

4. Volunteers

4.9 Safeguarding and good management practices

The welfare of children and adults must be the paramount consideration of any voluntary organisation whose work brings it into contact with vulnerable groups.

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 groups, adopting safe working practices to help to minimise risk, having good recruitment and selection practices, and sound systems of supervision.

This information sheet also adds to the general principles of information sheet 'Recruiting, selecting and inducting volunteers'.

Good management practices

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 groups including children or are going into people's homes, the organisation must do everything possible to protect both the volunteers and the vulnerable person from abuse, injury or loss.

Appropriate steps to take are:

- Screening
- Induction and training
- Risk assessment
- Record-keeping
- Review
- Insurance
- Background checking including accessing criminal records

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.

Support and supervision

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.

Background checks

For some volunteer roles it will be necessary or as part of risk management best practice, to find out the criminal history and barred status of a prospective volunteer. However having a criminal record should not necessarily prevent a volunteer from working with your organisation. This will depend on the nature of the volunteer role and the circumstances and background of the offences. An organisation using such checks will need to have in place a policy on recruitment of ex-offenders.

Information sheet 'Disclosure & Barring Services' gives full details.

Safeguarding

Policies and Procedures

Every voluntary organisation must 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 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 general safeguarding practice, child protection issues and the Protection of Vulnerable Adults. Agreed procedures for protecting children and/or adults who are vulnerable as a consequence of the services they receive, must be applied to all staff and volunteers within the organisation.

Organisations require clear lines of accountability as a means of safeguarding vulnerable groups. Organisations should ensure that those directly responsible for staff in contact with children and/or adults should use good management supervision to prevent or detect harm.

Allegations or suspicions of abuse

An organisation should prepare and issue guidelines on how to deal with the disclosure or discovery of abuse.

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 whom 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 occur more frequently than will be the case for inter-agency 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.

This statement should highlight the legal obligations to safeguarding Children and the good practice in safeguarding adults. For organisations which are relevant partners of the local authority as defined in the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014, they are also placed under a duty to report to the local authority an adult at risk or a child at risk.

An adult at risk is defined as an adult with care and support needs who is at risk of, or suffering, harm, abuse or neglect and who, due to their care and support needs, are unable to protect themselves. A child at risk is a child with care and support needs who is at risk of, or suffering, harm, abuse or neglect.

Individuals jointly working with families and/or carers, should reach a common understanding at each stage of their intervention about what information should be disclosed to the family and/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.

There will be occasions where an individual will have to decide whether the circumstances justify disclosure or are in accordance with any other legislative requirements such as the statutory duty to refer to Disclosure & Barring Services (DBS) in certain circumstances or any arrangements such as Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) - a framework of information sharing that complies with the Information Commissioner's 'Data Sharing Code of Practice'.

Further information

WCVA Safeguarding

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safeguarding@wcva.org.uk

www.wcva.org.uk

WASPI

www.waspi.org

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

www.nspcc.org.uk

Social Services Improvements Agency

www.ssia.org.uk

Disclosure and Barring Service

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service

Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014

<http://www.ccwales.org.uk/getting-in-on-the-act-hub/>

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For further information contact

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