

Volunteering Policy at Community Furniture Aid

Community Furniture Aid (CFA)

Introduction

This policy sets out the broad principles for voluntary involvement in Community Furniture Aid. It is of relevance to all within Community Furniture Aid (CFA) including volunteers, staff, members, and those elected or appointed to positions of responsibility.

This policy is endorsed by The Committee of Community Furniture Aid and will be reviewed annually to ensure that it remains appropriate to the needs of Community Furniture Aid and its volunteers.

Commitment

Community Furniture Aid acknowledges that volunteers contribute in many ways, that their contribution is unique and that volunteering can benefit users of services, staff, local communities and the volunteers themselves. Community Furniture Aid values the contribution made by volunteers and is committed to involving volunteers in appropriate positions and in ways which are encouraging, supportive and which develop volunteering.

Community Furniture Aid recognises its responsibility to arrange its volunteering efficiently and sensitively so that the valuable gift of the volunteer's time is best used to the mutual advantage of all concerned.

Definition

Volunteering is an important expression of citizenship as well as an important component of democracy. Volunteers are people who are, unpaid and of their own free will, contribute their time, energy and skills to benefit the community.

Statement of values and principles

Volunteering is a legitimate and crucial activity that is supported and encouraged by Community Furniture Aid and is not intended to be a substitute for paid employment. The role of volunteers complements but does not replace the role of paid staff.

Appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that paid staff are clear about the role of volunteers, and to foster good working relationships between paid staff and volunteers if this ever becomes appropriate.

Volunteers will not be used during times of industrial action to do the work of paid staff.

The volunteer role is a gift relationship, binding only in honour, trust and mutual understanding. No enforceable obligation, contractual or otherwise, can be imposed on volunteers to attend, give or be set a minimum amount of time to carry out the tasks involved in their voluntary activity. Likewise Community Furniture Aid cannot be compelled to provide either regular tasks, payment or other benefit for any activity undertaken by the volunteer.

Although volunteers offer time freely and willingly without binding obligation, there is a presumption of mutual support and reliability. Reciprocal expectations are acknowledged – both of what Community Furniture Aid expects of volunteers and what volunteers expect of Community Furniture Aid.

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Volunteer Co-ordination

All volunteers will have a nominated member of staff or volunteer to offer guidance and advice to help the volunteer carry out tasks effectively. Volunteers will be informed of who to contact to receive support and supervision.

The nominated post holder with overall responsibility for the development of voluntary activities within the Community Furniture Aid is Mrs. Marianne Cash, Volunteer co-coordinator. This person is responsible for the management and welfare of Community Furniture Aid's volunteers.

Recruitment & Selection

Community Furniture Aid is committed to equal opportunities and believes that volunteering should be open to all regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs or offending background that does not create a risk to vulnerable groups including children. The acceptance of volunteer assistance for a particular role is made on merit, the sole selection criterion being the individual's suitability to carry out agreed tasks. Information about the volunteer not relevant to the performance of the volunteering tasks concerned will be disregarded by Community Furniture Aid in terms of recruitment and selection.

Volunteering opportunities will be widely promoted in ways that makes them accessible to all members of the community.

Volunteers who are considered unsuitable for a particular task will either be offered alternative voluntary involvement with Community Furniture Aid or referred to the nearest Volunteer Centre.

All volunteers will be asked to attend an informal interview. If the volunteer will be carrying out activities with vulnerable groups (children and/or adults) there may be other safer recruitment procedures carried out including asking a volunteer to undergo an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) check. More detailed information will be made available specific to legislative requirements and to the particular volunteer position.

Volunteers will have a clear and concise task description, which will be receive ongoing review. The task description will be prepared in conjunction with the volunteer and the designated person referred to above.

New volunteers will be properly inducted into Community Furniture Aid.

Volunteers will be properly briefed about the activities to be undertaken and given all the necessary information to enable them to perform with confidence.

