

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Supporting charities, volunteers and communities

4. Volunteers

4.9 Volunteering to work with vulnerable adults and children



The welfare of children and vulnerable adults must be the paramount consideration of any voluntary organisation whose work brings it into contact with vulnerable people. Volunteers play a vital role in enhancing the lives of vulnerable people, but not every volunteer is suited to this kind of work, and very occasionally, may actually pose a threat. This means carrying out risk assessments for work that involves vulnerable people, adopting safe working practices to help to minimise risk, having good recruitment and selection practices, and sound systems of supervision.

This information sheet provides advice on how to develop safe working practices which will help to reduce risks. It draws heavily on government guidelines and code of practice in *Safe From Harm (Welsh Assembly Government 2007)*.

Policy Statement

Every voluntary organisation should adopt a written policy statement setting out its policy on safeguarding the welfare of the children and/or vulnerable adults with whom it works. This should state clearly the duty of all those employed by or involved in the organisation to prevent any abuse of any children and/or vulnerable adults with whom they are in contact.

It is essential that all staff and volunteers, their line managers or supervisors, and policy makers are trained in child protection issues. Agreed procedures for protecting children and/or vulnerable adults must be applied to all staff and volunteers within the organisation.

Good management practices

a) Risk management

Risk management concerns dealing with uncertainties and reducing or removing risk factors. The process of risk management involves identifying risks, deciding how serious or likely they are to occur and controlling those risks.

Where volunteers are working directly with vulnerable clients or are going into people's homes, the organisation must do everything possible to protect both the volunteers and the clients from abuse, injury or loss.

Steps which may be appropriate are:

- Screening
- Induction and training
- Risk assessment
- Record-keeping
- Review
- Insurance

Once risks have been identified an organisation should develop written policies and procedures, volunteer handbooks, trustee handbooks and

forms for risk assessment and incident reporting.

A communication strategy should also be developed ensuring that everyone involved in the organisation is informed of the risk management plan.

b) CRB checks

Many organisations working with children and/or vulnerable adults use criminal record checks as part of best practice to safeguard volunteers. An organisation is eligible to ask for a Disclosure (CRB check) for any staff or volunteers working with children or vulnerable adults.

It is important however to be aware of the increased safeguards being introduced under the ISA Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS). These are introduced from October 2009 when the new barred lists will replace POCA, POVA and List 99 and the scope of the Enhanced Disclosure is broadened to take regulated activity into account.

Additionally, from July 2010 any person wishing to work with vulnerable groups will be able to register on the VBS. This will become a legal requirement from November 2010. However, this Scheme will be phased in over a period of five years so not everyone will have to do this immediately.

ISA VBS will work alongside the current system of CRB checks and an online check will show if the individual is registered on the Scheme. However, organisations may still wish to apply for an Enhanced Disclosure to obtain a full criminal history as this may be important in order to assess the full suitability for a particular position.

Adopt and consistently apply a thorough and clearly defined method of recruiting and selecting staff and volunteers

All staff and volunteers for any position involving contact with children and/or vulnerable adults should be subject to the principles of best recruitment and retention practices.

Every applicant should be subject to checks on their identity and any person working in a regulated position, or applying to work in a regulated position with children and/or vulnerable adults must have ISA VBS registration. When recruiting an individual, their full employment list should be examined and all claims with regards to qualifications and membership of professional bodies should be verified.

The recruiting organisation should always seek at least two written references from persons who have experience of the applicants work or volunteering with children and/or vulnerable adults. All appointments should be conditional on the successful completion of a probationary period. The length of which will depend on the type of position, but this will normally be between three months and one year. A firm date for the review of a probationary period should be set on appointment.

Support and supervision of volunteers

Organisations require clear lines of accountability as a means of child and/or vulnerable adult protection. Organisations should ensure that those directly responsible for staff in contact with children and/or vulnerable adults

should use good management supervision to prevent or detect abuse.

Volunteers in any situation should be given adequate support to enable them to carry out tasks efficiently and with confidence. Support and supervision are separate but overlapping functions which are best simplified by seeing support as 'person-centred' and supervision as 'work-centred'. Both are essential in risk management.

Supervision should be structured and formal allowing reflection of the work in relation to standards and targets you have previously agreed with the volunteer. Each supervision session should conclude with a plan of future action. Keep records of issues and decisions made during supervision as these will be useful for tracking problems and progress.

Allegations or suspicions of abuse

An organisation should issue guidelines on how to deal with the disclosure or discovery of abuse. Organisations are advised to prepare and issue to all staff and volunteers, brief written guidelines setting out the steps they must take if a child and/or vulnerable adult discloses details of abuse to them, or if they discover that abuse has taken place.

These guidelines should include:

- a reminder of the duty to prevent abuse, including the duty to report any abuse disclosed or suspected;
- guidance on what constitutes abuse and recognising it;
- instructions on who to inform if abuse is disclosed or discovered.

Confidentiality and information sharing

The approach to confidential information should be the same whether any proposed disclosure of information is internal within one organisation or between agencies. The need to disclose confidential information to others within your own organisation will arrive more frequently than will be the case for inter-agency disclosure. There will be occasions where an individual will have to decide whether the circumstances justify the disclosure.

It is good practice to share information with families, and there should be a presumption of openness, unless to do so would compromise safety. Some information known to professionals may need to be treated confidentially and not shared in front of family members or carers, such as information concerning a particular member, which might compromise a criminal investigation.

Individuals jointly working with families or carers should reach a common understanding at each stage of their intervention about what information should be disclosed to the family or carers. Any reasons for withholding information should be clear and recorded and in such circumstances, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child or vulnerable adult must always be the overriding consideration.

Further information

WCVA CRU

Tel: 0800 0197 391

Fax: 01745 357593

cru@wcva.org.uk

www.wcva-cru.org.uk

Criminal Records Bureau

www.crb.gov.uk

Independent Safeguarding Authority

www.isa.gov.org.uk

The National Society for the Prevention
of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

www.nspcc.org.uk

For further information contact

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Baltic House, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF10 5FH

Registered Charity 218093

Tel: 0800 2888 329

help@wcva.org.uk

Fax: 029 2043 1701

www.wcva.org.uk



Tel: 0800 2888 329

www.wcva.org.uk

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