the need will be clear here! At this time, we would advise you consider how volunteers can practically support people's needs in local communities at this time.



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What should, and shouldn't they be asked to do to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of everyone involved.

Before going on to promote roles and recruit volunteers, we would recommend that you:

- Determine the roles and responsibilities that your organisation will create for volunteers. You don't need a full role description yet – just an idea of what volunteers might do.
- Think through how volunteer involvement contributes to the wider community at this time – how are volunteers helping to meet the needs of others during this period and beyond?
- Consider how you will monitor and evaluate the activities of volunteers – what is working well and what isn't working so well

### **Preparing Your Organisation**

At the same as identifying need within your group or organisation, it is also important to think about how ready your organisation actually is to involve volunteers.

At this point you should be thinking about:

- Who will recruit and manage volunteers?
- What will that process look like – forms, collecting data, ID checks etc?
- What policies and procedures do you need or could you pull together? This could include:
  - Volunteer policy
  - Volunteer handbook
  - Volunteer application forms
  - Interview forms
  - Reference request forms
  - Induction checklists
  - Health and Safety Policy
  - Safeguarding Policy
  - Data Protection Policy
  - Any other relevant policies or procedures for your volunteer roles



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- Do you have the equipment and materials available for volunteers to carry out their roles?
- Does the group have appropriate insurance in place to cover the activities of your volunteers, such as public liability insurance?
- How will your volunteers be working alongside other support services at this time?
- Are you clear on what volunteer can – and what they cannot – be asked to do? It may not be appropriate for volunteers to undertake certain tasks – for example, you may need to set clear boundaries for their roles to ensure safeguarding of both volunteers and any service users they will be working with.

### **Developing a Volunteering Role Description**

As part of good practice you should put together a clear role description to outline the tasks that volunteers will be asked to undertake. This could have some flexibility to adapt to the different needs, interests or skills of particular volunteers, but it provides a useful checklist so that both the volunteer, and you as the volunteer manager, are clear about the role and expectations on both sides. Having all of this information written down and kept in one place can be a useful reference point for both volunteer manager and volunteer.

### **Selecting the Right Volunteer(s)**

Normally we would suggest a robust process for selecting volunteers for different roles, but given the current crisis situation, you are unlikely to have the luxury of time to do this.

As a minimum, you should be looking to gather some information on the volunteer to determine their suitability. Some key things you should consider keeping a record of:

- The volunteer's name and address with proof of identity
- The volunteer's contact details
- Details of the volunteer's next-of-kin or an emergency contact
- Information about any medical conditions or allergies which a volunteer's manager or colleagues might need to know about
- The screening and selection tools – e.g. application forms, references, DBS checks etc.



The logo consists of a semi-circle of stylized human figures in red, with their arms raised, forming a larger semi-circle. Below the figures, the text "Southampton Voluntary Services" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

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## **Induction and Training**

Going through an induction process and providing appropriate training is key to the success of your volunteer involvement.

## **What should you cover in induction and training?**

To assess what induction and training volunteers will need you should ask yourself:

- What information does a volunteer need to carry out their role? This should be included in induction.
- What skills does a volunteer need to carry out their role? Will you require volunteers to have these skills when they start, or will you offer training? This will help you work out what training you might want to offer.
- What attitudes or approaches does a volunteer need to carry out their role? You should explain this information during induction.
- Training for volunteers can include mandatory training to equip them with the relevant information and skills to carry out their roles, but can also include optional training to support volunteers to develop in their role and widen their knowledge and skills.

## **Induction Process**

It is good practice to offer a standard induction process, just as you would with a member of staff, to help new volunteers feel welcome and settle into their role within your organisation. As part of this you may want to use an induction checklist that both volunteer manager and volunteer sign to agree the induction has been carried out.



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## **Training**

Training could be offered in a variety of ways and at different times:

- Informal/ face to face training – this could be a one to one session, ongoing coaching and mentoring, group volunteer meetings, and peer support from other volunteers
- Volunteer handbook – you may want to have a volunteer handbook for all volunteers, or even specific handbooks for specific volunteer roles
- Written guidance/ procedures – this could be guidelines on specific tasks or activities, an information pack, online resources etc.

## **Support and Supervision**

Providing appropriate support and supervision is key to ensuring volunteers are able to carry out their volunteering roles effectively. Given the current crisis, this can prove difficult, but a lot of this could be looked at through online platforms or phone calls to check in with them.

## **Dealing with Problems and Poor Performance**

Common types of poor performance include:

- Inappropriate behaviour towards staff, other volunteers or your service users
- Poor timekeeping
- Unreliability
- Bad attitude
- Lack of skills and/or an unwillingness to develop necessary skills





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## **Avoiding poor performance**

The best way to approach poor performance is to ensure it doesn't happen in the first place. Here are a few key actions that can help avoid performance issues:

- Try to ensure that your recruitment process matches the right volunteer with the right role. Poor performance often occurs when a volunteer is placed in a role that doesn't suit them.
- Provide induction and training so that volunteers know what's expected of them and have the skills they need – as much as you can at this time.
- Provide ongoing support that provides opportunity for one to one discussion with volunteers about any issues – again, as much as you can at the moment.

## **Other Issues**

We're sure that other points will be emerging over the coming weeks. VAL will continue to share developments during this time as new information is available.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact [volunteer@southamptonvs.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@southamptonvs.org.uk)