

INFORMAL VOLUNTEERING GUIDANCE



The recent and rapid emergence of hundreds of localised COVID-19 Mutual Aid groups across the country has been awe-inspiring. Agile place-based communities have been able to self organise online before many established charities have been able to develop their own response to the pandemic.

Thousands of people have signed up to volunteer to help reduce loneliness and ease food poverty amongst some of the most vulnerable members of our population. People who may never have volunteered before are offering to walk dogs, collect prescriptions, do the shopping and offer a friendly face in times of uncertainty.

But with this has come questions over duty of care, safeguarding and lines of accountability. There are already some horror stories circulating online that threaten to undermine community spirit and jeopardise public trust in volunteering. But is this a case of the nanny state interfering with genuine 'bottom up' social action or should we be worried about movements popping up without any policies and procedures?

Here we suggest steps that informal volunteering movements may wish to consider to help meet their duty of care and offer a safe volunteering experience without losing the beauty of being agile and free of unnecessary red tape.

CLEAR ROLES

When asking others to help - be clear about what's needed. This will help people decide whether or not they can contribute.

Think about creating specific roles with different requirements:

- what skills and experience is required?
- what time commitment are you looking for?
- does the volunteer need access to their own transport?
- does the role require a criminal record (DBS) check?

BOUNDARIES

Develop a basic 'code of conduct' setting out how you expect volunteers to behave. Problems can sometimes arise when these expectations are not made clear from the start.

Be clear about any activities that are 'off limits' due to:

- significant risks that can not be controlled
- a legal requirement for criminal record (DBS) checks
- the need for professional intervention

DATA PROTECTION

If you are storing people's details be aware of data protection regulations. Do not store or share people's private details without their consent and have a plan in place to delete people's details when they are no longer needed.

SUPPORT

Think about what support you can realistically offer your volunteers and identify a key point of contact to offer help and guidance. Ask volunteers to provide emergency contact details and encourage them too 'buddy up' so they can look out for one another.

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SAFEGUARDING

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are not required for informal personal arrangements - including neighbourly tasks that have been organised between neighbours. However when this relationship has been brokered by a third party DBS regulations may apply.

Individuals can apply for their own Basic DBS but Standard or Enhanced level checks must be applied for by an organisation. Basic DBS checks are ok for most befriending roles, but Enhanced checks may be required for volunteers involved in shopping, taking people to medical appointments, collecting prescriptions, etc. Some volunteers may have existing DBS checks if they are involved in other organisations.

It is important to make clear if the role will involve contact with children and/or vulnerable adults as some people are barred from engaging in this kind of activity.

Provide your volunteers with something to clearly identify themselves with such as an ID badge or an official letter with your contact number on.

Make sure you have a process in place to deal with any safeguarding concerns and share this with all of your volunteers to ensure a consistent approach. Speak to your local Council to access Safeguarding support, training and advice.

THANKS

Volunteers offer so much essential support to our communities. Make sure they know just how great they are!

If you want to link up with your local Volunteer Centre then you can search for them on NVCO's website:
<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/find-a-volunteer-centre>

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