

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUNTEERING!

Congratulations on taking steps in understanding more about what it is to be an effective volunteer!

Once you read through this document, you will be given a short quiz to test your understanding and knowledge of the content. When you pass this test, a certificate will be emailed to you outlining what you have learnt. This certificate would be a great addition to your CV portfolio and resume.

Should you have any questions relating to this document, please contact Centacare Volunteer Service staff on 99211433 or cvs@centacaregeraldton.org.au

Please note the information contained in this training document is intended as a guide only.

Thank you for taking an interest in volunteering and good luck!

Regards,

Centacare Volunteer Service Staff
Kristy, Melissa & Andrea

Objectives:

Once you have completed this training you should be able to:

- Understand the meaning of being a volunteer
- Learn about the Principles and benefits of volunteering
- Become aware of the structures of organisations that support volunteers
- Know the rights and responsibilities of being a volunteer and what to expect from your chosen organisation
- Support the National Standards for Volunteer Involving Organisations

Universal Declaration on Volunteering

“All people in the world should have the right to freely offer their *time, talent and energy to others and their communities* through individual and collective action, without expectation of financial reward.”

Adopted by International Association for Volunteer Effort 2001

Definition of Volunteering

“Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain”

The term ‘volunteering’ covers a wide diversity of activities in Australian society. It includes formal volunteering that takes place within organisations (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way and informal volunteering, acts that take place outside the context of a formal organisation.

While the vast majority of volunteering is undertaken by individuals, entities also donate employee time and this is included within this definition of volunteering.

Consideration of the term volunteering needs to also note best practice guidelines. Volunteering should not be exploitative, or be used to replace paid employment. While volunteering provides substantial benefits to society, importantly it also provides significant benefits to the volunteers themselves. The personal benefits of volunteering need to be recognised and fostered.

Principles of Volunteering

- Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer;
- Volunteer work is unpaid;
- Volunteering is always a matter of choice;
- Volunteering is not compulsorily undertaken to receive pensions or government allowances;
- Volunteering is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community;
- Volunteering is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs;
- Volunteering is an activity performed in the not for profit sector only;
- Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work;
- Volunteers do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers;
- Volunteering respects the rights, dignity and culture of others; and
- Volunteering promotes human rights and equality.

Code of Practice for Volunteers

To promote excellence in service and maximize the quality of my experience as a volunteer, I will:

- Recognise my own motives for being a volunteer and ensure the agency is aware of these
- Seek work opportunities appropriate to my skills, interests and aspirations
- Be committed to give high quality service
- Actively accept opportunities for job training and personal development
- Carry out all work I agree to do, responsibly and ethically
- Speak out about any concerns that might affect my work relationships or quality of service
- See myself as a valued team member with the right to contribute to decisions which affect my work
- Value and support other team members

This Code of Practice was developed by E. Kingsley and B. Tomlins for the South East Community Development Council, in conjunction with the Volunteer Centre of WA and the Lotteries Commission of WA 1992.

Why do people volunteer?

People volunteer for a wide range of reasons. Some of these reasons are personal fulfilment and some are due to people's 'community spirit' or desire to help others. Volunteering certainly offers a wide range of benefits for those who choose to do it. As a volunteer you can:

- learn new skills and have fun
- meet people and socialise
- get involved in your local community
- feel like you are doing something worthwhile and 'good' for others, which can help you to feel good about yourself
- share your interests, strengths, skills and talents with others
- get experience in an area that could help you with your current career or
- help you get into a new career
- have something useful and interesting to do.

Volunteer involvement is a two-way relationship, providing an opportunity for organisations to achieve their goals by involving volunteers in their activities, and for volunteers to make meaningful use of their time and skills, contributing to social and community outcomes.

What can you do?

Volunteering occurs in many different sectors, some of these include:

Animal Welfare
Health and Welfare
Community Service
Sport
Disability Services
Recreation
Religion
Arts
Emergency Services
Environment and Heritage
Education
Mentoring & Tutoring
Seniors & Aged Care
Young People

Volunteering only occurs in the not-for-profit sector.

Benefits of Volunteering

Who benefits from volunteering?.... Everyone involved!

Organisations; Clients; Community; Volunteers!