Volunteers with Mental Health issues Community Furniture Aid

Have a simple strategy for mental health agreed by our governing body, managers, staff and volunteers, setting out the following:

a) Our commitment to positive mental health

We aim to be a mentally healthy workplace where mental health is talked about openly the same as physical health.

For example, we aim to :

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Display and promote information that encourages everyone to look after their mental well-being.

☒ we aim to be flexible in the workplace e.g. seating arrangements, chill out spaces to make the environment as congenial as possible

☒ We ensure that we have sufficient procedures in place for handling complaints and settling differences involving volunteers.

☒ we aim to Provide training to volunteer managers to enable them to understand, supervise and support volunteers with mental health problems.

☒ We ensure that volunteers feel part of the team and that they are not isolated.

We welcome volunteers with mental health problems

☒ We positively welcome volunteers with experience of mental health problems 'people with mental health problems are welcome to apply' can give people the encouragement they need. We ensure that policies, procedure and practices support their inclusion at CFA.

☒ We recognise It can be difficult for volunteers with mental health problems to provide references. CFA Consider carefully whether these are necessary. If they are, then be flexible about who can be a referee e.g. to include support worker, mental health professional.

☒ WE at CFA Include mental health in our risk assessments. If there any working practises that would impact badly on someone's mental health such as lone working or difficult phone calls or emails? How do we support people in these situations? What would CFA do if someone, a worker, a volunteer or a client became aggressive or abusive? Physical conditions such as alcoholism and diabetes can also cause changes such as increased aggression. Our volunteer agreement form outlines what CFA do in these situations too; in that way CFA not discriminating against someone with a mental health problem.

d) Arrangements for day to day support

CFA support those with mental health problems, CFA manage the times when someone is unable to volunteer because of their health?

☒ Regular support and supervision is helpful for volunteers generally, and particularly for volunteers who have mental health problems. One to one sessions are important, giving the volunteer the opportunity to divulge personal information should they wish. CFA can refer volunteers to BAVO to make use of a Wellness Action Plan (WAP), provided by Mind Cymru. This gives management & volunteers an idea of what to look out for so you know when someone is becoming unwell and who to contact.

CFA prepared for 'ups' and 'downs', and provide a supportive environment. Where possible, we are as flexible as possible. Volunteers with mental health problems may be taking medication which could make them drowsy at certain times of the day, nauseous or unable to concentrate for long periods at a time. Volunteers are often aware of the side effects of their medication so don't be afraid to ask and discuss their needs.

☒ CFA encourage acceptance of individuality that might sometimes include behaviour that others find unusual, such as facial tics or slurring speech often caused by medication or signs of nervousness.

☒ CFA make sure that boundaries are clear. Volunteers should know how to make a complaint, the limits of what is acceptable and what would happen if their own behaviour is unacceptable. Management make it clear of the appropriate limits to their interventions (they are not expected to be counsellors or advice givers, for example) and where to go for additional support if needed

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☒ CFA do not make assumptions about people's abilities. This is particularly important for volunteers with direct experience of mental health problems.

CFA respect confidentiality of volunteers' personal circumstances. The burden of confidentiality is placed on both the volunteer manager and volunteer.

e) Coping in a crisis

CFA is committed to ongoing training in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) or Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) or safeTALK training, so that they know what to do in a crisis.

Everybody has mental health, volunteers and people in receipt of voluntary services are no different. Most people with mental health problems are far from being a risk to the public. Very occasionally a mental health problem can cause someone to act violently or abusively but this is very rare and usually there has been a long lead-up to that person getting very ill.

Volunteering & Affect on benefits

What is recognised as volunteering?

Volunteering is recognised by Jobcentre Plus if a volunteer is placed with:

- ☒ a charity, voluntary organisation or community group
- ☒ a public-sector organisation, such as local council or hospital
- ☒ a social enterprise supporting your local community, or even
- ☒ a local business.

It's not volunteering if someone:

- ☒ helps out a family member
- ☒ is given money apart from out of pocket expenses*, or
- ☒ is under contract to do it (this does not include any 'volunteer agreement' in place).

