

(This detailed guide should be read together with the "Use Your Skills" general leaflet.)

**Volunteering in the UK is voluntary, i.e. you are not forced to do it – you choose to do it.**

### **Choosing the volunteering activity**

There are many types of volunteering available in the UK. How do you choose which type is best for you? You need to take several factors into account:

- **Where can you get information about volunteering?** You can talk to friends, or contact organisations directly. If you don't have any information and would like some advice, the best place to go is your local **Volunteer Centre**. They can give you information about all the volunteering opportunities in your area, and help find activities that match your interests.
- **How much time do you have? Which days of the week are you free?**  
Many volunteering opportunities will allow you to do as little as an hour a week. Other volunteering opportunities may require two or three days a week including essential training, for example advice centre volunteering. To become a paid advice worker, you will need to spend a year or more as a volunteer.
- **How flexible is your time?** Some volunteering roles allow you to volunteer whenever you are free or whenever you feel like turning up. Other volunteering roles rely on volunteers to provide a service, and need volunteers to turn up at pre-arranged times or fixed times. For example an advice service might need you to volunteer from 10am-4pm every Monday, and to attend training from 9.30am-3pm every Thursday for three months.
- **What types of activity would you like to volunteer in?** Advice? Gardening? Helping old people? Activities with children? Reception duties? Serving tea and coffee? Interpreting? Computer applications? There is a huge choice – just ask.
- **What are your skills?** Do you speak another language? Are you good at communicating with people? Do you have other useful character skills? Do you have teaching experience? Are you good at financial accounts? Do you have qualifications? You may find a volunteer role where you can use these skills.
- **What is your level of English?** Some volunteering roles do not need much English, e.g. gardening, practical work or serving coffee. Other roles such as advice work or reception need quite a good level of spoken English. Just ask – there will be something you can do.
- **Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) Disclosure.**  
Some volunteering opportunities require all volunteers to complete an application form called a CRB or Police "Disclosure/Check". This is a check to make sure volunteers don't have any criminal convictions that would make them unsuitable to volunteer. This is nothing to worry about and will not affect your asylum claim. Volunteer roles where you are in close contact with children or vulnerable adults require all volunteers to have a Disclosure. This is because organisations have a responsibility to protect children and vulnerable adults. Disclosures are free for volunteers and can be done for both asylum seekers and refugees. The organisation will explain this in greater detail and will help you to complete the application form.

## **Arranging appointments, meetings and volunteering times.**

- **Arranging Times.** If someone suggests a time to meet or volunteer, please say immediately if the time (or the volunteer role) is not suitable. Remember that you can say “No!” It is much better to do this immediately, in order to avoid misunderstandings later. If you have commitments with family, college, work or anything else, you can suggest a different time.
- **Keeping to times.** You are a volunteer and can choose your times, but you must keep to agreed times. If you are unable to volunteer at an agreed time, or if you are unable to attend a pre-arranged appointment or training session, you should phone the organisation as soon as possible in advance so that they can make alternative arrangements.
- **The recruitment and selection procedure** of organisations can vary. This may include: Application Forms, Informal Interviews, References, CRB Checks and a Trial Period. The Volunteer Centre can help you with the application process if you would like help. If your English is not very good, the organisation should help you to complete the application form. For some volunteer roles you will need to attend training before or after you start volunteering.
- **Expenses.** Some organisations will repay your travel expenses for an initial volunteer meeting that has been arranged in advance, i.e. before you start volunteering.

## **Once you have started volunteering**

- **Commitment and reliability.** By demonstrating commitment and reliability, you will build up a good track record that will give you a good reference. All employers will want evidence of qualities like commitment and reliability before giving you a job.
- **Named Supervisor.** You should have a named person as a supervisor. They will help you get settled in to the organisation, help with any questions or problems, book you onto training courses and give you ongoing support. It is a good idea to have regular communication with your supervisor, as they will write any future references.
- **Punctuality.** For pre-arranged times, you should always arrive on time. You should phone if you are unable to attend, e.g. if you are ill.
- **Expenses.** You are entitled to receive expenses, e.g. bus fare, lunch or childcare. Your supervisor should show you where to find the expenses claim forms and how to complete them. You will normally need to give the organisation your receipt or a photocopy. Don't be shy to claim expenses - you shouldn't lose money by volunteering!
- **You can always stop** volunteering if you want to. E.g. if you get a job, or you want to do something different.
- **Tell your friends** if you are happy with your volunteer role!

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