- It empowers individuals
- It adds value to not-for-profit organisations
- It strengthens communities
- It's worth billions to the community
- It contributes to peoples mental and physical wellbeing
- It is a vehicle to meet new people, maintain and develop skills, learn more about your community, pass on existing skills, work for a social change and much more!

Agency responsibilities

Agencies have responsibilities when using the services of volunteers:

- Develop a policy statement regarding volunteer involvement.
- Volunteer roles should not replace paid workers or be designed to simply provide cost savings.
- The role should offer a different aspect of service than a paid employee
- Understanding the philosophy of volunteerism and the rights of volunteers
- Appoint a person (paid or unpaid) to organize volunteer involvement
- Provide ongoing support and training for volunteers
- Ensure that appropriate out-of-pocket expenses are negotiated for authorized tasks
- Provide adequate insurance cover for authorized volunteer involvement
- Provide ongoing information and recognition to enhance volunteer participation; and
- Provide opportunities for regular feedback and evaluation

Agencies have a right to expect reliability, responsibility and adherence to policies and procedures from people who choose to volunteer their services

Volunteer rights and responsibilities

Volunteers have a right to

- To work in a healthy and safe environment
- To be interviewed and engaged in accordance with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation
- To be adequately covered by insurance
- To be given accurate and truthful information about the organisation for which you are working
- To be reimbursed for out of pocket expenses
- To be given a copy of the organisations volunteer policy and any other policy that affects your work
- Not to fill a position previously held by a paid worker
- Not to do the work of paid staff during industrial disputes
- To have a job description and agreed working hours
- To have access to a grievance procedure
- To be provided with orientation to the organisation
- To have their confidential and personal information dealt with in accordance with the principles of the Privacy Act 1988; and
- To be provided with sufficient training to do their job

Volunteers have a responsibility when volunteering also. These can include:

- Be dependable – notify the agency if you are unable to attend.
- Be willing to undertake relevant orientation; training, support and supervision.
- Maintain confidentiality and be non-judgmental.
- Work in accordance with health and safety regulations.
- Work in accordance with instructions and rules.
- Say no when you cannot commit to a task.
- Respect the right, privacy and dignity of clients and colleagues.

National Standards

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement in Not-for-Profit Organisations represent what Volunteering Australia regards as 'best practice' in the management of volunteers.

The standards emphasise the importance of adopting a systems approach to managing volunteers; an approach that aims to meet the needs of volunteers so that they in turn are able to meet the needs of those to whom they provide a service.

There are 8 standards addressing the key areas of volunteer involvement:

1. Leadership and management
2. Commitment to volunteer involvement
3. Volunteer roles
4. Recruitment and selection
5. Support and development
6. Workplace safety and wellbeing
7. Volunteer recognition
8. Quality management and continuous improvement

Centacare Volunteer Service has copies of these standards which are available to anyone who is interested in reading more about them. You can also find a copy on our website.

Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct is a guide detailing requirements for responsive and ethical behavior. Such a code must be consistent with legislative requirements. A Code of Conduct may also reflect the philosophy of an organisation. Volunteers and paid staff will be expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with an organisations philosophy. All volunteers are required to observe a Code of Conduct

Structures in Organisations

In order to meet their legal (statutory) obligations most not for profit organisations have or should have policies and procedures covering areas related to:

- occupational health and safety
- equal opportunity, harassment and discrimination
- privacy and confidentiality
- insurance coverage
- risk management
- reimbursement of out of pocket expenses
- grievance and dispute resolution
- use of motor vehicles
- employment and recruitment
- volunteer involvement
- equal opportunity
- discrimination
- duty of care for self and others

It is the responsibility of the organisation to make sure that you, the volunteer, are aware of the policies and practices that relate to your work within the organisation. It is also your responsibility to make sure that you know about these, that you understand them, and that you follow them in your work practices.

