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**BUSINESS
IN THE
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Northern Ireland
cares

Employer Supported Volunteering
a guide for community/voluntary groups

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Volunteer Now

Volunteer Now works to promote, enhance and support volunteering across Northern Ireland. Volunteer Now is about connecting with individuals and organisations to build healthy communities and create positive change.

Volunteer Now enhances recognition for the contribution volunteers make, provides access to opportunities and encourages people to volunteer.

We provide training, information, guidance and support to volunteer-involving organisations on issues of good practice and policy regarding volunteering, volunteer management, child protection, safeguarding vulnerable adults and governance.

Registered charity no. XT22896

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Business in the Community

Business in the Community is a unique movement of companies across the UK and Ireland committed to continually improving their positive impact on society. This growing and powerful movement which recognises that social and economic responsibilities are central to business competitiveness.

The Business in the Community Cares programme is a dedicated campaign aimed at increasing the uptake of Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) for the benefit of employers and community groups.

Through the programme, Business in the Community is working with others to create a culture of ESV in Northern Ireland workplaces.

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Introduction

Volunteering is the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one's immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice.

Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) occurs when companies actively support and encourage their employees in voluntary activity within the local community. It is a partnership between the private, the voluntary and community and public sectors.

Voluntary and not for profit organisations across Northern Ireland are already benefitting from ESV. Many employers are interested in supporting their employees in volunteering and community involvement.

This guide has been produced to support the involvement of voluntary and not-for-profit organisations with ESV. A companion guide has been produced for employers. The guides provide information on the benefits of ESV, and answers to 'What? Why? How?' of implementing a successful programme. They include examples of best practice, case studies and useful sources for further information.



What are the benefits of ESV?

ESV actively links the employer, the employees and the wider community. It can enhance the capacity of voluntary and not-for-profit organisations to meet their objectives through the sharing of techniques and resources. It is successful when the employer's priorities, employee interests and community needs are met.

The voluntary and not for profit sector benefits a great deal from ESV because it:

- Creates partnerships that encourage a shared ownership for community wellbeing
- Brings added value through the involvement of new volunteers with skills and expertise and the provision of materials and resources

Business benefits from ESV because it:

- Develops staff skills and competencies
- Improves employee morale and motivation
- Can enhance company image
- Improves links with local communities

Employees benefit from ESV because it:

- Is enjoyable and rewarding
- Enhances teamwork, communication skills, creative thinking and problem solving
- Gives an opportunity to develop new skills or improve existing ones

What is the range of ESV?

The range of activity associated with ESV is varied and may include some of the following:

Individual Opportunities

- Mentoring
- Befriending
- Fundraising
- Participation as a trustee
- Paired reading

Team Events

- Organising an event or outing for a particular client group
- Assisting children and young people with basic skills (literacy, numeracy and Information Technology)
- Involvement in an environmental project

Practical

- Donation of equipment or furniture
- Supplying Christmas or Easter gifts
- Providing transport to clubs/events etc
- Decorating premises
- Developing a sensory garden
- Hosting events/support in kind

Administration

- Advising on office systems
- Providing support in Information Technology
- Support with financial management





Why should your organisation/group get involved?

ESV is recognised as a useful resource for voluntary and not-for-profit organisations.

It offers resources

- A new source of volunteers bring new energy, ideas and enthusiasm
- Employer support, for example, materials, services, resources
- Access to skills and expertise, for example, managerial or technical

It enhances public awareness

- Increased public awareness of local issues and needs
- Any publicity for a particular project will promote the work of your organisation

It has a positive impact

- Access to employer support and employer resources can assist in making a difference to the people and causes that you care about
- Partnerships established with private and public sector companies aid volunteer recruitment, increase awareness of your organisation and community needs and can impact on future resourcing



How can you get involved?

Step One: Preparation and planning

The following questions need to be answered:

Why are we doing this?

Be clear about why you wish to involve Employer Supported Volunteers.

Are we all agreed?

Check that the organisation (Trustees and Management) are committed to developing links with companies through ESV.

Discuss your plans with other relevant personnel in your organisation, work to ensure that you enhance rather than duplicate your links with employers.

Discuss ESV with the volunteers in the organisation, they may be able to generate ideas for projects and provide company contacts.

Be clear about any relevant ethics issues for your organisation.

Who do we need to involve?

Contact Volunteer Now or Business in the Community to discuss proposed activities. A visit from either organisation can be arranged to discuss the opportunity.

Do we have enough resources?

You will want your involvement in ESV to be as cost effective as possible. Remember that ambitious plans will cost more.

Do not underestimate the amount of staff and volunteer support time that may be required to make it work.

Have we made the necessary preparations?

