



### Summary

If you are thinking about volunteering, there will probably be some questions you will want to ask.

This information pack covers some of the frequently asked questions, but if you have others don't be afraid to ask the organisation your considering volunteering with.

After all, you need to make sure that the roll is the right one for you, and that it suites your particular circumstance.

# The TSX Community Volunteer Programme 2014 - 15 [Draft]

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Questions and Issues addressed in this Document:

1. How do I know which opportunity is right for me?
2. What will happen when I contact an organisation about volunteering for them?
3. What should I expect as a volunteer?
4. Will volunteering cost me anything?
5. How much time do I need to volunteer for?
6. Can I leave if I don't like it?
7. I'm working full-time. Will I still be able to volunteer?
8. Will I get training?
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1. How do I know which opportunity is right for me?
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Before you start looking for volunteer opportunities, think about what cause or issue you would like to volunteer for. For example are you passionate about the environment or do you want to help children or the elderly?

Also think about what you would like to get out of the experience. Do you want to meet people, learn new skills, support a particular cause, get some experience for your CV or just do something new?

You may also have some practical considerations - maybe you can only volunteer at certain times, need a building that is accessible, or prefer to volunteer near where you live. Lots of different organisations involve volunteers, ranging from small

Community groups, to hospitals and national charities. Whatever your needs are, feel free to discuss them with the organisation you'd like to volunteer with. Any good organisation will not mind answering your questions before you start.

## 2. What will happen when I contact an organisation about volunteering for them?

Organisations working with volunteers will all have slightly different ways of taking on volunteers. Some organisations will have recruitment information on their website and others will ask you to fill out an application form or go for an informal interview.

This is not like applying for a job. The organisation will just want to find out whether you have the basic skills they need and whether they can offer you the kind of opportunity that you want.

- Volunteering opportunities can be short-term or long-term, part-time or fulltime.

The application process for a one-day volunteering opportunity, for example to weed a garden, will be very different to an on-going more formal role, for example being a scout leader.

If the role has some responsibility, for example handling money, or if you will be working with vulnerable people or with dangerous equipment, you may be asked to go to an interview.

This will give you and the organisation a chance to assess each other and ask questions.

The questions an organisation will probably want to ask you will depend on the type of volunteering that you are interested in.

However they may ask any of the following:

- Why you are interested in volunteering?
- What sort of volunteering activities you are interested in?
- What skills you would bring to the volunteering role?
- If there are new skills you would like to learn through your volunteering
- How much time you have to offer, and when you are available?

You can also ask them anything that you feel unsure about - you may want to check some or all of the following :-

- Reimbursement of expenses (travel, lunch, childcare expenses etc)
- Opportunities for training or gaining qualifications
- What tasks are within the volunteer role

- What support or supervision will be available (someone to talk to regularly about how you are getting on)
- How volunteering may affect any claims for state benefits
- Who you'll be working with

An informal chat or interview can also give you an opportunity to look at where you will be volunteering and meet some of the other staff and volunteers. In addition to completing a registration or application form you may also be asked to provide references.

### 3. What should I expect as a volunteer?

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For most part-time on-going volunteering roles within an organisation you should expect the following :-

- An induction where you are told about the organisation and its policies.
- This would generally cover health and safety, what to do if you have a problem and an introduction to other staff and volunteers
- You should be told who your supervisor or leader is and how to contact them. It is important that you have a named person who you can go to with any problems or queries.
- Adequate training to be able to carry out your role. The exact nature of the training you receive will depend on the role, but you will probably need at least basic training for the tasks that you will be doing.
- You should receive ongoing support and supervision, to make sure you are happy in the role and know where to go if any problems should arise.

If you are volunteering for just a few hours to help at an event or something similar, you should still expect to be informed about the task and its purpose, health and safety, the organisation, and leadership / supervision etc. You should also expect to be treated equally, regardless of your gender, race, age, faith/religion, disability or sexual orientation.

Organisations involving volunteers should have an Equal Opportunities Policy and be willing to accommodate volunteers from all walks of life.

### 4. Will volunteering cost me anything ?

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Volunteering England believes that everybody should be able to volunteer and that volunteers should not be left out of pocket whilst giving their time for free.

Many organisations reimburse volunteers' expenses, so if the organisation you're thinking of volunteering with doesn't, it may be worth asking them why.

It may be that they don't have the resources to be able to reimburse expenses, in which case it will be for you to decide whether you still want to go ahead with the placement.

Under rules laid down by HM Revenue and Customs, organisations are allowed to reimburse you for anything 'reasonable' you have had to pay for to volunteer.

This can include travel, meals purchased while volunteering, special clothing and care of your dependants. Many organisations will have an expenses budget, so you will need to check how much they can reimburse and what their policy is.

For instance, many will set a limit on how much they can reimburse for lunch, or may ask you to travel in the cheapest way that you can. It is worth checking with the organisation how they reimburse expenses.

If you receive state benefits, you can be given your expenses in advance, providing that you then submit receipts and return any unspent money.

#### 5. How much time do I need to volunteer for?

This is really up to you.

Although the less time you have the harder it can be to find something that's fulfilling for you. You can volunteer at any time of the week, in person, over the phone or via the internet.

While much volunteering takes place in office hours, you can volunteer in the evening or at weekends too, again depending on what you want to do.

Online volunteering (also known as 'virtual volunteering') is becoming more popular as it offers a greater degree of flexibility, as does telephone befriending. Also, trustee and Management committee positions can be quite flexible in terms of their time commitments.

