

Voluntary and Community Action

Volunteer Risk Assessments

Volunteering Information Sheet No. 3

March 2009

Risk assessment involves identifying all things which could cause harm to people. Organisations have a duty of care towards their volunteers, so assessing risk allows you to know where potential problems and dangers lie, enabling you to take measures to prevent harm.

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).

Risk assessment is a way of identifying and controlling the hazards that exist in an organisation's activities. Two main elements combine to form the basis of a risk assessment exercise:

- a hazard is anything that has the potential to cause harm. This might be something like a faulty electrical socket
- risk is the likelihood of the hazard causing harm and the degree of harm it could cause – such as an electric shock, which could lead to a fatality.

Organisations have a duty of care towards their volunteers. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 also place a duty on employers to assess risk to those who may be affected by their activities, which would include volunteers.

Assessing risk requires detailed knowledge of the activities and working practices normally only possessed by the people who actually do the work/role. For this reason, risk assessment should always involve employees and volunteers, and should not be left to people who are not involved in the work/role on a day-to-day basis.

Look for the Hazards

A hazard is anything that could cause injury or damage. Think about all your organisation's activities and concentrate on significant hazards that could affect or cause serious harm to anybody. Think about activities that occur at your normal meeting place and also away from it, for example on trips or in people's homes. Think about those hazards that affect your members/service users in particular.

Decide who might be Harmed and How

Think of your committee members, staff, volunteers, members/service users and members of the public that come into contact with your organisation. What hazards might they each experience?

Look at Each Hazard in Turn and Decide what Risk it Poses

Risk is the likelihood of the hazard causing harm. Decide if the existing steps taken to prevent or reduce harm are adequate or if more should be done. Check if you have done all the things the law says you should. Have you carried out recommended good practice guidelines? Is there anything else

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that you could do that is reasonably practicable to keep people safe?

Record your Findings

Draw up an action list of what needs to be done to remove or reduce the risk of an accident or incident occurring to an acceptable level for each significant hazard. The model Health and Safety Risk Assessment Record may be helpful (you can obtain a copy from Voluntary and Community Action). Having done all you can, decide for each hazard whether the remaining risk is high, medium or low. Records of risk assessments should be kept.

Review your Assessment and Change if Necessary

If you change your activities or ways of doing things at any time then you may introduce new significant hazards or increase the level of risk of existing ones. You will therefore need to carry out further risk assessments to take account of these changes.

Further Information and Resources

For further information on understanding risk assessments contact the Development Officer at Voluntary and Community Action or review 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
- Health and Safety Executive website www.hse.gov.uk



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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.