

Voluntary and Community Action

Dealing with Volunteer Problems

Volunteering Information Sheet No.10

March 2009

Sometimes things can go wrong within a volunteer programme. This information sheet explains how to deal with these problems and the importance of having a 'problem solving procedure' in place for issues that cannot be dealt with informally.

Volunteering Information Sheets

The Volunteer Centre has produced a series of Information Sheets on:

- setting up and managing a volunteer programme
- recruitment and development of volunteers and trustees.



They are available to download from our website or by contacting the Volunteer Centre (details on back page).

Dealing With Problems

While the involvement of volunteers is usually a positive experience for everyone involved, it is important to be aware that sometimes things can go wrong within a volunteer programme, and you may find that a volunteer has a complaint about another volunteer, a member of staff or the organisation itself. You may also find that a volunteer's performance has declined, or that someone else has complained about a volunteer's work, attitude or conduct.

In order to avoid the creation of a contract with volunteers giving them access to some or all employment rights, it is absolutely essential to clearly distinguish between the grievance and disciplinary procedures provided for paid staff and procedures for volunteers. Separate policies for staff and volunteers are essential.

Most 'problems' are actually issues that can be resolved informally through supervision. Often volunteers may be unaware that they are doing anything wrong. This is why it is so vital to have adequate supervision and regular supervision meetings. No one can be expected to improve or change the way the work if an issue has

not been brought to their attention. The problem may have occurred because the volunteer may have training needs that have not been addressed.

You may find that a volunteer's performance has declined, perhaps the volunteer needs a change of role. They may be bored in their current one, or feel underused. Are there any other suitable positions in the organisation?

If a volunteer is not suited to the role they are given, or to any others at your organisation, remember that they may have much to offer a different organisation. Make sure that they are aware of this, and refer them to Volunteer Centre Central Bedfordshire who may be able to signpost them to a more suitable role in a different organisation that could make use of their skills.

In other cases, volunteers may feel they have been poorly treated in some way. Again, it is best if such issues can be dealt with through supervision meetings, then any grievances can be aired at an early stage.

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Problem Solving Procedure

Some issues cannot be resolved informally, which is why it is important to have a problem solving procedure in place. Such procedures are useful even if you never have to use them.

It is generally better to have procedures for volunteers that differ from those covering your paid employees. Procedures for volunteers should be as clear and understandable as possible. There should be a well-defined route for complaints to be taken up.

Initial complaints should probably go to the Volunteer Manager. If the matter is not resolved at this stage, then both parties should have the option to refer to a named person in a more senior position in the organisation.

Each organisation will need to write its own problem solving procedure to suit its individual situation, but care should be taken to make the process as clear as possible, with everything put in writing and definite timescales given for dealing with the issue. Volunteers should have the option of being accompanied by a colleague, friend or union representative in any meetings as part of this process.

All complaints should be resolved openly, fairly and quickly to:

- protect your volunteers
- minimise any disruption to your staff, service users and other volunteers
- demonstrate that your organisation respects its volunteers
- protect the reputation of your organisation

Lastly, there should be a right of appeal. It is when volunteers feel that there has been no form of due process that they feel most aggrieved.

Further Information and Resources

For more information or assistance in developing Problem Solving Procedures contact the Development Officer at Voluntary and Community Action or refer to the following resources:

- The Good Practice Guide for Everyone who Works with Volunteers, K Bowgett, K Dickie and M Restall, Volunteering England, 2nd Edition, 2002.
- Volunteer England Website, www.volunteering.org.uk

THERE MUST BE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE GRIEVANCE AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES PROVIDED FOR PAID STAFF AND PROCEDURES USED FOR VOLUNTEERS.



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How can the Volunteer Centre help?

If you are a voluntary organisation or community group operating in southern Bedfordshire, we can help by:

- promoting your volunteering opportunities and signposting volunteers to your organisation
- providing information, guidance and training in all aspects of good practice and volunteer management.

Please give us a call on 01525 850559 or email volunteer@action-centralbeds.org.uk to arrange a meeting.