

# What is volunteering? (and what it's not...)

## We recognise that volunteering is a major contributor to:

- the quality of life of volunteers themselves and the people and communities that they support
- the range and quality of services, facilities, activities and cultural life of the region
- the local economy

We are, therefore, committed to ensuring that volunteering remains at the heart of life in Knowsley, is entered into by increasing numbers of people across a diversity of backgrounds, and is based on the following principles:

## For volunteers themselves:

- it is always a matter of free choice
- it is inclusive and accessible
- good quality, meaningful opportunities are available (i.e. those underpinned by appropriate support, training, and resources to enable them to carry out their role effectively and safely)
- recognition is given for the contribution they make by organisations and by the wider Knowsley community

## For volunteer involving organisations:

- the nature and value of volunteer involvement is understood at all levels of the organisation so that volunteers and the organisation mutually benefit from the contribution that volunteers make
- the managing/support of volunteers is seen as an important and key role within the organisation, leading to the appropriate support and recognition for those carrying out this function.

## Definition

For the purposes of this Vision:

"Volunteering is defined as an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives.

NB It should be seen as distinct from mandated /required or contractual activity.”

## Volunteers, Volunteering and Employment Support

A key function of Volunteer Centres is to match potential volunteers to volunteering opportunities in organisations in different sectors. We offer anyone wishing to volunteer support and advice in matching their motivations and aspirations to appropriate volunteering opportunities. This may include progression towards employment or in developing career options, but there are also many other motivations such as learning, keeping active or simply helping others. Whatever the motivation, volunteering is a positive and informed choice.

We use the following definition of volunteering in our work:

Any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment, individuals or groups other than, or in addition to, close relatives. It should be seen as distinct from mandated / required or contractual activity - which could include internships, work placements, student placements and people on other employment-related schemes

([GM Vision for Volunteering](#), 2013)

## This definition is underpinned by a number of key principles:

- Choice - volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual
- Diversity - volunteering should be open to all
- Mutual Benefit - both the volunteer and the organisation that the volunteer works with should benefit from the relationship
- Recognition - the contribution of the volunteer should be recognised

We recognise the value of programmes which provide good quality support in preparing for and finding employment. Activities in these schemes are sometimes confused with volunteering and we therefore set out below our position on these:

## Activity which we do NOT consider to be “volunteering”

Internships - A time limited placement that allows a person to gain practical experience by undertaking an activity that allows a person to gain on-the-job experience. If the intern is under contract (written or implied) and unpaid, but working for a charity, voluntary organisation, associated fund-raising body or statutory body, they are likely to be, in the eyes of the law, a ‘voluntary worker’.

There is a 'voluntary worker' exemption from the National Minimum Wage regulations but this is to enable voluntary organisations to continue working with volunteers (i.e. those who wish to donate their time/experience for no reward) and where their role would have normally been seen as contractual and, therefore, subject to Minimum (National Living) Wage.

We believe that internships are an important way for increasing access to the labour market. However, in practice, not everyone has the resources to undertake a full week's work for no income and therefore unpaid internship opportunities are not open to all. We believe, as a matter of best practice, that interns should be paid at least the accredited Living Wage.

Work experience - A planned period of work-based learning or experience with learning outcomes usually undertaken as part of a programme of university, college or school study, as a short placement, work taster, temporary work, or a period of supported employment as part of vocational training. The placement is usually sourced externally with an employer in any sector (private, statutory, voluntary). Although the person may sometimes source their own placement, they will normally be accountable to the original agency for carrying out the placement to certain standards over an agreed period of time. Work experience is typically not paid, not contracted and short-term. This is often where people, especially young people, are offered the opportunity of a taster of a particular job and given the chance to try various tasks or shadow a member of staff. This may be part of an educational course or 'into work' programme.

We believe that work experience is a valuable means of learning. It is distinct from internship in that it will usually take place in the context of wider study and generally be short term.

Mandatory Work Activity - Mandatory work initiatives from the DWP or its sub-contractors are not volunteering: the principle of freedom of choice to participate in them is compromised and many claimants face benefits sanctions if they do not engage in the compulsory placements.

We note that voluntary and community organisations may choose to host placements but this is not the same as engaging volunteers. (We encourage organisations to consider carefully whether or not to be involved in this scheme as providers of placements. Trustees of voluntary and community sector groups need to consider whether they are willing to instruct their staff and volunteers to report someone to Job Centre Plus for not turning up or being late knowing that their benefits will then be stopped?)

We, the Volunteer Centre across Knowsley, will not be engaging with the Mandatory Work Activity process. We believe firmly that volunteering must always be about choice.

Volunteer Centres are not normally funded or contracted to provide support in finding unpaid roles for students/trainees to undertake as a component of their course of education or training nor unpaid roles for people as part of statutory or mandated work programmes. We are also mindful of the risks to our own sustainability of increasing requests to identify volunteering opportunities from providers who are contracted to do this as an integral part of a commissioned service (e.g. Work Programme).

Following from the above, staff of Volunteer Centres will refuse third-party requests to confirm, or otherwise, attendance at the Volunteer Centre, neither will we sign documentation to this effect.

We encourage volunteers to maintain their own record of hours spent volunteering and promote recognition of achievements by volunteer involving organisations. However, we must refuse third party requests to verify or confirm hours worked or activities undertaken, neither will we sign documentation to this effect.

In some cases, individual Centres may be able to develop services such as these but they would be on a charged-for, commercial basis. If, for example, Job Centre Plus or a Work Programme provider wishes to establish a referral partnership with the local Volunteer Centre, they will need to enter into a contractual arrangement covering charges for these services, particularly in relation to those clients who need additional support.

## The Keep Volunteering Voluntary national agreement

One Knowsley are proud to have signed up to this national campaign to Keep Volunteering Voluntary:

"As charities and voluntary organisations we know the value of volunteering. Volunteering means people independently choosing to give their time freely to help others and make the world a better place. Workfare schemes force unemployed people to carry out unpaid work or face benefit sanctions that can cause hardship and destitution. We believe in keeping volunteering voluntary and will not participate in government workfare schemes."

Join us and over 600 other voluntary sector organisations and sign up to the agreement to Keep Volunteering Voluntary.