

Safe involvement of volunteers with children and vulnerable adults

Most volunteers enhance the lives of the groups they work with. Some may not be suited to work with vulnerable adults and children and a tiny minority may pose a threat. This information sheet summarises ways in which an organisation can help to minimise the risks and points the way towards more detailed advice and information.

Key points:

- Ensure you have appropriate policies in place for Protection of Vulnerable Adults and/or Safeguarding Children and Young People.
- Review the policies annually to ensure compliance with current legislation and good practice and to ensure relevant contact details are up to date.
- Ensure all volunteers are familiar with the policies and understand the impact on their roles.
- Determine which roles you are legally required and/or entitled to request a [Criminal Records Bureau](#) (CRB) check for.
- Ensure compliance with the [Independent Safeguarding Authority](#) requirements (from Summer 2010).
- Adopt consistent and effective recruitment and selection procedures for all volunteers.
- Adopt work practices and codes of behaviour that minimise risks and protect both users of your group or organisation and workers.
- Provide regular training.
- Ensure appropriate recruitment and selection procedures are in place.

Declaring previous convictions: all applicants should be asked to declare any previous convictions or cautions and to confirm that there is no reason why they should not work with your client group. Where volunteers will be working with children, young people or vulnerable adults you can include a sentence along the lines of "Because of the type of work, involving contact with vulnerable people, you are required by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 to declare all convictions including spent convictions". You should also include a statement such as "Having a conviction will not necessarily prevent you from becoming a volunteer".

You should have a procedure in place that covers what you do in the case of someone disclosing a conviction, what offences you consider would prevent someone from being suitable to volunteer with you and who makes the decision on whether or not to involve them.

References: It is recommended practice to take up written references, preferably from at least two people who are not relatives. Ideally they should be followed up verbally. Where possible one referee should have first-hand experience of the applicant's work or experience with your client group. You will probably get a more helpful reference if you explain the kind of work and ask specific questions. You

should ask whether the referee has any concerns about the applicant working with your client group.

Trial period: make the appointment conditional on the successful completion of a trial period in which you assess the suitability of the new volunteer. During this period you should offer an induction to help your new volunteer become familiar with the organisation.

CRB Checks and the Independent Safeguarding Authority Vetting and Barring Scheme: please refer to the "Screening Volunteers" information sheet.

Safe working practices: adopt work practices and codes of behaviour that minimise risks and protect both users of your group or organisation and workers. Everyone in the organisation should be clear about their role, about what the organisation is trying to achieve and about the accepted codes of behaviour. They should know who they report to. Help your volunteers to carry out their duties by providing support and training. Support should include a supervision system for volunteers. This means you see them at regular intervals, either on their own or in small groups to discuss their work. Consider setting up a system of annual review. These arrangements will help you to assess general competence, the development of relationships with co-workers and your user groups and to identify any training needs. Be alert to any exceptional treatment, favourable or unfavourable, of any of your users of your group or organisation.

For help with writing a safeguarding children and protection of vulnerable adults policy:

[The Charity Commission](#) provides information on safeguarding children including what to cover in a child protection policy.

[The NSPCC](#) provide a range of services concerned with child protection including information on relevant guides and publications.

With thanks to Volunteer Centre, Brighton & Hove