

# NORTH OF TYNE VOLUNTEERING AREA OF EXCELLENCE

## BECOMING A VOLUNTEER - FAQ

There is a huge range of volunteering opportunities available in the North of Tyne area, from short, one-off activities such as helping out at a community event, to regular voluntary roles within organisations or being a voluntary charity trustee. Volunteer Centres support people to find out about and get involved in interesting and rewarding volunteering opportunities.

### GETTING STARTED?

#### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING?

Volunteering is a great way to give some of your time and skills for the benefit of others. It is also a fantastic way to learn new skills, meet new people, improve your health and to have fun!

#### HOW DO I GET STARTED ON VOLUNTEERING?

- Identify the things that interest you or the skills and experiences you want to share
- Think about your availability and times/ days you can volunteer
- Look online at your local Volunteer Centre website, charity websites or what's on at local community venues
- Contact your local Volunteer Centre to make an appointment with a member of staff for further support
- Look at the roles available and get applying!

#### WHAT SORT OF OPPORTUNITIES ARE AVAILABLE?

There are many different opportunities available to suit all interests, skills and availability. Volunteering opportunities include befriending, gardening, conservation, charity shops, fundraising, community centres, local events, and trustee roles, to name just a few. Volunteer Centres keep a list of volunteering opportunities available with charities and community groups in your area. They can also offer individual appointments to identify opportunities for you based on your skills, interests and passions.

What happens after I get information on volunteering from the Volunteer Centre? Volunteer Centres can help you find information on local volunteering opportunities. You can then contact the organisation directly to find out more and apply for the role you are interested in. Or, if you prefer, the Volunteer Centre can help you contact organisations and apply for a volunteering role.

#### DO I NEED REFERENCES?

Some organisations do ask for references. The role description and/or advert should indicate if this is required. Examples might include: a teacher, a former employer, a community leader or a professional person, or for some roles, a friend or neighbour. Family members can't be referees. If you are unsure about who you could use as a reference, please feel free to contact us to discuss further.

#### WILL I NEED A DBS CHECK?

Generally, roles that involve coming into contact with vulnerable people, including children, will require a DBS check. Any checking costs should be covered by the organisation.



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### VOLUNTEERING ARRANGEMENTS

#### **DO I HAVE TO GIVE A SET AMOUNT OF TIME TO VOLUNTEER, OR CAN I BE FLEXIBLE?**

It depends on the role. Some roles are one-off, such as helping at a community event, some roles will allow you to pick and choose when you are available, and other roles may ask for a minimum time requirement - this will usually be stated on the advert. Most volunteering opportunities are flexible and you can choose a role that fits around other commitments. A few hours a week is a common amount of time to volunteer, but there are opportunities to give 5 minutes, as and when you can, and other roles that take more time.

#### **I AM NOT AVAILABLE THE SAME DAYS EVERY WEEK, OR MAY HAVE PERIODS WHERE I CAN'T VOLUNTEER, SO CAN I STILL DO SOMETHING?**

Your local Volunteer Centre can help you find a role to fit with your availability. A variety of roles are available. You can check the role description to find out the days/ times each role is offered, and you can speak to the organisation if you have any concerns.

#### **I WORK FULL TIME - ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE EVENINGS OR WEEKENDS?**

Some opportunities are available outside of working hours.

#### **CAN I VOLUNTEER FROM HOME OR ONLINE?**

Some volunteering opportunities allow you to volunteer from home or online and we can provide details of these.

### SUPPORT AND TRAINING

#### **DO I NEED SPECIFIC SKILLS, EXPERIENCE OR QUALIFICATIONS TO VOLUNTEER?**

Most volunteering organisations offer training for the role. Any role specific skills and experience that they require in advance should be outlined on the role description.

#### **WILL I RECEIVE TRAINING?**

Organisations should provide the training necessary in order for you to carry out your role. This might include: induction sessions, shadowing existing volunteers or formal training in areas such as first aid, safeguarding or customer service.

For some roles, you may need to have some skills or experience related to the role you are applying for, but please check the role description and speak to the organisation if you have any queries.

#### **I FEEL I MAY NEED SOME SUPPORT WITH VOLUNTEERING, IS THERE ANYONE THAT CAN HELP?**

Some Volunteer Centres offer additional support for people with health conditions to access volunteering opportunities. This could include, for example, making phone calls, setting up appointments or accompanying to initial meetings. Many organisations support the use of a 'Volunteer Inclusion Plan'.

This is available [here](#) or from your local Volunteer Centre. This document can be completed together to discuss support needs.



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### WHAT IF I HAVE ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS?

Many organisations are committed to inclusivity and can provide reasonable adjustments to ensure you can participate fully. Contact your Volunteer Centre to discuss your support needs.

