

VOLUNTEER POLICY

1.1 Value of Volunteers

Discovery Initiative has used many types of volunteer to assist with the provision of a variety of services. This is of benefit to the individual volunteer as well as to the youth club and the community. Volunteers benefit by having the opportunity to develop confidence, experience and skills, and receive training and other benefits in kind. The organisation benefits from the volunteers' existing skills and experience as well as their local knowledge and commitment of time. The community gains enhanced services.

1.2 Equal Opportunities

We have been helped by people of different age groups, cultural backgrounds and ability ranges. We are committed to providing equality of opportunity in our recruitment and treatment of volunteers as in all other aspects of our work. We monitor our recruitment practice. Volunteers are asked to complete a recruitment monitoring form - See Equal Opportunities Policy and ask Centre Coordinator for more information.

1.3 Volunteer Recruitment and Selection

1.3.1 Recruitment

Most volunteers are recruited from within Newham and East London. However, we also use other volunteers from other parts of Greater London. Recruitment may be informal through word of mouth, or people dropping in to see what they can do. It may also be more formal through internal or external advertising. We have also co-operated where appropriate with government work experience and training programmes. The type of recruitment employed depends on the term of the volunteer agreement and the nature of the job. For instance, if it is for more than three months, then our normal staff recruitment process is followed which requires that the most appropriate person is appointed. Where someone is offering a lesser commitment, such as two hours a week, the local centre coordinator has greater discretion. Someone may be unsure what they wish to volunteer for, for instance. It may be necessary to conduct an informal interview to assess what skills or experience are being offered and negotiate with the potential volunteer where they could best fit into the work of the organisation.

1.3.2 Selection

Similar considerations apply to the selection of volunteer, staff and facilitator. The procedure is matched with the post involved. For example, where a volunteer is being selected to work with children or vulnerable adults, the most careful procedures are followed - See Safeguarding of Children and Young People Policy. In all cases potential volunteers are given information about the organisation, a person specification and job description. This helps them to assess their own suitability. They are asked to complete a volunteer application form and provide referees. A recruitment panel will select the best candidate for the post and take up references before appointment.

1.3.3 Appointment

On appointment a volunteer agreement is drawn up which states:

- Main duties of the post
- Availability of volunteer
- Probationary period
- Supervisor, supervision and review
- Expenses
- Training
- Insurance
- Attendance at meetings
- Dismissal
- Grievance
- Equal Opportunities/Health & Safety
- Confidentiality

The youth club depends on the reliability of the volunteer, who is expected to work to the same high standards as employed staff, volunteers and facilitators. Issues of health and safety, equal opportunities, and confidentiality, for example, are required by everyone working with Discovery Initiative. The agreement is a way of making sure that what is expected is clearly understood both by the volunteer and the organisation. Attendance at meetings for example needs to state whether the volunteer will be expected to attend staff meetings.

In return for the commitment made by the volunteer, Discovery Initiative offers a support structure which provides the volunteer with the resources to undertake the work expected.

1.3.4 Probation

After appointment the first three months is a time of probation for both sides. During this period either the volunteer or the organisation can assess if the arrangement is working to their satisfaction. It is also a time for assessment of the volunteer's skills and any training needed.

1.3.5 Induction

This period will also be a time for induction, and a written induction plan will form the basis of introduction to people, resources and work. Regular communication and support during the initial period of volunteering is crucial.

1.4 Volunteer Training

Discovery Initiative is committed to investing in the training and development of all volunteers so that they are able to do their work to an acceptable standard. Training needs are assessed during the probation appraisal meeting and at the six monthly appraisal. A budget for staff, volunteers and facilitators training is agreed annually as part of the strategic planning process. Training needs are defined as those which help the individual and the organisation to achieve the stated organisational objectives. Experienced volunteers can play a valuable role in assisting with the training of new volunteers where appropriate. Training takes two main forms.

1.4.1 On the job training

On the job training is the development of skills and experience under the guidance of the supervisor or other nominated colleague at the normal place of work. This means that there is someone to turn to if the volunteer does not understand how to tackle a task. The opportunity to see an experienced worker demonstrate how to do something is a valuable way to learn. This is enhanced if that same person is there to provide ongoing guidance, coaching and support as a new skill is being learned. An opportunity to review the experience of training is offered through supervision sessions which will also include Health & Safety issues.

