



Looking after your volunteers: The Four Principles

There are many factors to consider when working with volunteers, a key factor being the care and wellbeing of your volunteers. Volunteer management is a broad topic. A great starting point is to consider the four principles. You should value these four principles within your organisation but you should also look for these four principles within the volunteers you recruit. The four principles are: Discipline; Resilience; Empathy and Helpfulness.

DISCIPLINE

RESILIENCE

EMPATHY

HELPFULNESS

Discipline:

Ensure you have the thorough policies and procedures in place before your volunteers are in action. It is your duty of care to ensure that from the beginning, from the Volunteer's induction, training and activities, it should be made clear what is acceptable and correct behaviour, and what is not.

Ensure that the expectations of being a volunteer meet the reality of the role. From lone working policies to confidentiality agreements, train your volunteers to have discipline to the rules and guidance of your organisation. This will help to maintain their safety as well as protect your liability and reputation.

Resilience:

Commonly, charities are focussed on supporting vulnerable people. In effect, our volunteers are working with vulnerable people. This can result in volunteers interacting with people who have intense stories, concerning living circumstances or poor wellbeing and mental health.

It is important for volunteers to feel supported and to have confidence in their roles. Resilience is the ability to recover from difficulties and hardships. Resilience grows from confidence and self-esteem. Achieving goals can be a great way to build resilience. This is why you should make sure to communicate with your volunteers regularly.

Support and supervisions with volunteers are an important tool to monitor their ability, performance and understanding of their role. At *Befriending Networks*, we promote that you



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should meet face to face with your volunteers once every six months minimum. Ideally, there is regular communication in-between via communication such as telephone or email.

Your volunteers need to know there is open communication with the organisation that they are donating their time to. Volunteers must be valued and appreciated as well as supported so that they can have confidence, and therefore have resilience, in their role.

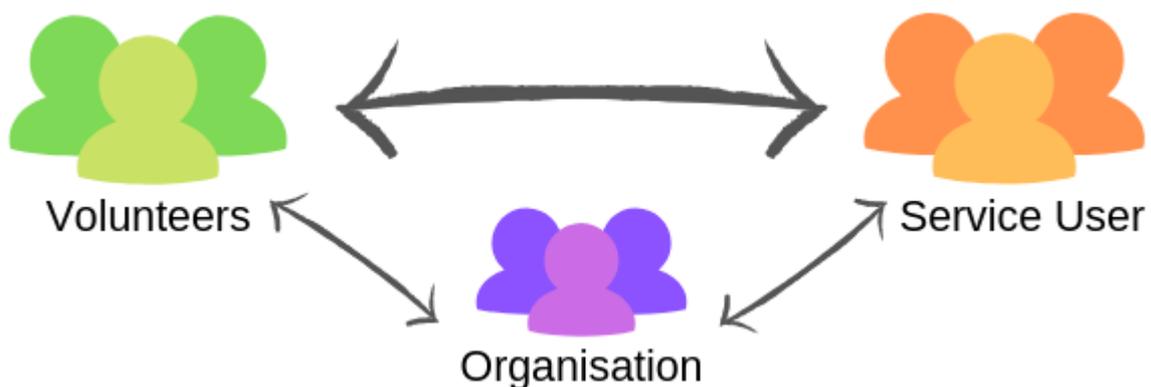
Empathy:

As stated, Volunteers in the Third Sector will commonly have access to vulnerable people who may have sad or upsetting circumstances. It is important that volunteers have the ability to understand and share the feelings of another: it is important that volunteers have empathy.

Ensure you allow your volunteers to have time to comprehend and understand your service user before they are working directly with them. For example, induction training for a dementia befriending service should entail a thorough understanding and exchange of knowledge about dementia and the barriers they may face in communicating.

The service users of your organisation deserve to receive fantastic customer service from someone who has good communication skills, patience and understanding. Empathy is a key skill for your volunteers as it will help them to understand how others are feeling and allow them the ability to respond appropriately to the situation. It is a social skill and a lot of research has been carried out to show that having greater empathy leads to more helping behaviour.

Empathy is not a skill that is solely for volunteers. You need to have understanding and empathy for your volunteers and what they may experience. Many volunteers work full time or have caring responsibilities for example. You need to have an understanding of their situation and monitor their performance and wellbeing to ensure that they have not taken on too much and are handling things fine.





Helpfulness:

Help your volunteers. Listen to them and respect them, just as you would expect them to listen and respect the service users they work with. Being helpful is a broad term. Volunteers can help in many different shapes and forms. From donating their time, fundraising or raising awareness, volunteers help in so many ways and many services would not be able to do a fraction of the work they carry out without the generosity of their volunteers.

What an organisation needs to monitor is the level of helpfulness. Boundaries are a difficult topic for some volunteers to comprehend but it is very important that they are explained, understood and respected.

It is quite common for a volunteer to go the extra mile to help and support a service user. In Befriending relationships in particular, this is more likely. For example, *a volunteer may be aware that their match put a load of washing on while they were visiting at 5pm. The volunteer returns to the house at 8pm to hang the washing up for them.* Though this is a generous act and that it comes from a good place, it means your volunteer is now breaking your lone-working policy as they are now representing your organisation outside of office hours, meaning your safeguarding and duty of care policies are no longer in place.

Boundaries exist in every relationship, it is important to acknowledge and respect boundaries and for this, organisations need to be helpful to provide clear guidance. Boundary policies and procedures allow a volunteer to understand what is expected from them and aims to ensure their willingness to help is not taken advantage of. These boundary policies allow a volunteer to know how much of an emotional and time input and commitment is expected from them.

By establishing the help that you can provide to your volunteers, and explaining the help that the volunteers can provide to your service users, this will work to ensure the wellbeing of your volunteers is protected and supported.

If you have any questions about this document, please do not hesitate to contact us:

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