

Protection of Vulnerable Groups Guidelines

Safeguarding Adults

“Everyone’s responsibility”



Many adults who use care services, or have experience of living in vulnerable circumstances, are uniquely placed to undertake certain volunteer roles due to their experience of disability, disadvantage and/or using services. They bring a level of insight which can only be gained through lived experience.

However, they can be socially excluded and seen as the ‘recipients’ of help rather than citizens who can make positive contributions. By opening volunteer opportunities up to potentially marginalised groups, you tap into their experience to the benefit of your organisation and the people it supports; you turn volunteering in your service into a force for inclusion. Volunteering offers people a valued role and can lead to the development of friendships, skills, and confidence while they enjoy themselves.

Before engaging vulnerable adults as volunteers in your service, secure organisational support for your plans. This will provide you with the authority you need to proceed, helping you run a successful volunteer programme which also fits with wider organisational objectives.

Working with vulnerable clients

If your organisation is working with “Vulnerable Groups” (children or protected adults) having a policy (and implementing it) will help you ensure the safety of everyone who uses the services of your group and the volunteers and staff you use to deliver these services.

Organisations are justifiably concerned about involving volunteers to work with vulnerable clients. Client safety is going to be uppermost in the minds of anyone working in this field.

Greater than normal care should be taken with selection.

To ensure good practice:

- carry out the appropriate checks ie: DBS, two references
- interview, application form or informal chat either or should be undertaken
- Avoid situations where volunteers could abuse their trust – emphasise confidentiality
- Ensure adequate training and supervision is in place
- Ensure that there are clear lines of communication
- Appropriate policies and procedures are in place

Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults

You have a duty of care towards your clients. This duty is enhanced if they are less able to protect themselves. As with Health and Safety issues a risk assessment can help highlight areas where you should take steps to reduce risk. Each situation is different, but this section describes typical measures to consider.

A child protection/vulnerable adult/safeguarding policy

Your policy should of course include volunteers. Make volunteers aware of it from recruitment onwards. Discuss it with them at induction and satisfy yourself that they understand it and especially know what to do if they have any concerns.

Organisational responsibility

Someone in the organisation should have overall responsibility on safeguarding issues to ensure that there is co-ordination on measures taken to increase protection. This should be reflected by reporting structures within the organisation.

Giving off the right message

One of the strongest safeguards you can put in place is to send out the clear message that your organisation takes the protection of its clients seriously. People with bad intentions will be looking for institutions that appear lax. Make sure that everyone associated with the organisation knows how much you prioritise these issues – it should, for example, be referred to in recruitment material that potential volunteers receive.

Training and induction

As well as covering child protection/vulnerable adult awareness issues, use training and induction to increase general awareness of your client group. People can do damage without having bad intentions simply through a lack of understanding.

Explaining boundaries and appropriate behaviour is of course very important where volunteers will be working directly with vulnerable people.

Design of the activity

A risk assessment may help you shape activities to reduce risk. For example, if an activity can be satisfactorily carried out in a group rather than having volunteers on their own with vulnerable people.

Pairing volunteers up is another way of avoiding volunteers being in sole charge of a child or vulnerable adult. However, care should be undertaken in this pairing and safeguarding should always be highlighted.

Communication and monitoring

Communication is vital. Volunteers should feel able to raise any issues or concerns, the same applies to anyone involved with the volunteers and/or the clients. There should be contact with clients and/or their guardians to ensure that they are happy with the volunteering relationship.

Reporting procedures should be clear and transparent.

DBS checks

These checks are a safeguard, but do not rely on them to exclusion of other steps. They can only show where someone has been caught before. They also do not reveal anything that has come up since the check was made.

If you have access to such checks, your duty of care suggests you should carry them out. Some organisations are under a legal obligation to do so. These include childcare organisations (organisations working with children whilst regulated under statute) and those regulated by the Healthcare Commission or the Commission for Social Care Inspection.