Some organisations will ask for a minimum time commitment from you, for example if you want to be a volunteer befriender you may be asked to undertake the role for at least 6 months.

This will be to make sure both you and the person you're befriending get the most of the experience.

Also, if you receive training to fulfil the role it is more likely that you will be asked to commit to volunteer for a specific amount of time.

This is because the organisation will want to make sure their beneficiaries benefit from the investment they make in training volunteers.

#### 6. Can I leave if I don't like it ?

Yes, of course.

You are under no formal obligation to keep volunteering for an organisation if you don't want to. However it is always worth talking to someone at the organisation about this first.

You can then discuss with them why you feel unhappy and what you feel would improve your time as a volunteer in the organisation.

If you feel that something is seriously wrong or someone is treating you badly you should consider making a complaint to the organisation.

#### 7. I'm working full-time. Will I still be able to volunteer ?

Yes, there are many opportunities to volunteer in the daytime, evenings, nights and weekends. Many organisations can cater for different time commitments, whether you want to volunteer once a month or once a week.

Some examples include: campaigning, the Samaritans and other helplines, working with homeless people, befriending, environmental and sports activities.

It is important to check with any organisation you are interested in volunteering for what time commitment they have in mind, as you will need to agree to a time that suits you both.

Some employers encourage their employees to volunteer in the local community in work time. Ask your employer if they have an Employer Supported Volunteering scheme and see how you can get involved.

#### 8. Will I get training ?

Some organisations offer substantial training and support, but others don't and expect you to learn 'on the job' or contribute your existing skills.

You will need to ask the organisation that you are intending to volunteer with also depends on the type of tasks that you will be doing.

For instance, if you're spending one day clearing overgrowth from paths, you can expect about 15 minutes training where you are told what to do, how to use the tools and what health and safety precautions to take.

But if you volunteer to give welfare benefits advice you should get much more training. You might get 10 two-hour training sessions or more spread over several weeks before you see a client, plus ongoing training to keep you up-to-date.

#### 9. Do I need qualifications ?

Obviously this depends on the role, but usually you don't.

Some very skilled volunteering tasks may require qualifications, but some organisations may offer you training to enable you to fulfil the role.

#### 10. Can I get a qualification or accreditation ?

Some organisations may offer volunteers qualifications such as an NVQ, but it is uncommon. However you may well learn a lot and gain valuable experience, skills and a reference.

If you do need a formal qualification, it may be best to contact your local Volunteer Centre as they may know of other local organisations that offer qualifications.

Also, you may be able to keep a record or portfolio that would help you get a qualification or entry to a college course..

### 11. Can I volunteer together with my family or friends ?

Yes, you can but you may not have such a large choice as if you were completely flexible. Some organisations specifically offer opportunities to volunteer as a family or group of friends. Examples include practical conservation and fundraising.

If there's a particular organisation you'd like to volunteer with, ask them if this is something they offer.

### 12. Will I need any official approval to volunteer ?

In some instances people from overseas may need to check whether they are entitled to volunteer whilst in the UK with the UK Border Agency.

Some people also worry that they won't be able to volunteer if they have a criminal record. Firstly, under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 only organisations that work with children or vulnerable adults are entitled to ask about any 'spent' convictions that you may have.

This means that only certain volunteering roles (usually those that involve volunteering with children or 'vulnerable adults') require a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

- But having a criminal record isn't necessarily a bar to volunteering.

Organisations that do require potential volunteers to have DBS checks must have a written policy on how they recruit ex-offenders, so do ask for a copy of this and don't be afraid to ask questions if you have any doubts.

### 13. Who is allowed to volunteer ?

Volunteering is a positive thing, both for the volunteer and for the people that they help. However, there are restrictions, some real and some imagined, that stop people from volunteering.

It is important to understand what restrictions really do exist so that potential volunteers receive good advice.

But it is important to remember that with so many different types of volunteering opportunities out there, there really is something to suit everyone.

This information provides covers :-

- People receiving state benefits
- Children and young people
- Older people
- 'Vulnerable' people

- Ex-offenders

(Please note that volunteers from overseas, asylum seekers and refugees are covered in the Volunteering England Information Sheet Accepting Volunteers from Overseas)

#### i. People Receiving State Benefits

People are allowed to volunteer while claiming state benefits, including means-tested benefits such as Job Seekers' Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

The latest Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) leaflet "you can volunteer as many hours as you like while you're getting benefits as long as you keep to the rules for getting them."

'Volunteering while getting benefits' defines volunteering as "when you choose to give your time and energy to benefit other people without being paid for it". It goes on to say that voluntary work can be done with any kind of organisation, including a ...

- charity, voluntary organisation or community group;
- public-sector organisation;
- social enterprise; or local business.
- It isn't volunteering if someone helps out a family member;
- is given money other than their expenses;
- or is under contract to do the work (not including any 'volunteer agreement' they may have).

There are two general rules to bear in mind if you are claiming state benefits. Firstly, benefits claimants are required to notify their benefits advisor of their intention to start volunteering.

Secondly, the organisation cannot give you any money except a reimbursement of expenses you have incurred in order to volunteer (travel, meals whilst out volunteering, care costs etc).

The organisation should collect receipts from you and reimburse exactly what you have spent. This means that, if needed, you could show your benefits adviser that any money you were getting was a reimbursement and not a payment.

#### If you have problems :-

If your benefits adviser tells you that you cannot volunteer, you can ask the organisation that you are volunteering for, or your local Volunteer Centre, to speak to them on your behalf.