Structures for Volunteers

Volunteers should be valued and organisations should have in place structures and procedures when involving volunteers. Some of these may include:

- Aim/s of volunteer involvement in the organisation
- Support structures/mechanisms for volunteers
- Recruitment procedures of volunteer staff
- Volunteer involvement, appropriate roles and job descriptions
- Orientation, education & training for volunteers
- Recognition of volunteer contribution to the organisation

Boundaries

Volunteers should be given information relating to their obligations and boundaries regarding their role within the organisation. Volunteers should be treated like a part of the team and have the same rights and responsibilities as paid staff. Some of the things volunteers should be told about are:

- Able to say 'no' to any tasks you don't feel comfortable with. You should never be expected to volunteer more time than you feel able to
- Stick to what is in the guidelines/policies
- Time – be reliable and on time
- Sharing Information
- Speak up if you see potential danger and never put yourself or others at risk.
- Grievance procedure
- Debriefing procedure

Equal opportunity and discrimination

All people who are applying for a paid or volunteer role are entitled to have an equal opportunity to gain such a position and should not be discriminated against based on who they are or their beliefs. Equal employment opportunity (EEO) legislation prevents discrimination based on:

- gender
- religion and/or beliefs
- ethnicity
- physical abilities or appearance
- social group or status
- lifestyle choices
- sexual orientation
- membership of particular groups

Police checks and references

Some community organisations screen all staff, including volunteers before offering them roles. Screening is a standard procedure; it is a safeguard and does not imply distrust. Checks and screening:

- Designed to protect staff as well as clients
- Ensures that society's most vulnerable are protected
- Gives peace of mind to staff, management and family members

Privacy Act

The *Privacy Act 1988* (Privacy Act) is an Australian law which regulates the handling of personal information about individuals. This includes the collection, use, storage and disclosure of personal information. Under the Privacy Act, all volunteer-involving organisations are obliged to comply with the requirements in this act. Whenever personal information is collected, you should be informed as to why it is being requested, to whom that information will be disclosed to and the purposes for which the information is intended to be used.

Confidentiality

Volunteers will, at times during their work, come across information which will be considered of a confidential nature.

The information may be regarding clients or other volunteers or staff. Sometimes the information may be of general nature, but sometimes it will be very sensitive and not meant for public discussion.

Protecting privacy is essential for all organisations. Staff and volunteers must always comply with policies and procedures intended to keep personal details private.

Private information must be kept secure, with limited access. Discussions must be considered as information given in confidence and not to be repeated.

Information regarding clients should only be discussed with the Volunteer Coordinator when there is concern. If in doubt ask - the Volunteer Coordinator directly.

Breach of confidentiality

What is it?

- Gossiping
- Revealing information that you have not asked permission to disclose
- Revealing information you know people would prefer to be kept confidential
- Revealing information to people other than those to whom you have been authorised to disclose it

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Would you like to hear the information said about yourself if it were you?
- If you repeat it, will the person concerned be identified?
- Is what you know firsthand or is it gossip?

Confidentiality for Volunteers

Volunteers owe a duty of care not to disclose confidential information unless:

- The disclosure is made under the compulsion of law
- Interests of the client require disclosure
- There is a duty to the public to disclose
- The disclosure is made with consent of those involved

Workplace Safety Laws

Volunteer involving organisations should ensure the health and safety of all of its workers, including volunteers. This means that you, as a volunteer, must be provided the same protections as an organisation's paid workers. This protection covers your physical safety as well as your mental health at work.

For example, to meet its duty the organisation might provide you with:

- training, information and instructions on how to do your work safely
- personal protective equipment
- first aid facilities or training, and
- information on emergency procedures, how to report hazards and incidents.

The organisation you volunteer for must make sure you are as safe as possible while you are volunteering, but as a volunteer you must:

- take reasonable care for your own health and safety
- take reasonable care to ensure you don't affect the health and safety of others
- carry out your tasks in a safe way
- follow the reasonable work health and safety instructions given to you by the organisation you volunteer for
- co-operate with the reasonable policies and procedures of the organisation you volunteer for that relate to work health and safety.

If, when you are volunteering, you or someone else is:

- seriously injured,
- becomes seriously ill, or
- is exposed to a serious risk to their health and safety because a dangerous incident occurs

You need to let the organisation you volunteer for, know as soon as possible. This may be as easy as telling your supervisor or manager. Under the Work Health and Safety Act these types of incidents, as well as workplace fatalities, are known as 'notifiable incidents'.

