



**Volunteer** Centre

Central Bedfordshire

# So you want to volunteer?

**Voluntary and Community Action**

# Welcome



**The Volunteer Centre can help you find out about volunteering opportunities in your area.**

Our Advisers can provide you with free information and guidance on any aspect of volunteering: on-line, by email, by phone or through a confidential and informal chat.

Put simply, volunteering is about choosing to give some of your time (unpaid) to benefit the environment or people in the community (other than, or in addition to, close relatives) ... yet it's a whole lot more than that!

Volunteering can be a highly rewarding and enjoyable experience. That's why our Advisers take the time to discuss your interests, likes and dislikes, and availability before suggesting some opportunities that might appeal to you.

We work in partnership with local volunteer-involving organisations to provide a wide range of interesting and rewarding volunteering opportunities.

We are committed to promoting equality and diversity and to challenging barriers to volunteering.

We offer impartial advice and guidance to all members of the community seeking to volunteer and do not make judgements on a volunteer's suitability for a role.

**The information included in this booklet will help you to identify the right opportunity for you.**

# Making the most of volunteering

**Volunteering is a great way to meet new people, develop your personal interests, learn new skills, improve self-confidence or help you get into work.**

You could assist a local voluntary organisation, community group, club or society; alternatively, you could help in a statutory agency, such as a school, hospital or prison. If you feel strongly about a particular issue, what about helping individuals or a local group to get their voice heard?

Volunteering offers something for everyone, whatever your skills, background or experience. There are many reasons why people volunteer.

## Volunteering can be a great way to:

- ✓ share skills
- ✓ help the community
- ✓ develop a personal interest
- ✓ improve your self-confidence
- ✓ gain useful experience
- ✓ learn new skills
- ✓ access training and qualifications
- ✓ relieve boredom
- ✓ enhance your CV
- ✓ get some work experience
- ✓ make friends and enjoy yourself
- ✓ get out and about

*“There’s nothing wrong with self-interested motivation! Whether you’re wanting to impress your boss, try out new skills or simply to escape from the kids for an hour or two.”*



You'll be **amazed** at what you can do!

# What motivates you?

**Whether you are new to volunteering or have a lot of experience, it is worth spending some time thinking about your own interests, needs and motivations.**

Your reasons for volunteering will influence the type of role and organisation you choose. Some volunteers feel very strongly about a particular issue or cause and want to help change things. Others want to improve things in their local community or environment, or may want to use or develop their skills.

**In thinking about what kind of volunteering is right for you, consider ...**

- why you would like to volunteer?
- what you would like to get from your volunteering?
- whether you have particular skills that you want to share or use for the benefit of others?
- whether you want to volunteer with something related to your hobbies and interests?
- whether you want to volunteer for a particular cause or organisation, e.g. a cancer charity, an environmental organisation, or supporting people with a disability or health condition?
- whether you have had a previous involvement with an organisation that you would like to support?

Volunteering can be a great way to gain experience for paid work. Volunteering should not affect your entitlement to state benefits; ask your Volunteering Adviser for more information.

Whatever your skills, background or experience, volunteering offers something for everyone. With more than 500 opportunities across Central Bedfordshire, we're sure you'll find something that you will enjoy.

# When do you want to volunteer?

You can volunteer on any day of the week, daytime or evening, depending on what you want to do. How much time you volunteer for is up to you. Some volunteering requires a regular weekly commitment; some only take an hour or two a month. There's also a trend towards short-term volunteering requiring a limited commitment.

Don't be put off volunteering because you work full-time. Many organisations would love to find volunteers who are available evenings, nights and/or weekends. It is important, however, to check with any organisation you are interested in volunteering for what time commitment they have in mind.

Deciding how much time you are able and prepared to commit to volunteering will help determine where you volunteer.

-  Will you be able to offer one hour a week or twenty?
-  Can you give time every week, once a month or only a couple of times a year?
-  Are there certain days/evenings/times you would be available, or would prefer, to volunteer?
-  Are you looking for a long-term commitment or would you prefer a short-term project (such as a one-off event or a campaign)?