If this doesn't resolve the issue, then contact the Regional External Relations Manager for Job Centre Plus in your area.

Their contact details can be found on the DWP website.

#### ii. Children and young people

If you are under 18, then there is no legal reason why you cannot volunteer, but you will find that some organisations may not be willing to take you on. Children are classed as a 'vulnerable group', so any organisation who takes on young volunteers must be careful to protect them.

Legally a child is defined as someone who is under 18 years old, or under 16 if employed. This may mean that organisations with volunteer roles where you would not be supervised all the time or may have to do something risky would not be happy taking you on.

But there are plenty of roles that are safe and suitable and many people under 18 do volunteer. The organisation will need to carry out a risk assessment to decide whether placing a young person in a volunteer role would put them, or the people they're working with, at risk.

However, by following some basic principles most organisations can involve young people in their work:

- Young people should not be left unattended
- Young volunteers should be supervised by two or more adults
- Any potentially dangerous activity should have constant adult supervision

Organisations should also be aware that insurance cover (public or employer Liability) does not automatically cover people under 16, so it is important to check that there is no lower age limit in your policy.

It is normally easy to extend the policy to cover young people, but occasionally the insurance company may decide that because of the type of work involved, the risk of involving young people would be too high.

It is a very good idea to obtain parental / guardian consent for volunteer's under 16. When giving a consent form to a volunteer, also consider providing a volunteer role description and publicity leaflets about your organisation.

This will help the volunteer's parent/guardian understand what your organisation does, what the young person will be doing, and when and where they will be working.

### iii. Older people

Whilst there are no upper age limits on volunteering, some organisations find that their insurance companies will not extend their policies to cover people over a certain age (usually 80), so it's worth checking whether the organisation's insurance will cover you should something go wrong.

Also, bear in mind that some volunteering roles may be physically demanding or set in a volatile environment (such as a Young Offender Institution). For this reason organisations may require a specific level of physical fitness to be able to deal with such situations.

### iv. 'Vulnerable' people

Adult volunteers may be classed as 'vulnerable' if they have a substantial physical or learning disability, are very elderly, have mental health problems or are recovering from addictions.

People who fall into these groups can be very good volunteers, bringing both a fresh perspective and a wealth of experience. However, just as when working with young people, care should be taken to make sure vulnerable people are not at risk and are adequately supported to carry out their role.

If you have support needs don't be afraid to discuss them with an organisation you'd like to volunteer with, as they may be able to provide the support you need in order to perform the role, or they may be able to adapt the role if required.

Some organisations offer 'supported volunteering' opportunities whereby volunteers receive additional support to carry out the role.

Some Volunteer Centres also operate similar schemes, so may be able to provide additional support and guidance if you require it

#### v. Ex-offenders

Many people with past convictions worry that they will not be able to volunteer. This is not true at all.

Under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act only organisations that work with children and/or vulnerable adults are allowed to ask about spent convictions.

Organisations are only entitled to apply for a DBS check if a person will be volunteering in a 'regulated activity' as detailed by the DBS.

For more information see [www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk/faqs/definitions.aspx](http://www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk/faqs/definitions.aspx)

There are numerous volunteering roles where you would not come into contact with children and / or vulnerable adults and so organisations would have no right to question you about spent convictions.

Some organisations may ask about any unspent convictions, but this should only be in relation to the volunteering role that the person is applying for.

Very few people are banned from working or volunteering with children and vulnerable adults. Individuals who are banned will usually know that they are banned and it is now a criminal offence for barred individuals to apply to work or volunteer with children or vulnerable adults in a wide range of posts.

As part of following the DB's Code of Practice, it is important to offer a fair recruitment process to all individuals with a criminal record.

NACRO and Volunteering England have developed a guide to 'Involving Ex-offenders in volunteering', which may help organisations with their recruitment decisions.

Anything you tell an organisation about past convictions should remain confidential. It is an offence for them to pass on information about a person's past convictions unless they have been given permission.

If you are worried, ask them about who in the organisation will be told about your past convictions and ask to see their Data Protection policy so that you know how information will be stored and how long it will be kept for.

Insurance for ex-offenders Where individuals have broken the law this needs to be disclosed to insurance underwriters as a Material Fact to the risk being proposed.

This will need to be supported with details of how this risk will be managed i.e. identifying suitable roles, providing suitable training and supervision, again, all of which will need to be recorded.

For organisations that exist to serve offenders (such as prisons), offenders should be included under 'Third Party' in the Public Liability Section of the insurance document.

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#### 14. Finding volunteering opportunities

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Within any community, there will be a wide range of volunteering taking place, from conservation and animal welfare to education and advocacy.

There are a number of ways to find out about local volunteering opportunities, and this Information Sheet aims to signpost potential volunteers to further sources of information, to help them find out more about the volunteering opportunities that are available to them. This information covers :-

- Finding volunteering opportunities in your local area
- Where to look
- Looking online
- Issues to consider

##### i. Finding volunteering opportunities in your local area

There are a whole range of volunteering opportunities out there, from gardening and campaigning to teaching someone to read.

Unless you already know what you want to do, it is worth finding out what kinds of volunteering opportunities are available near where you live or work.

If you already know where you'd like to volunteer, then you can contact the relevant organisation directly. For example, if you want to help people improve their literacy you

could contact local schools, colleges or adult education centres. Some organisations are looking for people with specific skills.

Other organisations, including Volunteer Centres, will find volunteering opportunities for everyone, including people with extra support needs.

You could also ask friends or work colleagues if they know of any organisations that are looking for volunteers.

