

# Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Supporting charities, volunteers and communities

## 4. Volunteers

### 4.8.1 Risk assessment - volunteers based at home



Most health and safety legislation applies only to paid workers. But your organisation does have a duty of care towards volunteers (and others).

This means that you need to avoid carelessly causing harm or injury to volunteers. It does not mean that volunteers will be working in a risk free environment.

It also means giving volunteers relevant information that might affect their health and safety.

What does this mean for volunteers who work mainly from their own home?

#### 1. Check out your insurance cover

Does it include cover for volunteers working from home?

Are there any particular requirements, or exclusions which you need to be aware of?

#### 2. Identify the main risks and possible actions

Consider the nature of the tasks to be undertaken e.g. making telephone calls, computer based tasks, practical tasks.

For each role, begin by making a list of the possible risks that you can think of, noting how likely it is to occur and how serious the consequences might be. Note also possible actions that could be taken to eliminate or control the risk. The sample form attached could be used for this purpose (Appendix 1).

Then make a judgement about where your priorities need to be in assessing and managing the important risks. You will decide this on the basis of

- a) how serious the risk of harm
  - b) how likely it is to occur
- and
- c) how feasible it is to manage the risk.

For example, if you have identified life - threatening risks, these need to be addressed, whatever the expense or inconvenience on your part. If you have identified risks which are trivial in consequence, unlikely to occur and awkward to address – don't waste time on them, but keep the situation under review.

Some areas of possible risk for you to consider are suggested in Appendix 2.

### **3. Conduct further risk assessment**

One of the following approaches may be taken:

#### **a) Discussion with the volunteer**

Using the list you have identified of the main risks which are of concern to you, talk to the volunteer to further assess risks, as appropriate.

Some of the risks you have identified will be controlled in other ways – e.g. through induction training, or the provision of safety equipment. The purpose of this discussion is to gather further relevant information about, for example, the environment where the volunteer will be working, or the volunteer's specific knowledge or capabilities.

From your discussion you should be able to better identify what actions need to be taken in order to reduce or manage risks. Make a note of actions taken. Also see Information Sheet *4.8 Keeping volunteers safe*.

#### **b) Train your volunteer to risk assess**

Volunteers could be trained to carry out their own risk assessment, perhaps using a check list which you have devised for their role.

It would be important that you see and discuss the completed assessment and ensure that appropriate actions are both noted and followed through.

#### **c) Conduct your own assessment in the volunteer's home**

There might be circumstances when this is appropriate – for example to check whether equipment fits or is set up correctly. You may be visiting the volunteer in their home for other purposes and be able to observe for yourself, for example, the working environment and equipment.

Again it may be useful to prepare a checklist to record your findings and to note what action is taken.

Bear in mind that it could be regarded as an invasion of privacy to carry out a risk assessment within a volunteer's home without good reason.

### **3. Review and update your risk assessment regularly.**

It could be discussed in the context of one to one review or supervision sessions with the volunteer.

The process should be a continuous one. What you learn through the experience of risk assessment should inform the content of your induction training/volunteer handbook and your description of volunteer roles. It should be a meaningful process

that demonstrates your care for volunteers – not just a bureaucratic procedure that is designed to ‘cover your organisation’s back’.

### **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.**

There are responsibilities laid upon the employer towards people who are not employees, who may be affected by the employers activities - such as volunteers, and members of the public:

*‘...to conduct his undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons not in his employment who may be affected thereby are not thereby exposed to risks to their health and safety’*

*‘...to give persons (not being his employees) who may be affected by the way in which he conducts his undertaking the prescribed information about such aspects of the way in which he conducts his undertaking as might affect their health or safety’*



## **Appendix 2**

### **Some questions to consider in the course of Risk Identification**

#### **The volunteer:**

- Is there any essential requirement when selecting volunteers for this role – or anything that would preclude placing a volunteer
- Does the volunteer have special needs or requirements

#### **The nature of the role:**

- Is there risk of violent or abusive behaviour
- Is confidentiality important
- Is there a risk of physical harm or injury e.g. lifting, eye strain (from extensive use of VDU screen), repetitive strain injury
- Is the work likely to be emotionally demanding

#### **The environment:**

- Is the working environment suitable for the task (e.g. workstation, safe storage, privacy)

#### **Equipment:**

- Is equipment appropriate, safe, and suitable for the task
- Is protective/safety equipment needed

#### **Other:**

- Will there be costs incurred, can they be reimbursed
- Are there significant limits or boundaries to what is expected in this volunteer role

#### **Some possible actions to control or minimise risk:**

- Providing safety information
- Ensuring back up support / supervision
- Providing / checking equipment
- Meeting expenses
- Agreeing record keeping /reporting requirements
- Agreeing/ reinforcing some 'ground rules'
- Training and induction
- Amending the role description
- Develop/amend organisational policies
- Emergency procedures

## Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

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