REINTRODUCING VOLUNTEERS?

SOME GOOD PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS FOR THOSE GROUPS BRINGING VOLUNTEERS BACK TO THEIR ROLES IN LIGHT OF COVID-19

The following are some things to think about and resources to help you as you consider reintroducing volunteers to their roles in light of COVID-19. Please note this is just a first step and guidelines are changing regularly. You must at all times follow the guidelines that are being issued by the NI Executive so as everyone continues to try to stop the spread of the virus. It is still paramount that you only reintroduce activities when it is safe to do so and when you have all the measures in place to help you do that. The safety of everyone involved in your organisation is the most important factor when making decisions about getting your activities up and running again – and that includes your volunteers!

Please note that volunteering can be carried out within Government's Covid-19 restrictions, assuming all safety measures are in place. For example, going into a person's house for the provision of care or assistance to a vulnerable person, as part of an agreed volunteer role, is permitted. Make sure you are aware of current restrictions and communicate with your volunteers about how they apply to your volunteering roles.

- Within your overall organisational risk register you should identify the risks associated with the volunteer roles that you have in your organisation and plan measures to prevent spread of the virus thinking about all the potential volunteer environments, the people you are working with or the way volunteers need to travel to get to their volunteering. See Risk Assessment Template (*Word download*).

- Talk to your insurance company to let them know the steps you are taking and any changes you are making to your activities.

- Be prepared to have to redesign your roles – think outside the box. See Role Description Template (*Word download*). Update your role descriptions so as volunteers are very aware of the new boundaries and expectations. You may of course still want to continue with some of the virtual roles that you developed during Lockdown so think creatively about what meets your needs.

- Source and put in place measures needed such as PPE, screens, hand sanitisers, signs, posters to help volunteers feel safe as well as think through how you are going to communicate with volunteers about the risks and the safety measures.

- You have hopefully been in touch with your volunteers throughout Lockdown but now you need to communicate with individual volunteers to see if they are interested in coming back, are they well enough and any ideas and concerns they might have. Surveys can be useful here. Volunteers should never feel pressured into coming back – only if they are happy to do so!

- You should have conversations with volunteers about whether or not they are in an at-risk group or living with someone who is. For example, over 70s can return to volunteering but the public health advice is still that they should take particular care to minimise contact with

others outside their household (given that there is a higher risk of coronavirus having a more serious impact as you get older). See https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/volunteering-during-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic. If you are shielding or consider yourself to be high risk you should continue to follow the government's advice which is to stay at home as much as possible and keep visits outside to a minimum.

- Given there will be changes to how your organisation will carry out activities it is strongly advised that you provide volunteers with an induction to the role again and training where needed (you can deliver online, through written briefings or socially distanced class room). This will allow you to emphasise the key messages that you want to put across specific to your role, but it is likely to include:

  - ✓ Information from the risk assessment of the roles.
  - ✓ Up to date health and safety advice and guidelines.
  - ✓ Relevant information that applies from Government guidelines
  - ✓ Hand washing and hygiene measures required.
  - ✓ PPE and other equipment available.
  - ✓ Social distancing and minimizing contact where possible.
  - ✓ Guidelines around the role and scenarios with the client groups (if relevant).
  - ✓ Stopping volunteering if they feel unwell.
  - ✓ Self-care and wellbeing.
  - ✓ Key changes to policy and practice e.g. safeguarding policy, code of behaviour.

- Volunteers may be feeling anxious or they may find themselves in difficult situations with clients where they may need specific advice. Volunteer Managers should be prepared to provide additional support and be available to talk things through more than usual.

- Keep volunteers informed of all changes in Government guidelines and make them aware of webinars, briefings or training that might help.

- Be mindful of any restrictions on what you can and cannot do. (See update 8 January 2021). The organisation may provide volunteers who need to travel with proof that they are carrying out legitimate activities on their behalf e.g. ID cards with volunteer's name, their organisation and organisation's contact details; official letter from the organisation; email or WhatsApp/ text message from the charity on the volunteer's phone; branded t-shirts, bibs and car stickers. See Sample Letter for Volunteers (Word download).

- Be aware that some volunteers will not want to come back yet for various reasons. That is ok! Think about other roles that they could do for you virtually so as they still feel connected and useful.

- Be aware that some volunteers will not want to come back at all – think about how you can get their feedback and how you can recognize their efforts.

- If you have gaps in your volunteer base talk to Volunteer Now about the BeCollective platform (see below) where there are people who have already expressed interest in volunteering waiting to help!

- Rethink your recruitment and support procedures – you have maybe done things differently during the last few months – give some thought to how it worked and consider continuing with some of it if it enables you to flexible, inclusive and innovative e.g. online applications and interviews.

SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

General Government Guidelines around COVID

– https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/volunteering-during-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic

– https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19

– https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/coronavirus

– https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/campaign/coronavirus-updates-support-your-business

Volunteer Now Free COVID-19 Resources
– https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/volunteering/helpeachother/

Volunteer Now Free Volunteer Management Software – BE COLLECTIVE
– https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/volunteer-management/

Volunteering in Charity Shops Post COVID
– https://www.charityretail.org.uk/we-have-published-our-reopening-pack/

Volunteering Outdoors
– http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/hub_news/vsg-covid-19-recovery-planning-guidance/

– https://mcusercontent.com/58669d6895e71c03602eb4f52/files/3405c35d-1c52-4d44-8ecf-47c1f83b3d10/National_perspectives_in_approach_from_across_UK_and_Ireland.pdf

Fundraising
– https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/more-from-us/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-public-fundraising-guidance

Volunteer Driving
– https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/safer-travel-guidance-public-transport-users-walkers-cyclists-drivers

– https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/safer-transport-guidance-public-transport-operators-during-coronavirus

Guidance for Community Transport
– https://ctauk.org/covid19-guidance/

Youth Volunteering

Education Authority Youth Service - Youth Restart Publication

– https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2020/09/Youth-Restart-2nd-Edition.pdf

Education Authority Website

– https://www.eani.org.uk/youth-services-support

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Youth Online Website

– https://www.youthonline.org.uk/restart/

8 January 2021 Update: In Northern Ireland we have moved once again into a period of tighter restrictions in an attempt to reduce the transmission of COVID -19 within our community. Volunteer Now is therefore updating their guidance in terms of what this means for volunteering. We are asking volunteer involving organisations to consider the regulations guidance very carefully to see how they might apply to their own volunteer roles. In particular, the message from Government is very clear that we should all **stay at home** where possible. From 8 January 2021 you can only leave home with a 'reasonable excuse' such as for medical or food needs, exercise and work that cannot be done from home. Notably the guidelines state that you can leave home to provide voluntary or charitable services, if you cannot reasonably do so from home.

As organisations, you will have to decide if your volunteering roles need to be carried out during this period and how they can be completed while adhering to all the specific regulations. Organisations will need to use a risk assessment process to support their decision making and to manage the risk. Organisations will also need to talk to volunteers about continuing to volunteer if they feel comfortable to do so, providing them with all the relevant information from the guidelines about social distancing, numbers that can meet outdoors, households and bubbles, safety measures. Those considered as clinically extremely vulnerable should not be volunteering outside the home. The new regulations guidance can be found at https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-what-restrictions-mean-you

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