Alternatively consider the organisations that you have regular contact with, for example your child's school, a sports club, or a local charity shop.

## ii. Issues to consider

- Before making contact with an organisation, think about what you want to know from them, and what they are likely to ask you.
- How much time can you give? At what time of day?
- What do you want to get from volunteering? For instance, do you want to meet new people or gain new skills?
- What skills or experience can you offer?
- Will you get out-of-pocket expenses reimbursed?
- Does the organisation insure its volunteers?
- Are you receiving any form of state benefit? You can volunteer whilst getting benefits, but you will need to discuss your volunteering with you jobcentre plus advisor.

## iii. Where to look

Do-it.org.uk (YouthNet UK)

Do-it is an internet database of volunteering opportunities, and covers the whole UK. The database can be searched by postcode, type of volunteering activity and type of organisation.

[www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk)

## iv. Volunteer Centres

These are local organisations that provide support and expertise within the local community, to potential volunteers, existing volunteers and organisations that involve volunteers.

They can tell you about local volunteering opportunities and put you in touch with local organisations. You can also discuss with them what you want to do and get further advice. Details of your nearest Volunteer Centre can be found at:

[www.volunteering.org.uk/finder](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/finder)

You can also look up your nearest Volunteer Centre in the telephone directory (often under 'V'). As well as the Volunteer Centre, some or all of the following should be able to help.

#### v. Councils for Voluntary Service

These local organisations sometimes host Volunteer Centres, or act as a volunteer bureau if there is no local Volunteer Centre in the area. They are sometimes known by a different name, such as Voluntary Action or Community Action, so look in the telephone book or Yellow Pages under 'Council', 'Volunteers' or 'Voluntary'.

In rural areas Rural Community Councils may include this role. This link will enable you to find your local Council for Voluntary Service or Rural Community Council:

<http://webdb.navca.org.uk/home.aspx>

#### vi. Public libraries

Many public libraries will have a noticeboard or a file of information on local volunteering opportunities.

There are several published directories of voluntary work, and most libraries will have at least one of these in the reference or careers section. The Voluntary Agencies Directory is particularly useful if you know exactly what you want to do as it has an excellent index of types of organisation.

Local hospitals Many hospitals have a Voluntary Services Manager who will be able to advise you on current volunteering opportunities. Call your local NHS Trust for more information.

#### vii. Your employer

Some employers encourage and support their staff to volunteer. Your employer may be able to provide information about opportunities and support such as money, equipment, or time off to volunteer.

Contact the community affairs manager or Human Resources (HR) manager to find out if your company has an employee volunteering programme.

#### viii. The Press

The Guardian newspaper features an interesting selection of about 100 volunteering opportunities. These appear most Wednesdays in the Society Guardian supplement.

ix. Looking online

Skills-based volunteering : Reach is a charity which recruits people of all ages and backgrounds throughout the UK with specific business, professional, managerial or technical career experience and finds them part time, expenses only opportunities, with voluntary organisations which need their expertise. For further information contact REACH on 020 7582 6543 or visit <http://www.reachskills.org.uk/>

x. Older people's volunteering: RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme)

This programme is run by CSV, and offers the opportunity for everyone over the age of 50 to volunteer. <http://www.csv-rsvp.org.uk/site/home.htm>

xi. Young people: V

V can advise you on finding volunteering opportunities if you are aged 16-25. To find opportunities near you, visit <http://www.vinspired.com/>

xii. GuideStar UK

The GuideStar website contains information on approximately 168,000 registered charities in England and Wales, so can be used to find local groups in your area. Once you've identified the voluntary groups that you'd like to volunteer with, you can contact them directly to find out what sort of volunteering opportunities they have available. <http://www.guidestar.org.uk/>

xiii. DirectGov

The DirectGov website offers a wealth of information on volunteering and related issues in the 'Home and Community' section.

[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

15. TSX Volunteering Programme :

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*"Community Pathways"* is a new idea building upon activities we have delivered to date [which we know work]

We have designed a programme of developmental opportunities for our members which will provide greater support as they progress along an individual 'pathway' back to re-connecting with the community having become isolated and disconnected.

As with all our programmes, volunteers will be an integral part of the project promoting our user-led ethos by engaging people [as volunteers] to assist their peers and also progress via opportunities provided.

Activities to be delivered have been requested by current members and combine to provide a 'pathway' which will take them from being socially disconnected back to gaining community involvement.

The support activities will enable them to re-integrate and improve their mental / physical health whilst building new skills / confidence which may also lead to employment in the future as a longer term objective.

"Community Pathways" will benefit people who have experienced addictions / excessive use of alcohol / substances

The rationale behind the project is that whilst physical problems are well known [e.g. liver, kidney and heart problems] research shows 1 in 5 people will experience mental ill-health due to substance abuse leading to exclusions from regular community life.

The project will target all areas within Basildon and breaks down into 3 spheres :-

- (1) Volunteer recruitment, training and engagement – we will develop a dedicated volunteer team trained, resourced [e.g. expenses] and supported to deliver the programme on a local level working in neighbourhoods, estates and areas we know prospective members need our support.

Full training and support will be provided to each volunteer and teams responsible for each of the 4 groups which will be established.

- (2) Establishment / Development of 2 geographically targeted Support Groups each year [total of 4] using arts as a medium.  
The groups will bring people together via a common interest learning arts skills, effect better social connections and reduce the isolation of people who have become disconnected enabling them to rejoin community life – group work will be the foundation for developing further activities.