## Top Tip

*Be realistic about the amount of time you can give, it is always better to increase your involvement later on if you want to.*

**Short on time?** Ask our Advisers about 'time flexible' opportunities where you choose to give as much or as little time as you wish.

Some opportunities require a specific level of commitment, others may be more flexible. As a general rule, the more training and supervision you receive from an organisation, the greater the commitment they'll ask from you.

Some opportunities may not be available immediately as volunteers need to undergo training or await criminal records checks. Consider whether you are happy to undergo checks or training for particular roles.

# What kind of volunteering do you want to do?

**There are all kinds of volunteering opportunities available locally ... here are just a few examples of the type of activities and causes you can get involved in:**

- Accounting
- Administration
- Advice work
- Advocacy
- Animal welfare
- Befriending
- Caring
- Charity shops
- Committee work
- Conservation
- Disability
- Driving
- Events
- Fundraising
- Gardening
- Heritage
- Homelessness
- IT support
- Mentoring
- Social media
- Sport
- Teaching and training
- Telephone help lines
- Women's groups

Opportunities are available locally and throughout Central Bedfordshire. Some opportunities will be close to home while others may be further afield so you may need to consider transport and access issues.

- How far are you prepared to travel?
- If you don't have your own transport, can you walk to it or get a bus?

**Transport or mobility difficulties?** Ask about home-based opportunities where you can do all/most of your volunteering from home.

**Want to volunteer with your family or friends?** Some volunteering can be done in groups, such as environmental projects or local campaigns, so two or more people could easily join together.

Our Volunteering Advisers can help guide you through the many opportunities available. This is your chance to ask questions about the organisations and find out more about each opportunity.

# What happens next?

**You can search, enquire and apply for local volunteering opportunities on-line at [www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org) or meet with one of our Volunteering Advisers for a free, confidential and informal chat. Our Advisers can help you:**

- explore your interests and motivations for volunteering
- search and select information from over 500 local volunteering opportunities
- get in contact with local volunteer-involving organisations and groups

Our Volunteering Advisers will help you to match your skills, interests, experience and availability with the opportunities that best suit you. There is something for everyone ... wherever you live ... whatever your age, skills, interests or experience. You'll be amazed at what you can do!

The recruitment process for volunteers varies depending on the organisation and the role you want to take up; it is normally informal and may include any of the following:

- application form
- trial period
- interview
- references
- informal discussion
- criminal records check

Many organisations use role descriptions and person specifications to outline what is involved. This enables volunteers to check that they have the skills and experience required for a particular role; organisations use them to attract volunteers who are the most suited to a particular role.

Remember, the recruitment process is as much about you deciding whether you like an organisation as it is about them accepting you as a volunteer. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Many organisations cover out-of-pocket expenses that arise from volunteering, such as travel expenses, meals while volunteering, postage and telephone costs (if volunteering from home). You may want to ask about expenses before starting your volunteering.

*"I want to contribute to something I believe in."*

# How to contact us

**To find out more about how we can help you find the right volunteering opportunity, drop in for a chat or contact us to arrange an informal meeting.**

Our offices are open to the public between Monday and Friday from 9.30am until 3.00pm and at other times by appointment. You can contact us by telephone, email or post, or visit our website.

We can also arrange to meet you at a venue closer to where you live or work if you cannot get to Leighton Buzzard or to one of our Volunteer Information Points to see us (*call us or see our website for details*).

**Telephone:** 01525 850559

**Email:** [volunteer@action-centralbeds.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@action-centralbeds.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.action-centralbeds.org.uk](http://www.action-centralbeds.org.uk)  
[www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org)  
(*search for Volunteer Centre Central Bedfordshire*)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/VCCentralBeds](https://facebook.com/VCCentralBeds)

**Address:** Voluntary and Community Action  
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Bedfordshire LU7 1DA

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