1.4.2 Supervisor

Each volunteer is assigned to a named member of staff who acts as their supervisor. This means that the volunteer knows who to turn to if at all unsure about some aspect of the job. A cover person needs to be appointed if the normal supervisor is to be on leave or is off sick.

1.4.3 Volunteer Supervision

At least once a month there is an opportunity for the volunteer to meet their supervisor for a confidential meeting. The purpose of this meeting is two-fold - to make sure the needs of both the volunteer and the organisation are being met. It allows the volunteer the opportunity to discuss the work, ask questions, explore difficulties, make suggestions and keep the supervisor generally informed of progress. The supervisor feeds back to the volunteer any perceptions of their performance on the job, ensures that the work is being done to a high standard and that the volunteer's needs are being met appropriately. Training courses are prepared for and reviewed. Work for the past period is reviewed and work for the coming period is planned.

1.4.4 Review

There is a need to review by the volunteer and the supervisor the experience of the volunteer. This is done after three months for volunteers completing their probationary period, and then at six monthly or at least annual intervals. Reference is made to the Volunteer Agreement and there is an opportunity to define training needs, and agree time commitment and work goals for the next period. A review form is completed and signed by volunteer and supervisor which will be kept on file by the programme manager.

1.5 Insurance

Volunteers are covered by Discovery Initiative's volunteer insurance policy in the event of injury at work. However, Discovery Initiative is unable to accept responsibility for loss of, or damage to personal property brought onto its premises. Such items as coats, handbags or bicycles on Discovery Initiative's centres (or within vehicles) are there at the owner's risk. Arrangements can be made to lock away any valuable items.

1.6 Expenses

If out of pocket expenses are incurred in the course of work with Discovery Initiative, the coordinator will reimburse them. Where possible these items are to be cleared in advance and agreed to be legitimate expenses. For instance, the cost of a bus fare to work, but not normally the cost of a taxi, is legitimate. Discovery Initiative normally provides food while on duty free. Where purchases are made, receipts are needed.

1.7 Grievance, Discipline and Complaints

1.7.1 Grievance and discipline

Please see our grievance and disciplinary procedure.

1.7.2 Complaints

Any user of our services has the opportunity to complain about unfair treatment or dissatisfaction with some aspect of our service through the complaints procedure either verbally or in writing. If a complaint is made about a volunteer it is important that the volunteer's supervisor is notified as soon as possible. A volunteer has a right to be informed of the nature of the complaint and asked to give the supervisor their account of what happened.

1.8 Health & Safety

Our policy is to provide and maintain safe and healthy working conditions, equipment and systems of work for all our staff, volunteers and facilitators, and to provide such information, training and supervision as they need for this purpose. We also accept our responsibility for the health and safety of others who use our services or are affected by our activities.

All staff, volunteers and facilitators are expected to undertake their duties with due regard to health and safety issues and to co-operate with supervisors and coordinators in achieving a healthy and safe workplace, and to take reasonable care of themselves and others. Whenever a health or safety problem arises which cannot be rectified easily, the supervisor needs to be notified as soon as possible. Please refer to the Health & Safety Policy.

1.9 Holidays

Volunteers are entitled to take holidays, dates of which are to be negotiated in advance with the supervisor, giving as much notice as possible in order to allow for cover to be arranged for duties.

1.10 Sickness

In the event of sickness when a volunteer is expected on duty, the supervisor needs to be notified as early as possible on the first day of absence. The volunteer needs to ensure that someone makes the call on their behalf when they are not able to do so personally.

1.11 Absence

Absence without agreement or persistent poor time keeping may result in disciplinary action

1.12 Notice

In the event of Discovery Initiative terminating a volunteer agreement, normally one week's notice will be given. In the event of serious misconduct, Discovery Initiative has the right to dismiss without notice. The volunteer is expected to give the supervisor a week's notice if possible.

1.13 Reference

Volunteers are entitled to be given a reference by the supervisor or coordinator for a potential employer. It is helpful if volunteers give some warning of when a request of this kind is needed.

Signed by the Coordinator
for Discovery Initiative
– 01/03/2010