- (3) Personal Development Training – workshops delivered in small groups to learn skills which will support social re-integration e.g. using IT to create community connections, confidence building, communications skills, life planning and other topics as needs are identified

Volunteer tasks / roles include :-

- 3 volunteers will support each Support Group established
- peer-to-peer support activities arranged on an ongoing basis between individuals and volunteers [ad hoc, therefore no time / frequency targets allocated but we will monitor activities delivered and feed back details].
- leading and running activities which are requested by group members e.g. training, health / fitness sessions and anything g which promote better health and development of group members
- informal counseling / coaching and sharing experiences in order to assist the individual being supported

- accompaniment to other services and sessions e.g. taking a member to the doctor's for an appointment
- telephone befriending
- measuring project activities / engaging with service users to conduct peer evaluation
- promotions for the project in the community
- outreach and making contact with individuals
- 1-1 support, encouragement / development of social connections
- Meeting as a Consultative Group [monthly] to review activities and input into project planning – this is one of the TSX objectives i.e. to ensure users are afforded opportunities to participate in review / planning exercises.

#### 16. TSX [Basic] Training Programme :

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In order to participate as a volunteer in “Community Pathways”, full training and support will be provided to each volunteer and teams responsible for each of the 4 groups which will be established.

This breaks down into 3 spheres :-

- Induction - each volunteer will undertake the following sessions prior to being engaged on the project which will be delivered by the Project Co-ordinator within the first month via 2 - 4 training workshops :-
  - Introduction to volunteering
  - TSX Volunteer Policies and good practice
  - Representing TSX
  - Personal / professional boundaries of volunteers i.e. what advice can we provide and what advice should we not provide i.e. refer ?
  - Lone working
  - Basic communications skills - how to treat our service users
  - Administration - reporting back on activities to the Project Co-ordinator
  - Which opportunities are there in TSX ?
- Skills - each volunteer will be able to specialise in specific tasks as part of their volunteer service which will require specific training including the following sessions which will be delivered by the Project Co-ordinator and also sessional trainers within 2 - 4 months :-
  - Briefing Workshop - “Developing the volunteer role” - which opportunities are best suited to the individual
  - Planning and measurement of activities
  - Providing advice to clients
  - Budgeting and managing money - providing coaching to service users
  - Networking to promote TSX -how best to rep[resent TSX in the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector domain

**NB** these sessions will be developed as the programme progresses

iii. Continuous Personal Development (CPD) will be available as training needs are identified which will be developed as the programme progresses and might include IT, fund raising, project co-ordination and trustee training etc.

**NB** these sessions will be free of charge to our volunteers

## **Ways of volunteering outside the UK**

Volunteering opportunities available in the rest of the world are as diverse as those available in the UK. It's therefore a good idea to consider very carefully the sort of activity you want to do, your reasons for doing it and the resources available to you before you start looking for an opportunity.

Opportunities arranged from the UK come in a variety of forms, with the most common being

- professional volunteering for at least a year, which typically covers the cost of flights, accommodation and subsistence;
- non-professional volunteering for anything from a few weeks to a year, for which volunteers will usually have to fundraise or contribute financially; and
- time limited fundraising challenges.

It is best to apply well in advance. Not all projects are well organised, so it's a good idea to find out as much as you can beforehand. If possible, speak with volunteers who have returned from the project to find out how they found it.

It is also possible to travel to a country and then find voluntary work. However, you should check first if your visa allows volunteering and bear in mind that it can take many weeks to be selected onto a volunteer programme.

## **Practical advice**

Volunteering overseas can be an extremely rewarding experience, but is not something that should be entered into lightly. There are some things you need to think about before parting with any money.

- Length of time you want to volunteer for.
- Fees - most organisations will ask you to pay an administration fee for arranging the trip for you. Find out what this covers.
- Will you need to organise your own travel, accommodation, food, visas and financing?
- If you want to use particular skills whilst volunteering.
- Do you have any language skills – how will you communicate?
- Insurance – do you need your own insurance?
- Health – will you need vaccinations, how accessible will healthcare be whilst you're away?

You may also want to weigh up the balance between the adventure for yourself and the contribution you make in another society.

Volunteering abroad may affect your entitlement to certain state benefits on your return to the UK. You can avoid this by making National Insurance contributions whilst you are away, to find out more visit the HMRC website

## Checking out organisations

It is important that you check out any organisation thoroughly before handing over any money or leaving the country. Ask if you can be put in touch with people who have been on the organisation's projects before. If possible, try to speak in person with someone who has volunteered with them rather than simply trusting testimonials. Many organisations have ambassador or alumni schemes which visit trade fairs, schools or student unions to talk about their experiences.

Consider insurance issues such as whether you will need your own travel insurance, whether the organisation's insurance will cover you for the kind of work that you will be doing, and what would happen if you needed to get back to the UK before completing the placement.

What kind of work that will you be doing? Ask yourself if there is a genuine need for volunteers to perform the tasks they're being asked to, or has the

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opportunity been created as an adventure holiday, with little benefit to the local community.

Spend some time researching the country that you want to go to, and don't forget to check out the political situation, details of any visas or vaccinations you'll require, climate etc, as these will help you plan for your trip and ensure that you're properly equipped when you get there.

Websites you may find helpful include:

- Ethical Volunteering Guide <http://www.ethicalvolunteering.org/>
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/traveland-living-abroad/>

## Raising the money

Unless you have savings or will be doing paid work overseas, you are likely to have to raise some or all of your own expenses before you go. You don't necessarily have to be put off an overseas placement simply by the cost; if it is what you really want to do, there are ways of raising the money.

