



Involving Children (under 18's) as Volunteers

Volunteering is an activity that everyone can get involved in and benefit from. All kinds of people volunteer and volunteer involving organisations are becoming increasingly aware of the need to consider the diversity of their team. When involving children as volunteers, there are some special considerations which organisations should be aware of to ensure their safe and successful involvement.

Volunteer Roles:

- Devise appropriate volunteer roles for children to undertake. Have an open mind and remember that children are often quick to learn. Older children (16+) will be keen to take on new challenges but be careful of the level of responsibility you assign them.
- Make volunteering opportunities attractive and appealing to children, and highlight the impact their volunteering can make. Variety and a fun element help.
- Ensure that each volunteer role has a clear role description and volunteer specification. When drawing these up be aware of the language you are using and avoid jargon. A question and answer format is a good idea.
- Think about developing goal orientated tasks, where the results can be seen. Consider breaking larger tasks down into smaller parts and offer children a choice of what they would like to do - this may help keep their concentration!
- Ask them why they are volunteering and ensure their needs are met. For example if they want to learn something new find them a role that meets that need.
- Be flexible (time and commitment) to reflect the diverse range of things which may be happening in a child or young person's life.

Promotion:

- Target information about volunteering opportunities for children in places they are likely to see them e.g. in schools or youth centres.
- Consult with children and young people in the design of publicity materials. Use positive images of volunteering e.g. children having fun, learning new skills.
- Encourage children and young people to invite their friends to get involved.
- Consider the use of technology, including social media to communicate with young people.

Volunteer Management:

Remember the other elements of good practice in volunteer management!

- Volunteer agreement
- Induction
- Nominated person for support and supervision
- Access to training
- Reimbursement of volunteer expenses



Safeguarding:

When an organisation decides to involve children as volunteers the children become providers of a service (more often they are the recipients!). Whilst this is an empowering and exciting concept, young volunteers need to be afforded the same protection as any child who comes into contact with your organisation. Good safeguarding practice is key:

- Share the volunteer role description with the child and their parent/carers and seek written parental consent to involve the child/young person as a volunteer. The volunteer manager should meet with the parents/carers and explain what their child will be doing and how they will be supported. Provide an opportunity for them to ask any questions they may have.
- Parents/carers should be asked to complete a registration form for their child to provide the organisation with all relevant information e.g. health and medical needs, emergency contact numbers etc.
- Share your Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy with parents/carers. Think about developing an easy read version for children and young people getting involved.
- Prominently display your Safeguarding Policy Statement. This should outline a zero tolerance approach to abuse of children and young people.
- Display the contact details for your Designated Officer(s), should anyone have a concern about a child or young person involved with your organisation.
- An important element of your policy is the Code of Behaviour - ensure all staff and volunteers are aware of the guidelines for working with children and young people. Everyone should be clear about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and the sanctions, should there be a breach of the Code. For example, there should be guidelines around communication, physical contact and technology, including a social media policy.
- Develop a Code for the children and young people getting involved. They need to be clear about what is expected of them too, ground rules help to prevent harm.
- Avoid one to one situations with a child/young person - it is best to organise group activities for children and young people. Parents/carers may feel more reassured by this.
- All staff and volunteers should receive safeguarding children and young people training.
- Certain volunteering roles may require an Access NI check, in line with The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order, as amended by The Protection of Freedoms Act. Checks can be carried out for volunteers aged 16+. Children under the age of 16 should not be volunteering in regulated activity which requires a check.

Further information about safeguarding children and young people can be found at:

<https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2019/04/Keeping-Children-Safe-Our-Duty-to-Care.pdf>