Think ahead and prepare your organisation

1. What type of activities could business volunteers do?
2. What size of group could you facilitate?
3. How long will it take and how much will it cost?
4. Ensure the activity is risk assessed and your insurance will cover it
5. Think of opportunities that may maintain the relationship with the business
6. You may wish to provide refreshments or lunch for the volunteers



Step Two: Opportunities that attract Employer Supported Volunteers

It is important to design a range of volunteer tasks that provide interesting and worthwhile activity. Bear in mind the time constraints on Employer Supported Volunteers. Think about roles, the make-up of groups, and special opportunities for skilled and professional volunteers.

Some helpful tips

- First time volunteers prefer one-off, time limited opportunities that enable them to 'test the water'
- Offering volunteering opportunities in the evenings and at weekends may be useful
- Employees often like to work in groups with their colleagues and friends
- ESV involvement works well if you are specific about the needs to be met and any particular skills required, as well as the time commitment involved
- Try to ensure that volunteers have fun and enjoy the experience and remember to say thank you



Step Three: Making employer links

You may already have links with a range of private and public sector companies. Remember that employers in your area will be more interested in ESV if:

- They have a history of involvement in the community
- They already have links with your organisation
- They are interested in the work of your organisation
- They have the skills you are looking for
- Contact Volunteer Now or Business in the Community to identify companies that are interested in ESV. *(See contact details on page 2)*



Step Four: Team projects

Employees often like to work in teams or small groups. Remember that team projects may require materials and resources. You need to:

- Agree tasks to be completed and work with the employees to draw up an action plan
- Make clear the responsibilities and time commitment required
- Clarify in advance who will provide and pay for materials
- Provide support where possible for project leaders
- Confirm that the necessary risk management procedures have been followed to ensure the health and safety of all participants
- Try to avoid adding to the tasks once the plan is agreed. However should additional tasks outside the original plan arise, discuss those requirements and seek agreement between the parties





Step Five: Managing Volunteers

Thinking Ahead

Make sure there are clearly defined and worthwhile tasks to be done. Remember that volunteers are motivated by activities that:

- Challenge them
- Encourage team building
- Offer the opportunity to meet a community need in an effective way
- Use their skill and energy creatively

Consider putting in place role descriptions and volunteer specifications – these may be useful for those Employer Supported Volunteers with personal development objectives.

Where a volunteering opportunity is being considered that might involve access to children or vulnerable adults, check that appropriate procedures are in place to provide protection for these groups. The 'Our Duty of Care' team at Volunteer Now can give guidance on this. Full Access NI checks may not be necessary for one-off activities which are well supervised.



Step Six: Providing support

The successful involvement of Employer Supported Volunteers will often depend on the level of support required. At the minimum, the following should be provided:

- Welcome the volunteers
- Introduce them to the organisation covering health & safety, layout of the building, toilets, fire exits, kitchen facilities and use of equipment
- Take the opportunity to tell the volunteers about the work of your organisation and how their volunteering with impact on your organisation
- Allocate a member of staff or volunteer to support and supervise the activity
- Provide feedback and remember to thank the volunteers and their employer



Step Seven: Giving feedback

Employers need to assess whether ESV programmes are worthwhile. Your organisation should:

- Remember to thank volunteers and their employers
- Provide opportunities to gain feedback from employees, the employer and your own organisation by drawing up an evaluation form
- Give the employer feedback about the impact volunteers have made
- Maintain contact with the employer and employees. Send updates about how your work is going and further ways in which they can become involved
- If the company has made a significant contribution to your work, think about acknowledging this publicly

Case study of ESV

Volunteers from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety take on a gardening challenge at Autism Initiatives, Belfast.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) is committed to fulfilling its Corporate Responsibility (CR) through ESV. In a recent practical volunteering challenge DHSSPS transformed a garden space creating a sensory garden at Autism Initiatives (AI) , Glen Road, Belfast

The Challenge

AI is a supported living facility for adults with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) with varying degrees of severity. Due to the nature of ASC, their service users have varying sensory needs. The DHSSPS team took up the challenge of creating a sensory garden at AI.

This practical challenge involved the team digging out beds and putting down wood chippings, planting flowers, painting a fence and decking, hanging colourful lights to add a sensory element and generally giving the facility a makeover. The area has been transformed into a colourful, stimulating and also tranquil space for the service users to spend time reading and relaxing and this will help their wellbeing in the longer term.



Impact

- Much needed assistance with a project AI could not resource
- Opportunity for AI to showcase its work with a local employer
- Service users, staff and visitors will benefit from an enhanced reflective garden space
- Service users can avail of the improved area on a daily basis

“The Glen Road house is fortunate to have extensive garden space, which was not being utilised to its full potential.

Our staff have worked tirelessly fundraising money to finance materials but unfortunately could not afford labour costs as well.

We are indebted to the team from DHSSPS who have helped us to create a very special outdoor space suited to the individual needs of the adults who live here.”

**Clare Cregan, Team Leader
Autism Initiative, Glen Road**





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Business in the Community is a unique movement in the UK and Ireland of over 800 member companies (250 of which are in Northern Ireland), with a further 2,000+ engaged through our programmes and campaigns. We operate through a local network of more than 100 business led partnerships and 60 global partners.