If approaching grant-making organisations, or businesses to sponsor you, do some research before getting in touch. Local contacts may work better; for instance, you could contact the local branch of the Lions, Rotary Club or Round Table to find out if they can help. If there is a local newspaper where you live, they might be willing to write a short article about your trip. Often a local approach such as this can be far more fruitful than approaching larger organisations.

There are numerous ideas for fundraising. For instance, you could organise a club night, a dinner, a sponsored walk or swim.

Websites like [www.justgiving.com](http://www.justgiving.com) can help you gain sponsorship and give you some ideas. The organisation you want to volunteer with may also help you raise the funds you need.

## Finding volunteering opportunities overseas

Please note that Volunteering England does not have any formal links with any of the organisations listed in this Information Sheet and cannot take responsibility for the accuracy of this information or the actions of any of the listed organisations. Please check them out before handing over any money or leaving the country.

### **If Things Go Wrong Summary**

For most people their volunteering experience is a positive one, and may result in them becoming lifelong volunteers. Sometimes, though, things do go wrong, and it's important to work out a course of action if this happens.

There are many reasons why a volunteering opportunity might not work out, and this Information Sheet attempts to suggest some possible courses of action that may be open to you.

Please note that Volunteering England is unable to investigate individual cases, so this Information Sheet is intended to signpost you to some organisations that may be able to offer you further assistance should you need it.

This Information Sheet covers:

- Good practice
- If things go wrong - mediation

Do I have any rights?

- Who can I complain to?
  - o Governance issues
  - o Health and Safety
  - o Data Protection
  - o Discrimination and harassment
  - o Trade Unions
  - o The role of Volunteer Centres

Sometimes things may not always work out during the course of a person's volunteering. This could be due to a complaint, issue, concern or problem raised either by or about a volunteer. Depending on the nature of the problem or concern, there are various ways it can be dealt with.

### **Good Practice**

In terms of general advice, Volunteering England recommends that complaints or problems should initially be discussed between a volunteer and their supervisor or line manager through an ad hoc discussion or in a supervision meeting. In some cases, it may be that more training, support or supervision is needed, especially if the issue is related to

a volunteer's performance, attitude or behaviour. The person who is responsible for the volunteer may set a time period in which they can monitor the volunteer to find out if the problem or concern has resolved itself

For problems which cannot be solved informally, we recommend that organisations follow a 'problem solving procedure'. This should enable complaints, problems, issues or concerns (either raised by or about a volunteer) to be dealt with in a fair, consistent and equitable way.

Such a procedure would typically involve several stages, so that a volunteer has the opportunity to appeal to higher levels of management and – where appropriate - the organisation's governing body if they feel unhappy with the handling of the complaints process by their own supervisor (or their supervisor's manager). If the issue cannot be resolved in-house, then it may be necessary to involve another member of the organisation, such as a regional or head office representative with responsibility for volunteering (if the organisation has such a structure in place).

### **If things go wrong - mediation**

Mediation can be a good solution for workplace disputes, and it is increasingly recommended for employment matters as well as for cases involving volunteers. Mediation by an impartial third party can be helpful in many situations, as it is a confidential process which is generally completed through discussions between the parties over the course of one day. It can also be a good method of resolving problems if the volunteer wishes to return to their regular volunteering role once the problem has been dealt with. Further information can be sought from ACAS: <http://www.acas.org.uk/>

### **Do I have any rights?**

Whereas paid employees have 'grievance and disciplinary procedures' built into the terms and conditions of their employment contract, volunteers don't have a legal status in the same way that paid workers do in the UK. Volunteers are not covered by employment law and therefore do not have formal rights to redress in an Employment Tribunal. This is because employment law is usually based on having a 'contract' of employment or for providing work or services, and volunteers do not have such contracts with the organisations that they help.

This means that volunteers don't have the right to have an organisation follow proper investigative procedures when things go wrong, and they don't have the right to appeal a decision made by the organisation.

To sum up, in most situations there isn't very much a volunteer can do if they want to find an external body which can pass judgment on their situation. However, in a small number of cases, volunteers have been able to establish some form of employment rights.

Summaries of these tribunal cases can be found in chapter 1 of the Volunteering England publication *Volunteers and the Law*, which can be downloaded for free at:

### **Who can I complain to?**

If you have an issue, concern or problem that relates to the governance of the organisation, health and safety, data protection or harassment, then there are some external agencies that may be able to help.

It should also be noted that whilst volunteers are not covered by employment legislation, they are covered by some types of legislation, such as health and safety law and data protection, as members of the public.

## **Governance issues –**

**The Charity Commission** In terms of potential forms of external redress, the Charity Commission exists as the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. Its website explains that its primary focus as regulator “is to work closely with charities to ensure that they are accountable, well run and meet their legal obligations in order to promote public trust and confidence”. Therefore, the Charity Commission is not able to act on complaints related to disagreements between individuals, but it will investigate if a volunteer’s concerns relate to the organisation’s wider work or the fulfilment of its charitable aims. <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/>

## **Health and Safety**

If you have concerns regarding health and safety issues that you feel are not being addressed by the organisation, you can contact the Health and Safety Executive on: 0845 345 0055. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/>  
Alternatively, you can contact your local council.