Are benefits affected by volunteering?

In most cases benefits will not be affected by volunteering, unless:

- ☒ a volunteer receives a subsistence allowance
- ☒ a volunteer is doing what someone else would normally be paid for
- ☒ a volunteer is paid anything other than reimbursed for out of pocket expenses (this will count as income)
- ☒ a volunteer is unable to keep to the 'basic rules' for receipt of their particular benefit

Otherwise an individual can volunteer for as many hours as they like.

The basic rules

Jobseeker's Allowance – Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg)

In order to receive Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) an individual needs to be

- ☒ actively looking for paid work.
- ☒ must be free to go to an interview with 48 hours' notice.
- ☒ able to start work within one week of receiving notice.

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Volunteers must tell their JCP Work Coach if they do any volunteering. They must also inform them of any payments made, including honoraria, expenses or payments in kind such as meal vouchers. It can be useful for volunteers to have a letter from their volunteer organisation outlining the expenses or any other payments they receive, the nature of the volunteering and how they can be contacted whilst they are volunteering. A model letter is attached.

Universal Credit – Jobseeker’s Allowance Claimant Commitment

Universal Credit is being introduced in 2014 with some customer groups in Shotton. It will be gradually rolled out throughout Wales by 2017.

Under the new Universal Credit System, the Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) Claimant Commitment replaces the Jobseeker’s Agreement (JSAg) for all new JSA claimants and for those returning to JSA from the Work Programme.

This applies to claimants who are assessed as being ‘work ready’.

The claimant commitment, overseen by a JCP Work Coach, sets out daily, weekly and monthly tasks the claimant will be expected to carry out in order to find work, or in order to work towards employment. It is intended that the claimant works with their Work Coach to agree achievable goals, which are set out in a Personal Work Plan. If the claimant does not provide adequate evidence of achieving agreed goals, they may face benefit sanctions.

Volunteering may be accepted as part of a claimant’s work search activity, as agreed with the Work Coach. What is deemed to be appropriate volunteering activity will be considered on a case by case basis as part of the conversation between the claimant and their Work Coach. It will also be important for a volunteer to discuss with their Work coach what, if any, evidence of their volunteering is required.

More clarification concerning volunteering as a part of the JSA Claimant commitment should become available as the new scheme is rolled out.

Other Benefits

For information on volunteering and other specific benefits, see the DWP leaflet Volunteering while getting benefits.

Volunteer expenses and welfare benefits

It is recognised good practice to reimburse volunteers for their out of pocket expenses. If this is the only payment made to volunteers, and if receipts are kept as evidence, then expenses payments should not affect benefit payments.

It is acceptable for volunteers to be paid ‘up front’ for anticipated expenditure.

See Information sheet 4.13 for more on Volunteer expenses.

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Getting new volunteers started

Volunteers who are on benefits, who wish to volunteer with your organisations, should be encouraged to contact their JCP Work Coach to discuss this. It will be helpful if they take with them a letter from you, such as the one below.

Problems

If you think that a volunteer's case has not been dealt with fairly or they are experiencing problems with benefits, please contact your local volunteer centre or WCVA Helpdesk on 0800 2888 329.

In summary:

- ☐ Develop a good relationship with your local Jobcentre Plus so they understand the nature of your volunteering.
- ☐ Raise the issue of benefits with current and new volunteers.
- ☐ Encourage volunteers to raise the issue with their Work coach.
- ☐ Be aware of the possible effects of expenses payments on benefits

Training & Development

All volunteers will be made aware of and have access to all Community Furniture Aid's relevant policies, including those relating to volunteering, health & safety, safeguarding vulnerable groups and equal opportunities.

The development of training and support for volunteers is a high priority for Community Furniture Aid in order to equip them with the necessary information and skills to carry out their tasks. It will be the responsibility of the designated person referred to above to see that this training is provided. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to attend relevant training.

Training in the supervision of volunteers will be provided for all those who have direct responsibility for volunteers.

