



Good Practice Guidelines

(Working with Asylum seekers / Refugees)

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Expenses

Introduction:

These guidelines are intended to supplement the general expenses guidelines found on the Volunteer Centre Sheffield website. These specific notes for working with asylum seekers and refugees are intended to help clarify some of the additional questions or difficulties that Volunteer Managers have had when involving refugee or asylum seeker volunteers.

Why are additional notes required? What are the issues?

Asylum seekers and refugees have often contacted us saying that they have not been paid their expenses. This is the most common problem we have experience with asylum seeker volunteers and it is one that can be easily avoided.

All volunteers should get their out of pocket expenses reimbursed but it is particularly important for asylum seekers as they get 30% less benefit than people on Job Seekers allowance. A day-rider bus fare can be 10% or more of their weekly income. It is therefore really important for organisations to pay expenses regularly (preferably on the day).

Volunteers with English as a second language may not fully understand your written expenses policies, even if they have been given a copy.

Be proactive – ask if volunteers want expenses

Many asylum seekers are unsure about expenses, and may well be ashamed to ask to claim their expenses. One volunteer came in and told me that she had been volunteering for 5 weeks but had not received any money for her expenses. She explained why she had not asked for her expenses:

"I don't want to ask for my expenses because everyone will look at me bad. People think refugees just come here for money so I don't want to ask for anything. I work hard and they should give me expenses but I don't want to ask. I don't understand, they have time to give me orders, tell me what to do – why don't they have time to give me expenses."

As a Volunteer Manager, it is your responsibility to check with volunteers that they have claimed their expenses. It may well take months for a volunteer to build up the confidence to ask for their expenses so please be proactive in offering to pay expenses. This will ensure that all volunteers feel comfortable about claiming expenses and do not feel like they causing trouble for you.

For more information about working with asylum seeker and refugee volunteers, please see our website or contact Paul Harvey on 0114 253 6650 or email p.harvey@vas.org.uk

Volunteer Centre Sheffield has a range of resources available on different aspects of working with volunteers. Please contact the Centre if you would like additional support or advice. ¹

¹ 1 Sheffield Volunteer Centre is part of Voluntary Action Sheffield
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