## **Data Protection**

The Data Protection Act sets rules about the way organisations collect and use information about you (your personal information). If you have a complaint about the way an organisation has handled your personal information, you can contact the Information Commissioner’s Office, who may be able to help. <http://www.ico.gov.uk/complaints.aspx>

## **Discrimination and harassment**

Anti-discrimination legislation applies to employment and the provision of goods and services, so doesn’t cover volunteers because they are not employed under the relevant legal definitions. Volunteering England advises organisations to reflect the spirit of such legislation in their volunteer involvement as a matter of good practice, to help ensure that volunteers are treated fairly and equally

## **Careers in the Voluntary Sector**

### *Summary*

*In the last 10 years the number of people working in the voluntary sector has increased by over a quarter, making it a viable option for both those embarking on their first job and those looking for a career change. The reason for this increase is largely due to government agencies and local authorities contracting out more work to organisations that are better placed to deliver public services. This means that there is a vast array of opportunities for people considering working in the voluntary sector.*

*This Information Sheet covers:*

- *The Voluntary Sector*
- *Where to look for voluntary sector jobs*
- *Volunteering as a step to paid employment*

*The Voluntary Sector*

*The terms 'charity', 'third sector', 'not-for-profit' and 'voluntary and community' are all ways of referring to similar organisations, though experts will draw out particular differences. Organisations range from huge international concerns handling multi-million-pound budgets to tiny local community groups with few - or no - paid staff. The sector addresses a vast range of issues, and this, in addition to the Government's increasing interest in the sector, means that new employment opportunities are broader and even more varied than before.*

### **Pros and Cons**

*The downsides of working in the voluntary sector are that pay rates are not always as high as in the private sector, and that the sector is still largely characterised by short-term contracts and project-based funding, making it a less favourable option for people who place a high value on job security. However, voluntary organisations often make up for this with innovative, flexible working practices and opportunities for personal development, and many people report that not only is their work enjoyable and rewarding, but that they also have a good work-life balance. Undertaking work that is socially meaningful and enables someone to make a difference can be the deciding factor for those considering a career in the voluntary sector.*

*First steps Having decided that you like what the voluntary sector has to offer, it's time to work out what you can offer in return. Although the sector is often perceived as cuddly and 'soft', in reality the skills and qualities required in voluntary organisations are no different from those sought elsewhere. One third of voluntary sector employees now hold a degree or equivalent qualification, although there are still skills shortages in IT, fundraising and legal knowledge. Across the sector there is a wide variety of job opportunities, ranging from administrators, journalists, designers, caterers, receptionists, bricklaying instructors and recruitment specialists.*

*To find out what kind of skills organisations are looking for, you can study job advertisements in the newspapers, and if you have access to the internet you can look at online application packs. By looking at those criteria deemed 'essential' or 'desirable', you can gain a good idea of the skills, qualifications and personal qualities that are in demand. By comparing these with your existing skill base and experience you can identify your own training needs and go about filling any gaps.*

*If you're interested in finding out more about managing volunteers, the Prospects website contains a job profile for a Volunteer Co-ordinator:*

*[http://www.prospects.ac.uk/p/types\\_of\\_job/volunteer\\_work\\_organiser\\_job\\_description.jsp](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/p/types_of_job/volunteer_work_organiser_job_description.jsp)*

### **Applying**

*The key to finding a fulfilling role within a voluntary, or any other, organisation is knowing both what you want from a job and what you have to offer. Bear in mind, also, that it doesn't hurt to apply for a job for which you don't appear to be 100% qualified if it's something you really want to do. You may still turn out to be the right person for the post – employers often advertise for an 'ideal' candidate when they would actually be happy to employ someone who has most of what they are looking for and who is prepared to train for or develop the remainder. Applicants should also consider how they can demonstrate commitment to the organisation's cause, so think about any previous experience you might have, or any volunteering that you have done that may be relevant to the role you're applying for.*

*You may find that the paperwork involved in applying for a job in the voluntary sector seems rather excessive, but don't be tempted to send your CV instead or to miss out any sections of the application form. Organisations typically adhere strictly to equal*

*opportunities procedures, and in practice this means that no one is given the benefit of the doubt in this respect. All applications are judged on the basis of the same criteria, so if you have failed to follow instructions (for example to match your personal statement with the person specification), the selection panel will not try to work out what you have to offer from the information that you have provided. You need to be very clear and tell them everything you think they want to know. This can be a tedious and time-consuming process, but it saves time in the long run since it means that your applications are much more likely to reach the shortlist for interview, so you should have fewer of them to do.*

*Where to look for voluntary sector jobs*

- *The Guardian newspaper: Wednesday (Society Guardian), Saturday (General)*
- *Local newspapers*
- *Recruitment agencies that specialise in the third sector*
- *Charity Press: publications such as Third Sector have job advertisements, and you may be able to access them through your local library. If you are already involved with a voluntary organisation they may well be on the mailing list for some of these publications. (Third Force News is the best one for jobs in Scotland.)*
- *The Big Issue usually has quite a good selection of jobs in voluntary organisations*
- *If you are looking for work in a specific profession such as marketing or publicity, you could check the trade press and professional associations' magazines.*
- *Many voluntary organisations advertise vacancies on their own website, so if there's an organisation that you're particularly interested in working for, it's worth book-marking the page and looking at it frequently to make sure you don't miss any vacancies.*