Support, Supervision and Recognition

Volunteers will have open access to management whom they can take their volunteering concerns and seek guidance and support.

Volunteers will have access to regular support and supervision. This will enable both the volunteer and the supervisor to identify, monitor and evaluate the volunteer's involvement, recognise achievements and identify individual training needs, including that relevant to their particular volunteering role and to their wider personal development. The frequency, duration and format of these sessions will be negotiated between the volunteer and the management referred to above.

Volunteers will be given the opportunity, where relevant, to share their views and opinions with Community Furniture Aid's wider staff, at staff meetings etc.

A process will be developed in order to give formal recognition of the contribution of Community Furniture Aid's volunteers (e.g. internal awards, articles in newspapers and newsletters, thank you letters etc.) or outline any existing process.

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Expenses

Community Furniture Aid recognises that the reimbursement of expenses incurred in travelling to and from the place of volunteering or in the course of volunteering is important from an equal opportunities point of view. This is necessary to ensure that all individuals have access to voluntary opportunities.

Community Furniture Aid's volunteers are able to claim reasonable out of pocket expenses, subject to the production of receipts as evidence of the expenditure. Bus & train fares will be reimbursed only if volunteers are logged in for that day at CFA. Fuel costs will be reimbursed only when A volunteer expense form is completed stating mileage name of volunteer, purpose for claim and signed by the volunteer. These forms are available from CFA secretary on request

What can be reclaimed from Community Furniture Aid and the calculation of expenses will be explained to the volunteer before they start any activity likely to give rise to expenses. These calculations are based on BAVO guidelines.

Community Furniture Aid has a consistent approach to the reimbursement of expenses which are the same for volunteers, staff, etc. and are as approved by the Inland Revenue.

It is the responsibility of the designated person referred to above to make volunteers aware of the procedure for the reimbursement of expenses.

Expenses, tax and benefits

HM Revenue and Customs and the Department of Work and Pensions recognise the following as being legitimate expenses for volunteers:

- ☑ travel to and from the place where the volunteering activity takes place
- ☑ travel during the course of volunteering
- ☑ meals taken during the course of volunteering
- ☑ postage and telephone costs
- ☑ care of children and other dependants during the period of voluntary work
- ☑ the cost of protective or special clothing

Expenses paid to volunteers should be the actual costs incurred, supported by receipts wherever possible.

Mileage payments should be at a 'reasonable' rate - for example within the HM Revenue and Customs limits.

These are set at a level to take into account depreciation and other running costs as well as fuel.

HM Revenue and Customs **approved mileage rates** (revised in 2011-2012) are

Cars and vans – 45p per mile for the first 10,000 miles, 25p per mile over 10,000.

Motorcycles – 24p per mile.

Bicycles – 20p per mile.

An additional 5p per mile per passenger is allowable

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Receipts, train or bus tickets should be provided as evidence of expenditure. You may want to put sensible limits on some expenses, to prevent misunderstandings, or embarrassment if you are presented with unaffordable receipts for expenditure. Your limit will depend on local costs and your financial position. It should be sufficient to allow volunteers to have a hot snack and drink– up to £5 is certainly reasonable. It is also reasonable to ask volunteers to use the cheapest reasonable form of public transport. It may be necessary for some volunteers to take taxis – because of disability, for example, or to be accompanied by a support worker or carer. It is worth considering individual needs such as these, when you are estimating your budget and considering your expenses policy.

Generally it is advisable to aim for parity between expenses rates for staff and for volunteers. There would be little justification, for example, in adopting different mileage rates for staff and volunteers within the same organisation

An expenses policy might include:

- ☐ Exactly what expenses can and cannot be claimed, and at what rate.
- ☐ What can and cannot be claimed on behalf of a client where the volunteering includes befriending, visiting or trips out to social activities.
- ☐ The procedure for claiming, i.e. when, on which forms and what records or receipts are needed to accompany a claim.
- ☐ What happens after a claim is made, and the method of payment – cash, cheque, into a bank account.
- ☐ What will happen if a fraudulent expense claim is made.
- ☐ How you will support volunteers who may need help with completing forms.