The organisation you volunteer for is required to let the work health and safety regulator in your state or territory know if any notifiable incidents occur as a result of the work of the organisation

Talking about less serious incidents, including 'near misses', with the organisation you volunteer for may help to prevent more serious incidents from happening in the future.

Duty of care

Before being appointed to a position, the organisation will need to be assured that you understand the concept of duty of care.

Duty of care requires that everything 'reasonably practicable' is done to protect the health, well-being and safety of others at the workplace. This duty is placed on your employer, all paid and voluntary workers, and anyone else who might be using the work area.

Organisations manage duty of care through their risk management practices, through their policies and practices relating to workplace safety, and through their member protection policies.

Volunteers have a duty not to be careless or negligent and a duty to report to authorities any person we observe or suspect is being careless, negligent or abusive.

Dealing with conflict and grievances

All organisations have a policy and procedure for lodging complaints or settling disputes. Usually there are different processes for different kinds of disputes or complaints. It is important that you know who to talk to if you are having a problem at work or if you feel that you need to make a complaint.

Conflict can and will occur even between the best of communicators. Rather than seeing conflict as always a negative occurrence it is helpful to think of conflict as just another aspect of communicating within a group or with others. Conflict can actually force us to see things that we hadn't thought of before and can result in more creative solutions to problems. However, when the result of conflict is a negative outcome, it impacts negatively on the people or group of people involved.

Often a conflict occurs because of a misunderstanding. Conflict actually clears the air and the people involved accept the situation and feel better about it.

There are some simple steps a volunteer can take to solve problems and they include:

- Before you start volunteering check the organisation out, ask questions about their mission, their work, the range of volunteer options, whether there is ongoing training/education/information provided to volunteers and if there are policies and procedures.
- If there are problems, talk to the manager of volunteers. Try to fix problems early before they become disruptive and upsetting.
- If you prefer to write down your problem, this is a good way to express yourself better than you may be able to verbally. It is also good to be able to write it down to “get it off your chest” and to maybe even attempt to solve them problem yourself. Written statements are also a record of your issue.
- If you want to talk to someone outside the organization, feel free to contact us at Centacare Volunteer Service
- If you wish to try to resolve the issue via mediation, you can contact a mediation service.
- If you want to resign, don't leave without saying what the problem is. It may be that those problems can be sorted out so that the same thing doesn't continue to occur.

Regardless of how the conflict manifests itself there are a number of resources to assist to solve problems. These can take a variety of forms and resources which Centacare Volunteer Service has which may be of some assistance.

Issues facing volunteers

Volunteering, like almost anything else that we do, can come with some unwanted side-effects or 'issues'. These can range from relatively small issues to larger issues. Some of these issues could be:

- managing time to meet the demands of your volunteering and other
- commitments
- conflicts within organisations about the role of volunteers
- power associated with the volunteering can 'go to your head', leading you to
- overstep the boundaries of your role
- your volunteering role may change and end up being something that you
- did not intend or want to do or be involved in when you first started
- people can take you for granted and begin to ask you to do things that are
- beyond your role or responsibilities
- you can be placed in situations that are unsafe both physically and legally.

Some of these issues are foreseeable, that is, you could guess that they might occur. These kinds of issues can be managed in advance. For example, you could acknowledge any beliefs or other roles that might impact on the way you undertake the role. This is commonly referred to as a 'conflict of interests'. By letting everyone know about this up front you are protecting yourself from a range of possible issues.

Summary

As you can see there are many things that you need to be aware of to help you to be an effective volunteer. It is good practice to continually think about what you do as part of your volunteering role and think of ways to improve what you currently do to ensure that you are being as effective as you can. It is equally important to keep in mind why you first chose to volunteer. Sometimes your own goals and reasons can get lost in the day to day business of 'doing' the job and could eventually lead to a loss of satisfaction.

We thank you for taking the time to help you improve your knowledge about what volunteering is and how it can benefit you and your community.

<End of training booklet>

Acknowledgements:

Volunteeringaustralia.org

Safeworkaustralia.gov.au

ofv.sa.gov.au

Learning Guide for Volunteers: National Volunteer Skill Centre 2004