*Some websites advertise a range of voluntary sector vacancies:*

- *Guardian Jobs: <http://society.guardian.co.uk/jobs/>*
- *Jobs in Charities: <http://www.jobsincharities.co.uk/>*
- *Voluntary Sector Jobs: <http://www.voluntarysectorjobs.co.uk>*
- *Charity Job: <http://www.charityjob.co.uk>*
- *Charity Sector Jobs: <http://www.charitysectorjobs.com>*
- *Not for profit Jobs: [http://nfpjobs.netextra.net/current\\_edition/index.jsp](http://nfpjobs.netextra.net/current_edition/index.jsp)*
- *People Unlimited: <http://www.peopleunlimited.co.uk/>*
- *Good Moves: <http://www.goodmoves.org.uk/home/home.asp>*
- *Working for a Charity: <http://www.wfac.org.uk/>*
- *NCVO Jobshop: <http://www.ncvo-jobshop.org.uk/>*
- *Spangle Jelly: <http://www.spanglejelly.org.uk/>*
- *W4MP: <http://www.w4mp.org>*

*NB: Due to the tendency within the voluntary sector to adhere to strict equal opportunities procedures, it is very unlikely that speculative applications and CVs will be welcome. You are much more likely to be advised to wait for vacancies to be advertised.*

*It should also be noted that some organisations offer fast-track graduate programmes, which can provide a route into the sector. One such programme is offered by Cancer Research UK. • Cancer Research UK: <http://graduates.cancerresearchuk.org/default.aspx>*

## **Volunteering as a step to paid employment**

*Among the many reasons that people volunteer, its ability to act as a bridge to paid employment is one that many people find attractive. Some professions such as social work will not consider candidates who have not demonstrated their commitment to the field by undertaking some form of relevant volunteering. For others, volunteering can provide the training and experience without which they would be ill equipped to compete in the open employment market.*

*While it can happen that a paid post becomes available in the organisation with which you are volunteering, it would be unwise to join on the basis that you hope this will be the case. It would be more realistic to look upon your time as a volunteer as an opportunity to strengthen your existing skills and develop new ones, and to find out whether or not a particular kind of work is suited to you. Volunteering can also help you to prepare for paid employment by:*

- *Providing good-quality training, some of which carries nationally recognised qualifications*
- *Enabling you to maintain existing skills, acquire new ones and identify which ones are transferable between sectors*
- *Building your confidence about being able to operate in a work context*
- *Helping you to remain active and involved in something while seeking work (which can be isolating)*
- *Allowing you to gain insight into how voluntary and community organisations operate*
- *Providing you with a source of up-to-date, relevant references to offer prospective employers.*

## **Internships and unpaid roles**

*In some professions, such as in some media and political work, people may be expected to work without pay to gain experience, and this may be referred to as an 'internship' or working as an 'intern'. These opportunities have increased across other fields of employment for new graduates during the economic downturn. You should establish what is expected of you, what your working conditions will be and whether you will have a legally-binding contract. Sometimes such roles can be classed as volunteering opportunities, for instance when they're unpaid and without a contractual obligation.*

*Sometimes, however, they involve a contract and may pay minimal wages. Before taking on an 'internship' role, you should be clear about the period of time involved, what employment opportunities are realistic, and whether you will have employment rights as an 'intern'.*

Harassment differs from discrimination, and although the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 doesn't specifically refer to volunteers, it appears that anyone found guilty of harassment could face imprisonment and/ or a fine, as well as civil action by the person subjected to the harassment. To summarise, if a volunteer were found guilty of harassment then they could face legal proceedings as well as civil action (although their status would be that of an individual, rather than a 'volunteer'). Similarly, if a volunteer were subject to harassment, then they (as an individual) would be covered by this legislation.

### **□ Protection from Harassment Act 1997:**

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1997/1997040.htm>

The case of *Majrowski v Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust* (2006) UKHL 34 suggests that it may not just be the abusive or threatening staff member who may be liable - their organisation may have vicarious liability as well.

### **Majrowski v Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust (2006) UKHL 34**

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200506/ldjudgmt/jd060712/majro-1.htm#1>

To summarise, volunteers may have some form of redress against the worst forms of bullying or similar behaviour, but does this does not give them protections against discrimination as such.

### **Trade unions**

Some volunteers join trade unions and have sought union representation in cases of disagreement with the organisation they volunteer for. However, this can be difficult where volunteers are not a member of a trade union before the dispute occurs, because trade unions may not be able to offer representation for a case which precedes someone's membership. Even in cases where trade unions do represent volunteers, it can be a complex process because there is very little legislation to refer to. Trade unions that accept volunteers as members include:

- Unite:** <http://www.unitetheunion.com/>
- Unison:** <http://www.unison.org.uk/>
- Community and Youth Workers Union:** <http://www.cywu.org.uk/>

### **The role of Volunteer Centres**

Volunteer Centres are organisations that provide support at a local level for individual volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations (such as charities and voluntary and community organisations). Part of their work involves promoting good practice in working with volunteers to all volunteer-involving organisations. This means that if things go wrong, sometimes a local Volunteer Centre may be able to intervene and help to suggest possible solutions to the issue or problem. Ultimately, if you do have a negative volunteering experience, try to remember that this is the exception rather than the rule, and that many people view their volunteering in a positive light. If the organisation you volunteer with is unable to provide a suitable solution, remember that you are under no obligation to stay and that there are numerous organisations, ranging from charities, voluntary organisations, community groups and statutory agencies, such as hospitals, schools or museums, which are actively seeking volunteers and would welcome an addition to their volunteering team.

When looking for another volunteering opportunity, don't be shy about asking if the organisation has a good set of volunteer policies in place, because this will indicate how committed they are to managing their volunteers as well as how prepared they are for with any difficulties that may arise in future.

Your local Volunteer Centre should be able to help you find a new volunteering opportunity.

Details of your nearest Volunteer Centre can be found at:

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/finder>

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