

# NORTH OF TYNE VOLUNTEERING AREA OF EXCELLENCE

## INFORMAL VOLUNTEERING GUIDANCE

The emergence of hundreds of localised COVID-19 Mutual Aid groups across the country was awe-inspiring and demonstrated just how agile place-based communities could be in self-organising to provide a local response before many established charities were able to develop their own solutions.

Mutual Aid groups continue to thrive post-COVID, allowing resources and services to be exchanged between members of the community to overcome social and economic challenges. Thousands of people volunteer on an informal basis providing resources like food, clothing, medicine and services such as breakfast programmes to help reduce loneliness and ease food poverty amongst more vulnerable members of the community.

Mutual Aid groups are distinct from charities in that they encourage collective decision making between participating people rather than decisions being taken by a committee or management team. All participating members are empowered to enact change and take responsibility for the group.

But with responsibility there are questions to be addressed over duty of care, safeguarding and lines of accountability. 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 is needed. This will help people decide whether or not they can contribute.
- Think about creating specific roles with different requirements:
  - ⇒ what skills and experience are 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 cannot be controlled
  - ⇒ legal requirement for criminal record (DBS) checks
  - ⇒ the need for professional intervention

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### 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 to 'buddy up' so they can look out for one another.

### 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 fine 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.
- You and your volunteers can access online Safeguarding training at <https://elementstraining.teachable.com/>

### 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>

