

Ten things to know about volunteering

1. What is volunteering

Volunteering is an unpaid activity where someone gives their time to help a not-for-profit organisation or an individual who they are not related to. Unpaid volunteers are often the glue that holds a community together. Volunteering allows you to connect to your community and make it a better place. Dedicating your time as a volunteer helps you make new friends, expand your network, and boost your social skills.

2. Who is responsible: always say which organisation you are representing

Be clear about who you are, what your volunteer role title is and which organisation you are volunteering on behalf of. This helps to manage expectations around the support you can offer. It also helps people to understand which organisation is supporting them.

3. ID checks, DBS checks, references

Some organisations may ask you to provide 1 or 2 referees. In this instance, the organisation will request a simple letter, followed up with a short phone call. For some roles, you will be required to go through a DBS check. This is a process for gathering information about an applicant's criminal history and is an important part in safeguarding. It helps organisations make safer recruitment decisions and prevents unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups. Most organisations will require some verification of identity, this could be checking official documents that identify who you are and where you live. The organisation will process these in accordance with their data management and GDPR policies.

4. Representing your organisation

Always treat people with respect/courtesy

- Your role description outlines your duties as a volunteer
- You and your organisation should ensure that you work within the law when supporting other people's needs
- Reporting errors means action can be taken to reduce the impact of the mistakes and lessons can be learnt
- You must protect the safety and welfare of the people you support
- You must also ensure your own health and safety and take responsibility for your actions within your role
- A working relationship involves mutual respect and value of the other people's skills and knowledge with a focus on working together
- Developing good relationships with other volunteers and organisations helps to improve the quality of support provided.

5. Carrying out your duties

Listen and respond

As a volunteer, you have the responsibility to complete tasks promptly and reliably and to follow guidance or advice from your host organisation. Sometimes you might be asked to participate in orientation, training events or meetings.

6. Knowing your limits

Your organisation will tell you the agreed ways in which you are to volunteer. If you are directly supporting someone. Your coordinator will provide you with the information you need to know to enable you to meet that person's needs. Volunteers must be careful to stay within the boundaries of their role. Your host organisation will set out what is and is not included within your role and it is important that you operate within this guidance.

7. Expenses – know if you can claim expenses

You are not paid for your time as a volunteer, but you may get money to cover expenses. This is usually limited to direct expenses you have for travel or purchases necessary for your volunteering. At the start of your volunteer placement, you should speak to your host organisation about any expenses you can claim and the process for making claims.

8. Safeguarding – know your organisation's policy

Any worry about an adult who has or appears to have care and support needs, who is subjected to or may be at risk of, abuse or neglect and who may be unable to protect themselves from the abuse or neglect or risk of it. Or any worry about a child or young person who is subjected to or may be at risk of abuse. You must familiarise yourself with the organisations safeguarding policies. You can also refer to our document on safeguarding for further information and useful telephone numbers.

9. Equalities – know your organisation's policy

It is unlawful to discriminate against anyone because of their:

- age
- gender reassignment
- being married or in a civil partnership
- being pregnant or on maternity leave
- disability
- race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

You will usually be given guidance on your host organisation's equalities policy. If in doubt, ask for information.

10. Support

If you have any concerns you should raise this promptly with your line manager. This could be a concern about your role, about those your working with, your team or anything that is troubling you. If you had a whistleblowing concern or concerns around bullying, you should request to see your organisations policies and procedures and follow these as outlined in the document.