



The Grassroots Guide

To Happy Volunteering



Welcome to
Volunteering

Why Should I Volunteer?

FOR YOU:

- ✓ **To meet new people**
- ✓ **To learn new skills**
- ✓ **To find new interests**
- ✓ **To share your hobbies and passions**
- ✓ **To have your existing skills used and appreciated**
- ✓ **To improve your CV**
- ✓ **To have fun**

FOR YOUR COMMUNITY:

- ✓ **To help those people who may be struggling and need support**
- ✓ **To help a worthwhile cause**
- ✓ **To promote a passion or interest**
- ✓ **To put the 'community' into your community**

Volunteers make a real and lasting difference to the people and groups around them and the act of volunteering itself enriches the lives of many people on a daily basis.

Why not find out for yourself?

Come and talk to one of our friendly Volunteer Centre staff members and find out how, by giving an hour or two of your time, you can make a difference.

**There's Nothing That I'm
Particularly Good at... What Can I
Offer As A Volunteer?**

The kind of skills you need to volunteer have nothing to do with how good your CV is, or the number of diplomas you have. Life skills are something we all have. Managing the family budget, caring for friends and relatives, writing letters, talking to people on the bus or the phone, or simply enjoying a hobby or interest - all of these activities equip us with the kind of skills that are highly valued by those groups and individuals who need help and support. Combine these 'life' or 'transferable' skills with commitment and enthusiasm and you are an ideal candidate for volunteer of the year!

So it doesn't matter what your background is, how educated you are or how accomplished. Everyone has something to offer. At the Volunteer Centre we can help you explore the skills you think you don't have and find a place where they will be used and appreciated.

"It seems to me that people have vast potential. Most people can do extraordinary things if they have the confidence or take the risks. Yet most people don't. They sit in front of the telly and treat life as if it goes on forever."

What Can I Do?

That depends upon your interests and your background.

Are you a caring person, able to understand people and sympathise with their troubles?

- ✓ Befriend a lonely older person or a young Carer struggling to cope with his or her family circumstances.

A good organiser?

- ✓ Volunteer with a local group to co-ordinate social and fundraising events.
- ✓ Update and reorganise the chaotic filing system of an overstretched charitable organisation.

Do you enjoy driving?

- ✓ Volunteer as a driver to take isolated people to hospital appointments, shopping or to social activities.

Walking? History?

- ✓ Volunteer to give guided walks around local tourist hot spots or museums.

Are you good with money?

- ✓ Become a Treasurer or fundraiser with a local group.

Look around your own community – do you know someone who could use your help?



Do I Have the Skills?

All groups that require volunteers should provide clear 'role descriptions' that describe what is expected of a volunteer and the kind of skills and knowledge they will need.

If you have looked at a role description and are still unsure, your first interview with a member of the group where you want to volunteer is when you can make sure that this placement is really for you.

For most volunteering opportunities with larger or established groups, you are not expected to have all the skills you need and training will be provided. If training is not offered, and you feel that that is the only thing preventing you from volunteering, speak up and ask for it.

Remember:

✓ **Be realistic**

You may want to volunteer as an administrator with your local drama group, but if you're not an organised sort of person, this probably isn't the role for you. If, however, the only thing stopping you is lack of experience with computers, this is easily solved through some training, support and practice.

✓ **Be honest**

There's no point pretending that you can do something when you can't. This is a recipe for stress and volunteering is supposed to be fun! Pick roles that you are comfortable doing or that you feel you can grow into. If you find yourself struggling, speak up and get help.

✓ **Be positive**

You will find that, with a little training and support, there are many roles you are suited for. If it doesn't work out – and this does sometimes happen - don't be disheartened. There are plenty of other things you can do.