### WILL THE ORGANISATIONS BE SUPPORTIVE?

Volunteers are vital to the activities of many organisations and you should be fully supported to carry out your role. If you feel you need more help you should talk to your Volunteer Manager who will be able to discuss additional support requirements as appropriate.

### WILL I BE ABLE TO CLAIM EXPENSES?

Whilst you will not be paid for undertaking volunteer activities, it is good practice for organisations to reimburse any out-of-pocket expenses associated with the role, such as travel costs. Most organisations have an expenses policy which outlines how to claim, what can be claimed for, and any limits to how much can be claimed. This being said, not all organisations have expenses built into their budgets so it's best to check this out before agreeing to undertake a role in case this would be a barrier for you.

### POLICIES, BENEFITS, LEGAL INFORMATION

#### WILL VOLUNTEERING AFFECT MY BENEFITS?

You can volunteer while receiving benefits as long as your ability to meet the conditions of your benefit is not affected. You should inform the Jobcentre that you are planning to start volunteering. More information is available at [Volunteering and claiming benefits](#) and [Find a volunteering opportunity](#)

#### I HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD - DOES THAT MEAN I CAN'T VOLUNTEER?

Having a criminal record doesn't mean that you can't be a volunteer. Many organisations welcome applications from a cross section of the community. Some organisations actively support rehabilitation and will have procedures to assess your suitability. However, certain offences may prevent you from volunteering in particular roles. This can depend on various factors such as the nature of the offence, when it took place, whether it is considered spent or unspent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, and the nature of the role. Organisations should make information available on their policy and procedure on recruitment of ex-offenders.

#### GUIDANCE ON RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES:

- [Volunteering for people with criminal records](#) **Unlock Helpline:** 01634 247350
- [Criminal Record Support Service](#)
- **NACRO Resettlement Advice Service Helpline:** 0300 123 1999.
- [Information on spent & unspent convictions](#)
- [Guidance on the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and the Exceptions Order 1975](#)

Some roles are exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. For these roles, organisations may ask about spent convictions or request Standard or Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. If you are on a barred list, it is a criminal offence to apply for a voluntary role involving the relevant regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults.



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If you are on license or supervision it is part of the standard license conditions that you: “Undertake only such work (including voluntary work) approved by your supervising officer and notify him or her in advance of any proposed change.” This means that whilst we may provide you with information about volunteering opportunities you must discuss these with your supervising officer before applying.

### **I AM YOUNG PERSON - CAN I VOLUNTEER?**

Volunteering can be an excellent way to contribute your ideas and skills to the community, and at the same time gain experience, confidence and social connections. Some organisations offer volunteering for young people. You can talk with your local Volunteer Centre about roles that are available. Opportunities to join social action projects may also be available. **If you are aged under 16 you will need parental consent to volunteer.**

### **I AM AN ASYLUM SEEKER - CAN I VOLUNTEER?**

Home Office guidance states that volunteering may be undertaken at any stage of the asylum process. More information is available in [Permission to work and volunteering for asylum seekers](#) . For roles requiring DBS checks (supporting vulnerable people), certain ID documents are needed. You could discuss this with your local Volunteer Centre to find out which roles may be a good fit for your skills, interests and circumstances.

### **WHAT IF I DON'T LIKE WHERE I AM VOLUNTEERING?**

Whilst we hope that you would enjoy wherever you start volunteering, sometimes this doesn't work out as planned. If you are unhappy in your volunteering role we would advise you to let your Volunteer Manager in the first instance to see what can be done to resolve the situation. If you are still unhappy, you could get back in touch with the Volunteer Centre, and we can help you to look into other volunteering options.

### **WHAT DO I DO IF I FEEL I AM NOT BEING TREATED FAIRLY?**

Wherever possible we would advise you to speak to your Volunteer Manager. If this doesn't resolve things, or you are uncomfortable speaking to your Volunteer Manager, many organisations have a problem solving policy which can be followed. If you feel like you're not able to, you could contact your local Volunteer Centre to discuss this further.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### **WILL I BE ABLE TO USE THE ORGANISATION FOR A REFERENCE?**

Volunteering can be a good way of developing references particularly if you have been out of paid employment for a little while or have recently been in education or taken time out for caring responsibilities. The organisation should have a volunteering policy which should outline the process for obtaining a reference.

### **CAN VOLUNTEERING LEAD TO PAID EMPLOYMENT?**

Contractually, a volunteering organisation should not offer any guarantees about this, or the prospect of paid employment as part of your volunteering role. However, as you build your skills and experience as a volunteer, this should help you when applying for jobs and being able to demonstrate your capabilities.



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## INTERESTED?

Here are you key contacts where you live:

### Northumberland CVA

01670 858688



### Volunteer Centre Newcastle

07419 988821



### North Tyneside VODA

0191 643 2626

