

## YOUR GUIDE TO

# Providing Support to Volunteers



**Volunteer Centre**  
East Sussex

We are the nationally accredited Volunteer Centre for East Sussex, promoting, supporting and developing volunteering across the county.

# Introduction to Providing Support to Volunteers

## What do we mean by support?

In terms of volunteering, providing support relates to the help and encouragement given to volunteers to enable them to carry out their volunteering activities. The nature and the amount of the support given will differ from person to person as it will depend on a volunteer's circumstances and the role that they are doing. But it is fair to say that all volunteers will require some level of support at some time whilst they are volunteering.

It is good practice for organisations to provide support to all volunteers, starting at the recruitment stage and continuing throughout a volunteer's time with an organisation. Providing support shows the volunteer that the organisation values its volunteers and helps the organisation to identify ways in which support can be given. Supporting your volunteers will help them reach their full potential in your organisation.

How support is provided can range from helping someone fill out the application form to apply for your volunteering opportunity to providing external training to enable the volunteer to do the volunteer role. However, the type of support that is offered will depend on the resources available and the needs of the volunteer.

## Benefits of providing support

Providing support to volunteers will help them feel welcome, valued and part of the organisation. Supporting a volunteer can help build their confidence, learn new skills or identify training needs. It provides the opportunity for volunteers to ask questions, share information and ideas and can help combat isolation for some volunteer roles by keeping in regular contact with them.

Providing regular support can identify gaps in volunteers' skills development which can be addressed through the support process. Support also helps a volunteer to understand how their role contributes to the work of the organisation, to show progress and achievement and understand the organisation's ethos.

By supporting volunteers an organisation will benefit from motivated volunteers who are able to carry out their volunteer role who in turn become a valuable asset to the organisation.



# How can support be given?

Below is a list of different ways in which support can be provided. This is not an exhaustive list and which of these an organisation offers to volunteers will depend on the resources available as well as meeting a volunteer's needs.

- ▶ **Providing a warm welcome** – making initial contact can be daunting for a lot of people. Providing a warm welcome from the start will make a person feel welcomed.
- ▶ **Recruitment pack** – this can include information on the work of the organisation, volunteer role description, application form (if using) and how to apply for the role.
- ▶ **Role descriptions** – these help give ownership of the role to the volunteer, provide a clear explanation and set boundaries of the activities they will be doing. It also protects volunteers from being asked to do things that might be unreasonable.
- ▶ **Policies and procedures** – ensure volunteers are covered by the organisations' policies and procedures, especially insurance and health and safety.
- ▶ **Named contact person** – it is important that volunteers know who they can go to if they have any questions and that that person is there to support them.
- ▶ **Resources and equipment** – make sure that the volunteer has the necessary resources / equipment to carry out the volunteer role.
- ▶ **Induction** – having an induction to the organisation, introducing them to staff and other volunteers and the volunteer role will help make the volunteer feel part of the team.
- ▶ **Handbook / information sheet** – the content of the handbook / information sheet could reflect what is covered at Induction and could include details on, for example, practical advice on health and safety, where the tea making facilities are, and support and supervision available to volunteers.
- ▶ **Reimbursed out-of-pocket expenses.**
- ▶ **Regular support and supervision sessions** – providing an opportunity to talk away from every day activities and give the volunteer your full attention to talk about the volunteer role and how the volunteer is getting on.
- ▶ **Regular contact** – keeping volunteers up-to-date with organisational news, for example, changes to procedures, vacant posts etc.
- ▶ **Meetings** – have regular volunteer meetings, either formal or informal. Have volunteers represented at staff meetings
- ▶ **Training / Coaching / Mentoring / Peer Support**
- ▶ **Social gatherings**, such as seasonal parties, outings, quiz nights etc. Issue recognition and appreciation certificates and provide references.

### And finally...

Ensure all volunteers have equal access to support and praise and give thanks to volunteers.

### Additional resources:

In addition to contacting us directly for advice, you can also find more information on Support and Supervision on the **Hastings Voluntary Action** website at <http://bit.ly/1r5UoRM> and in the **Volunteering England Good Practice Bank** at <http://bit.ly/1IQW0cH>.