**What Will Be
Expected Of Me If I
Volunteer?...**

That will really depend on what you agree with the group or organisation you join. In general, because people rely on volunteers, you would have certain **responsibilities**:

- ✓ **Be reliable and punctual**
- ✓ **Understand what you are supposed to do and respect the policies and guidelines you are given**
- ✓ **Respect the aims and values of the group or project you join**
- ✓ **Be willing to learn**
- ✓ **Speak up when worried or unhappy with your role**
- ✓ **Be open and fair minded in your dealings with others**

Do Volunteers Have Rights?

Volunteers don't have the same legal rights as a paid employee, but any group or organisation worth giving your time to will treat you with the same care and consideration. As a volunteer, you are a valuable member of any group and should be treated as such. You can expect to:

- ✓ **Be valued and respected**
- ✓ **Have your ideas and contributions respected**
- ✓ **Be given a clear description of what is expected of you**
- ✓ **Get regular support and supervision**
- ✓ **Access training and development opportunities**
- ✓ **Get reimbursed for out of pocket expenses**
- ✓ **Work in a safe environment**
- ✓ **Get thanked for the volunteering you do**

When you volunteer, make sure that you:

- ✓ **Are given a Role Description**
- ✓ **Have a decent 'induction'. This is an introduction to the group and your role and should cover Health and Safety; the rules governing your role; an explanation of 'confidentiality'; how to get reimbursed for any expenses; who you should talk to and what process you can go through if you are unhappy**
- ✓ **Have regular supervision ideally on a monthly basis – with a contact person or supervisor**

Remember, you are under no obligation to stay at a placement if you are not getting fair and courteous treatment.



Can I Talk About My Volunteering With Family & Friends?

You can certainly talk about aspects of it – your friendships with other volunteers, social events, any training you're doing, the work your group is doing in general terms – but you have to be careful.

Before you talk, consider the following:

- ✓ Will what I say be breaking the confidence of someone who trusts me and/or who trusts the group I help?
- ✓ Would what I say cause a person hurt or embarrassment if they were to overhear me?
- ✓ If the person I'm discussing was standing next to me, would I stop myself from saying this?
- ✓ Could what I say damage the reputation or, if overheard by the wrong person, affect the safety of another person?
- ✓ Could what I say damage the reputation and good name of the group I'm placed with?

If the answer is 'yes' to any of the above, don't say anything.

As a general rule, don't discuss the personal circumstances of clients you deal with. Even if you don't mention their name, details of their personal lives may identify them to others.

The group or project you're placed with should give you clear guidelines on 'confidentiality', particularly on those times where it is important to break confidence and speak to your contact or supervisor – if a vulnerable person is at risk of harm or neglect for example. If you are unsure or have any doubts,

Ask before you speak.



I Have A Right To My Opinions - What If I Don't Agree With What My Group Says About 'Equal Opportunities'?....

Yes it's true – no one can tell you what to think, but if what you think could be found insulting, hurtful, degrading or offensive by another individual or group, when you are volunteering, you must do everything you can to keep such opinions to yourself.

You may want to ask yourself what you understand by 'equal opportunities'. It's not about forcing someone to think or feel a certain way; it's about making sure that what you say and do does not prevent anyone else from enjoying the same freedoms, courtesy and opportunities that we all have the right to enjoy. This includes the right to go out and about our daily business without being patronised, insulted or harassed simply because of who we are or choose to be.

Life would be pretty boring if we are all the same and, at a very basic level, equal opportunities is about accepting and respecting those people who are different from ourselves.

“The only way to make sure the people you agree with can speak is to support the rights of the people you don't agree with.”



**What If I Don't Agree With The
Way Things Are Done At My
Placement?....**

At the outset you must be sure that you:

- ✓ **agree with the beliefs and values of the group you are placed with.**

These should be made clear to you at your Induction and, if you agree to join the group as a volunteer, you must respect them. You may like the idea of working to promote organic gardening, but if the environmental group you are placed with supports wind power and you are violently opposed to it, gardening or not, you should steer clear.

