Guide for Volunteers

A volunteer is someone who willingly gives up their own time, without payment, for the benefit of others or for a cause they wish to support. At this time demand for volunteers has increased as communities and individuals are having to manage unprecedented challenges and restrictions. At any time, the safety and wellbeing of volunteers is a priority – in the current difficult circumstances it is important that the safety and wellbeing of volunteers is considered by everyone involved in relief and support activities.

This Guide has been created as a source of information and support for people volunteering during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not intended to replace guidance or instructions offered by organisations and groups that are involving volunteers at this time; instead, this guide is to supplement what is already in place and be a reference for further information and support so that people can engage in volunteering effectively and safely.

Individuals involved in volunteering, or offering to volunteer should be aware of and consider the following:

1. Commitment
   You should be aware that the service or support you are providing as a volunteer will be vital to the service users; people in difficult circumstances will depend on you. Volunteers need to be aware of the commitment that will be required and the time that they will have to donate on what could be a regular and prolonged basis.

2. Policies and procedures
   All organised volunteering should be supported by policies and procedures that will give guidance and instruction on how activities should be managed, along with the services that can and can't be provided. You should ensure that you have read any policies and procedures associated with your volunteering and follow the guidance and instructions that they give. They should help to protect you in case of any dispute. Please make sure that you ask for a copy of any policies and procedures that are in place before carrying out your volunteering duties.

3. Confidentiality
   As a volunteer you may become aware of personal information regarding the circumstances of people receiving your support. The group or organisation that you are volunteering with should have a clear policy on the requirements of confidentiality, and this should be followed without exception. Please make sure that you understand how the group or organisation you are volunteering for deals with confidential information.

4. Boundaries
   In all volunteering activities, boundaries exist that guide volunteers in their roles. It is important that you do not exceed the boundaries of your own volunteering and what you have been asked to do. This is to protect service users and yourself as the group you are volunteering for may not have insurance in place to cover activities that you have not been asked to perform.

5. Communications
    Everyone has a responsibility to support effective communications. You should ensure you understand any instructions or guidance given to you and ensure that you share (within the bounds of confidentiality) any information that is required to support the aims and tasks of your volunteering. There should be a clear communications plan in place so that when messages need to be transmitted, the correct information is reaching the person who needs it. Please make sure that you fully understand how you are expected to communicate during your time as a volunteer.

6. Expenses
    Normally expenses incurred by volunteers as a result of their duties would be reimbursed by the organisation or group. You should ensure that you are aware of what expenses, if any, can be reclaimed. You may be asked to keep any receipts and record any activities that you carry out for transparency purposes, especially if your activities have been funded by an external or publicly funded body. Please check the process for claiming legitimate expenses before beginning your activities.

7. Health and safety
    It is the responsibility of the organisation or group that is involving volunteers to provide guidance, information and instruction that minimises risk and protects volunteers as they carry out their duties. At this time, it is more important than ever that this guidance and instruction is provided, and that all volunteers follow it without exception. If you are unsure about the risks involved in any task, please ask for further guidance and information.

8. Personal wellbeing
    Volunteers can sometimes witness the unexpected and struggle to cope with the tasks and responsibilities associated with their volunteering. As a volunteer your own personal wellbeing should always be a priority. If you feel overwhelmed or anxious about any aspect of your volunteering, you should speak to your organisation or group coordinator. MIND has a dedicated area of their website that provides information about mental health during the current pandemic which can be found by [clicking here](#).

9. Safeguarding
    It is the responsibility of the organisation or group that is involving volunteers to ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone. This includes the volunteers and beneficiaries of their services and activities. As a volunteer you will have responsibilities to contribute to this. This should be clearly explained to you and if you have any concerns about anyone you should speak to your organisation or group coordinator.

Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action has produced a series of guidance notes for new groups and organisations which cover some of the points raised above in more detail. These can be found by [clicking here](#) , and they may help you to have more detailed knowledge of how to keep yourself safe and protected whilst performing volunteering activities.

Volunteer Scotland has a wealth of information about volunteering in normal times which can be found by clicking here, and they have a webpage dedicated to volunteering during the current pandemic which can be found by clicking here.

Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action

We are funded by the Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire's Health and Social Care Partnership to support third sector organisations who are delivering a service within Aberdeenshire in the following ways:

Development: Further information on any of the subjects within this document is available from your local Development Officer. To find out how to contact the relevant person, please visit our website by clicking here.

Funding Search: Our dedicated Funding Officer regularly updates our funding webpage with information to help fund your group. You can find out more by clicking here.

Office Services: We support organisations by offering services such as independent examination of accounts, payroll provision and PVG services. Further details can be found by clicking here.

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We are Aberdeenshire's Third Sector Interface