

# what things do I need to think about?

Starting volunteering can be exciting and nerve-racking. It's important to take your time and make sure that it's the right thing for you, after all, the organisations will be making sure you are right for them, so you should do the same back!

Have a chat with your Volunteer Manager (or the person who will be managing you) about all the details and how you can fit volunteering into the things you already do and some of the things you will need to work around.

This factsheet has some things you might want to ask about so that when you start you know that it's right for you. It might also be worth asking to have these written into your Volunteer Agreement (see last section) so that everyone involved knows what you have agreed to.

## **Commitment**

Most volunteering roles ask that you commit to be at an agreed place at the same time on a regular basis. It's really important that you see if you can make that time and get to that place before starting. It might be something you really want to do, but don't let the excitement of starting get in the way of planning and making sure you are doing everything properly.

Sometimes the commitment can be negotiable and you might be able to work around the other things you have going on in your life. Mention about the people you care for (children, relatives, friends) and the appointments, school runs, personal care duties you have to work around and ask if you can leave earlier or start later to work around that.

# Training

Most organisations will provide you with some sort of training. When you start make sure you know what training is expected of you and what times it is on and can you attend.

Training can be on a wide range of subjects. This is a brilliant gift they give you but please think about if you are going to be there long enough to use it. It is very frustrating for an organisation to spend the time and money on a volunteer on training and they leave as soon as they have it. Please think about and respect the training given and pay the organisation back with some time and service afterwards.

During your volunteering, pay attention to the training opportunities that might be open to you, you may end up with more skills and awareness than you expected!

# Expenses

Volunteering is a time and skills based commitment and so volunteers do not get paid for their work. However, volunteers can be reimbursed for any reasonable expenses such as travel expenses, parking and in some cases meals purchased while volunteering. Organisations often have a policy that outlines what is a reasonable expense and what is a reasonable limit of such expense.

Some volunteers cannot make it to their volunteering role unless they can be reimbursed. If this is important to you and a big consideration to choosing volunteering then it is a good idea to see if the organisation you are volunteering for can afford to and offers expenses.

If you are being asked to use your car as part of your volunteering role **YOU** will need to ensure that your insurance covers you doing this role. Your insurance company will be able to guide you through this but you may need to be insured for 'business use'.

# Benefits

If you are in receipt of any sort of benefits or payments, it is worth checking with who you get them from to see if your volunteering will affect them in any way.

# Equipment

The organisation should provide you with everything you will need to perform the tasks they are asking of you if it is a regular opportunity. For one offs or specialist tasks (e.g gardening or fixing things) it may be that you are expected to use your own tools or equipment. You should clarify who is responsible if anything were to happen to your equipment and then make a decision if you are willing to use it.

# Line Management

Find out who your Line Manager is as they will be the person you will be setting your tasks and helping you if anything goes wrong. Before you start, you are more than entitled to ask to meet them in advance to see if you get on. Quite often the person recruiting is the person that will be the Line Manager but some larger organisations have a central Volunteer Manager that recruits a lot of people and then deploys them to different places.

# Volunteer Agreement

When you begin your volunteering your Volunteer Manager on behalf of the organisation should provide a volunteer agreement. This is a document which isn't a contract but should outline what the organisation expects of you and also what you should expect of them. This is usually signed by both you and a representative of the organisation. If you have made any special arrangements to work around your personal life or duties this is a good place to have it documented.

You should receive a copy of this to be kept safe during your time volunteering as it can be used if you have any problems with the organisation.