Volunteers should not be given fixed rate payments to cover their expenses e.g. a lunch allowance since expenses must be for actual out of pocket expenditure.

Do not be tempted to pay more than is actually incurred. This could jeopardise any benefits payments volunteers receive, possibly incurring benefit sanctions.

Expenses payments that **exceed** volunteers' actual costs may be regarded as a payment in return for 'work' they have carried out. This could be regarded (by a tribunal or similar body), as a contractual relationship, giving the volunteers employment rights – including the national minimum wage.

Some organisations make payments to volunteers as 'honoraria'. While the HM Revenue and Customs does accept genuine one-off payments as non-taxable gifts, such payments are likely to affect benefits. If the honorarium is in any way expected it may also be regarded as a payment for services, affecting the legal status of the volunteers.

An honorarium should be a genuine one-off 'thank you' payment. If it is expected, or regularly given it would be treated as any other taxable income.

Expenses and Gift Aid

If a volunteer chooses **not** to claim their expense entitlement, Gift Aid cannot be claimed on this amount.

However, the volunteer may claim expenses and choose to repay this as Gift Aid.

The usual rules of Gift Aid will apply and there should be evidence of a clear transaction showing a monetary gift from the volunteer to the organisation

Expenses policy

CFA volunteer policy on expenses will ensure your volunteers know what their entitlement to expenses is and the procedures for claiming them.

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Insurance

Community Furniture Aid's liability insurance policies include the activities of volunteers and liability towards them.

Community Furniture Aid does not insure the volunteer's personal possessions against loss or damage

Confidentiality

Community Furniture Aid will advise the volunteer on its confidentiality policy and procedures, where relevant. This would include those relating to personal information held by Community Furniture Aid relating to the volunteer.

Settling Differences

Community Furniture Aid aims to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. Community Furniture Aid seeks to ensure that volunteers' views are heard, noted and acted upon promptly and aim for a positive and amicable solution based on Community Furniture Aid's guidelines for settling differences.

The Management, is responsible for handling problems regarding volunteer complaints or conduct and these should be referred to him/her. In the event of a problem, all relevant facts should be obtained as quickly as possible. Support will be provided by Community Furniture Aid to the volunteer while it endeavours to resolve the problem in an informal manner. If an informal resolution proves impossible, Community Furniture Aid's wider grievance or complaints policies and procedures (which include volunteers) will be referred to. If a volunteer's behavior is repeatedly or seriously unacceptable, they may be asked to change their role, or to leave Community Furniture Aid

Volunteers have to sign the Volunteer agreement form which covers these matters more fully.

Rights and Responsibilities

Community Furniture Aid recognises the rights of volunteers to:

- know what is (and what is not) expected of them
- have adequate support in their volunteering
- receive appreciation
- volunteer in a safe environment
- be insured
- know their rights and responsibilities if something goes wrong
- receive relevant out-of-pocket expenses
- receive appropriate training
- be free from discrimination
- be offered the opportunity for personal development

Community Furniture Aid expects volunteers to:

- be reliable
- be honest
- respect confidentiality

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make the most of training and support opportunities
carry out tasks in a way that reflects the aims and values of Community Furniture Aid
carry out tasks within agreed guidelines
respect the work of Community Furniture Aid and not bring it into disrepute
comply with Community Furniture Aid's policies.

Volunteers may be offered the option of purchasing items of stock at a competitive rate, if not required for our core pack.

In the event of theft of any items from Community Furniture Aid (CFA) by a Volunteer

Volunteers will be made aware that all items donated to CFA become the legal property of the Charity CFA at the point of donation. All items Must be taken into stock ant the storage unit of CFA . Any volunteer found to have taken items donated to Community Furniture Aid without express permission of the management or payment having been made will be reported for theft to the relevant authorities.

Approved and Accepted by Committee on

Policy Approved by Chairperson.....

Date:

Review Date.....

Updated by M Cash Secretary CFA 14/7/2016