Once involved with a group, though,

- ✓ **you should be treated as part of a team and,**
- ✓ **your suggestions and opinions should be heard and respected**

Ideally, volunteers should have a say in how the organisation develops by being represented on the Management Board or Group. At the very least, you should have the chance to let your contact person know what you think at regular supervision sessions.

Any group you are placed with should have guidance in place for dealing with any concerns or problems you may have, and this should be covered in your Induction.

It is particularly important to

- ✓ **Speak up immediately if you have concerns about your own Health and Safety, or the Health and Safety of any of the service users you work with.**

Ultimately,

- ✓ **You must respect any decision that is made by an organisation's management team or, democratically, by group members.**

We have all had times when we think that we can do things better than others – and occasionally this is true - but there are often good reasons for a group to operate the way they do. Ask.

Never ignore a group's rules and guidelines, even if you disagree with them.

If you just cannot live with things the way they are, seek another placement where you will be happier.



What If I'm Asked To Do Too Much?....

It is very likely that during your time as a volunteer you will be asked to do 'too much'. This is because many small groups in particular often have too much work to do and not enough people to do it!

If, right from the beginning, you are very clear about how much time you are able to give, this should not be a problem.

If your group is stuck or particularly short of help, however, there is no harm in them asking you to do a little bit more. Just remember:

It's OK to say 'no'

No one will resent you for it, and it's better to say 'no' than to worry about being a spoil sport and end up feeling overstretched and 'put upon'.



**I'd Like To Be A Volunteer
Driver—But What If I Can't
Afford The Petrol?**

Volunteers may not get paid for helping, but no volunteer should be out of pocket for it either. For example:

- ✓ You should be reimbursed for travel costs to get you to and from your volunteer placement.
- ✓ If you are volunteering all day, you should be provided with a meal or reimbursed for the cost of buying lunch.
- ✓ If you are making craft items with children or baking cakes for a stall at the local fete etc., your materials should be paid for.
- ✓ You should be reimbursed for the cost of any stationery or photocopying you use/do as part of your role.
- ✓ The cost of any protective clothing or essential equipment should be paid for.

If you are a volunteer driver you will usually be given a fixed rate per mile for the distance you travel, and this will cover both petrol and any wear and tear on your vehicle.

Different groups will have different systems for reimbursing volunteers and you should be taken through this as part of your Induction process.

Why Do I Need To Give References?...

Well, if a family member of yours was getting support from a volunteer, you'd probably want to be sure that the volunteer was trustworthy. The sort of references a volunteer needs to give are simply to establish that a volunteer is who they say they are and that they are of 'good character'.

What Is A 'CRB Check'?

'CRB' stands for Criminal Records Bureau, and as you could be volunteering with 'vulnerable' groups of people – children, elderly/frail or those with learning disabilities for example – you may be asked to complete a CRB disclosure form to make sure there is nothing in a volunteer's background that makes them unsuitable for their role.

Having a criminal record does not mean that you can't volunteer.

Your contribution as a volunteer is still needed and valued, but the type or severity of the offence may affect what kind of volunteering you can do. It's best to be open about any cautions or convictions you may have on your record from the outset.

The results of a CRB check or any details you give about your background are treated in the strictest confidence.



I Want To Volunteer - What Happens Now?....

Contact the Volunteer Centre – we can help match you up with a volunteering opportunity that might interest you.

Once you've been in touch, the following usually happens:

1. You fill in an application form. You may do this with a Volunteer Centre staff member or at home on your own – it's up to you.

The application form is so that we can find out what your skills and interests are – it's not to decide whether or not you can volunteer.

2. You come in for an interview.
3. We then put you in touch with an individual, group or organisation that needs your help. They may ask for names and addresses of referees and ask you to complete a CRB disclosure form.



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Torrige

Grassroots Project

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**The Torrige Volunteer Centre is part of Torrige Voluntary Services
- the Council for Voluntary Service for Torrige District
- Registered Charity Number 1002702**

Grassroots is funded by the Cabinet Office through the
GoldStar Exemplar Programme



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