

YOUR GUIDE TO

Safer Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers



Volunteer Centre
East Sussex

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

Safer Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers

Why not safe recruitment and selection?

Aiming towards a SAFER recruitment and selection process simply acknowledges that involving anyone in contact with children and young people and vulnerable adults can never be completely 100% safe. There are, and always will be, a number of risks involved. Good management of volunteer recruitment and selection means doing everything possible to minimise the risks involved.

The screening (checking) of volunteers' suitability to carry out activities with vulnerable service users is essential and relies on each and every organisation recognizing and fulfilling their 'duty of care' towards people who use their services. Screening individuals to volunteer with children and young people and vulnerable adults in any setting where they may be unsupervised, i.e. left alone with service users, is a legal requirement that must be met by volunteer-involving organisations.

Currently a great deal of media attention is being focused on proposed changes to the way in which criminal record checks on people applying to work with children and young people and vulnerable adults will be carried out. Uncertainty about these changes however, should not deflect from the need to understand that criminal record checks should only ever form a component part of a robust overall safer recruitment and selection process.

The main reasons why relying on the outcome of a criminal record check as the sole indicator of whether or not it is 'safe' to involve someone in volunteering with vulnerable service users are two-fold; firstly an outcome that states 'none recorded' in response to the question 'does this

person have any criminal convictions' is just that. It does not guarantee that the person has never committed an offence for which they might have been convicted of or caught. Secondly the outcome of a check is always a reflection of a moment in time, it cannot eliminate the possibility that someone could commit a crime that would render them unsuitable for working in a unsupervised setting with children and young people and vulnerable adults, at any time after that check had been completed.



What is a clear process for the safer recruitment and selection of volunteers?

Putting in place a thorough process takes time and needs thinking through carefully. Once a volunteer role has been identified it is necessary to carry out a risk assessment. This means examining where risks to both to service users and volunteers may occur and identifying the means by which to reduce these risks. Any remedial action necessary should be clearly written down and allocated appropriately to responsible individuals within the organisation. All risk assessments should be subject to a regular review to take account of changing circumstances. If the volunteer role will involve unsupervised access to children and young people and vulnerable adults then a criminal record check should be sought. The administration costs of this check should be met by the organisation and not passed on to volunteers.

Alongside requesting a criminal record check, if appropriate for the volunteer role, the volunteer organisation should take a number of other steps to promote safer selection and recruitment and help to deter unsuitable individuals from applying. These include:

- ▶ **Asking people interested to complete a brief application form, including a self-declaration about any previous convictions they may have.**
- ▶ **Taking up references either by telephone, or in writing can elucidate important information about someone's suitability as a volunteer working with vulnerable service users.**
- ▶ **Interviewing potential volunteers to help them understand more fully the role for which they are applying and to allow the organisation to review the risk assessment in light of an individual's specific circumstances (e.g. if they have a previous conviction).**

Where do you start?

The 'duty of care' toward it's service users and the legal requirement to request criminal record checks for some volunteer roles means that no volunteer-involving organisation can ignore the need to put in place a safer recruitment and selection process. The best way of starting to put together this process is to seek specialist help. Volunteer Centre East Sussex is your local means of getting support and signposting to other specialist agencies.

How will you introduce and implement your volunteer policy?

Getting the right balance between fulfilling your duty of care and legal obligations while upholding equal access rights to potential volunteers with criminal convictions needs to be managed carefully. A 'blanket approach' of excluding ex-offenders is not acceptable and your recruitment process should reflect that very clearly. It is essential to gain the support of your management team and trustees and that everyone understands and adheres to your safer recruitment and selection policy. It must be clearly agreed that diverting from this policy is completely unacceptable and any breaches will be treated seriously.

And finally...

Ensure your safer recruitment and selection policy is fair to service users and volunteers alike.

Additional resources:

In addition to contacting us directly for advice, you can also find more information on the **Hastings Voluntary Action** website at <http://bit.ly/1m8hTJ7> and in the **Volunteering England Good Practice Bank** at <http://bit.ly/1mZQC7e>.