

**The Volunteers**

**Handbook**

Information for people considering voluntary work



**Newark and Sherwood Volunteer Centre – Helping you to volunteer**

Newark and Sherwood Volunteer Centre helps people who want to volunteer find suitable volunteering opportunities. The Volunteer Centre staff can help you to identify the type of voluntary work you would like to do. They can also put you in touch with organisations who want volunteer help.

This booklet outlines some of the things you might want to think about before committing yourself to becoming a volunteer.

**What is a volunteer?**

A person who, free of charge and without duress, contributes their time and skills with the aim of benefitting others in their community

**Why do you want to volunteer?**

Volunteering has a lot to offer people from all types of backgrounds and walks of life. People volunteer for many different reasons:

* To do something they really enjoy
* Make use of special interests and talents
* Learn new skills and develop new interests
* Make new friends and develop new interests
* Find out more about a job or type of work which they are considering as a career

If you decide that you would like to get involved in voluntary work, but are not sure exactly what you would like to do, then think about WHY you want to volunteer. This can be a useful way of helping you focus on what sort of voluntary work you want to do.

**Questions to ask yourself**

If you are clear about why you want to volunteer then you may have some idea of the voluntary work you would like to undertake. However, there are a number of other things which may influence the type of voluntary work you do. The following questions might help you focus on what you would like to do and how much time you can give.

**Commitments and responsibilities**:

* How much time can you spare for voluntary work? Think about your other commitments and don’t overcommit yourself
* Are your circumstances likely to change in the near future?
* What period of time can you commit to doing voluntary work? E.g. 1 day, 1 month or 6 months? Some voluntary projects may require a minimum commitment, so check before you decide.
* How much time do you wish to volunteer? E.g. 1 day a week, 1 day a month or less?
* What times of the day are you free?
* What days of the week are you free?
* What about child care arrangements?
* Do you have your own transport? If not, is it easy for you to use public transport?

**Personality, skills and interests**:

* In what ways do you feel you can best contribute?
  + What are your particular skills and interest?
  + What do you really enjoy doing?
  + Do you prefer working with people or to do something practical?
* If you prefer working with people, is this on a one to one basis or in groups?
* Would you prefer to do something you have already done, using skills you have already acquired or would you prefer the challenge of something new?
* What skills and interest do you already possess? Many everyday skills are useful when doing voluntary work. Make sure you don’t overlook these skills, e.g. talking, listening, decorating, driving, gardening etc.
* If you want to work with people have you identified a particular group with whom you would like to work? Many skills can be used with many different groups, but there may be some people you would like to work with more than others e.g., children (under 5), young people, older people, families or homeless people etc.

**Questions to ask the organisation**

You will usually meet the volunteer coordinator or the person in charge of the project. This will usually be an informal two way interview or chat. This is an ideal opportunity for you to ask some questions about the organisation/project and what you might be doing.

* How and why did the organisation/project begin?
* What is the structure of the organisation? Where do volunteers fit in?
* How will the voluntary work you may be doing benefit the organisation/project?
* Will there be a role description, so you know what will be expected of you?
* How many hours a week are involved and will you be expected to commit yourself to a certain length of time?
* Who will you be responsible to?
* What expenses will be reimbursed and how?
* Will becoming a volunteer affect your position as a claimant? See our additional resource Volunteering whilst on Benefits
* Will there be any training, induction or courses you may attend?
* Who can I go to when I need support and advice?

**Questions you be asked the Organisation**

Just as you need to ask questions of the organisation, so the project/organisation will ask you questions about yourself. This may be done by:

* Visiting the project/organisation, having a look around and a chat
* An application form and a request for references
* An informal interview

Depending upon the role you may be interested in, you may be asked about your personal circumstances, your driving licence and endorsements, your health and any criminal convictions. You may also require a DBS check (Disclosure and barring), formerly known as CRB.

**The Right to Volunteer**

Everybody should have the right to volunteer. Clearly, not everybody is suited every type of voluntary work, so there needs to be some sort of selection procedure. However, an organisation should only take relevant criteria into account when making a decision about a person’s suitability for a particular type of voluntary work. A criminal conviction for example should not prevent a person from volunteering, although it may mean that it would be inappropriate for a person to do certain types of voluntary work.

**Ex-offenders**

If an ex offender is not asked about convictions they are entitled to withhold this information. If they are asked then they can withhold this information but it may mean that you are unable to work with certain groups of people or roles which require disclosure of convictions.

An organisation’s questions should be designed to ensure that you are not wrongly placed, not discriminate against you because you have committed an offence.

**Rights of a volunteer**

* To be dealt with promptly (and cheerfully)
* To be treated equally
* To have the right to know why they were not accepted for voluntary work as far as possible
* To be given full information and induction when they start with an organisation
* To have a clear role description
* To know who to go to with any problems
* To have adequate insurance cover
* To have appropriate training and support
* To be appreciated
* To have safe working conditions
* Where possible all expenses to be reimbursed
* The task should be something the volunteer wants to do and is of benefit to others in the community
* To see the positive benefits of their volunteering

**Responsibilities of Volunteers**

Volunteers should:

* + Give commitment
  + Be reliable
  + Work within the aims and objectives of the organisation
  + Be honest if there are any problems
  + Respect confidentiality and those they work with
  + Treat all people equally
  + Attend relevant training