

# INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS AS VOLUNTEERS:

guidance for resettlement organisations

This guidance aims to help resettlement organisations to understand and promote volunteering as a positive choice for young people with offending histories.



*Encouraging young people to consider volunteering is about widening their horizons; it's about helping them to dream in colour again*

# WHAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE?

*It's about making them believe in themselves...*

**Resettlement practitioner**

*The voluntary sector is very forgiving, very aware of people's differences and diversities. It's a great way of spreading your wings and getting the support you need at the right time.*

**Volunteer co-ordinator**

*There is a hugely diverse range of volunteering opportunities available. Lots of different organisations involve volunteers, ranging from small community groups, to hospitals, national charities, arts organisations, museums and libraries.*

It's often assumed that a young person with experience of the criminal justice system is most suited to volunteering with other ex-offenders or in other criminal justice settings. While this may be valuable for some, volunteering **outside** the criminal justice system may be an opportunity for young people to experience new things.

Consider what cause or issue they may be passionate about or have an interest in and what they want to gain from the experience.

## OVERCOMING RELUCTANCE TO VOLUNTEER

It is important that young people make their own choices about whether they want to volunteer or not. Volunteering is about **choosing** to give your time: they should not feel coerced. Some young people may have had to do unpaid work as part of a sentence; it's important that they see volunteering as something entirely separate from this.

# OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

## EXPERIENCE

It may be helpful to discuss the young people's previous experiences of volunteering and why they might think about doing it. Highlight what potential benefits it could have for them as well as the organisation they would volunteer for. You may want to refer to the guidance in this series for young people if they haven't done any volunteering before.

[www.ivr.org.uk/ivr-projects/ivr-current-projects/ex-offenders-and-volunteering](http://www.ivr.org.uk/ivr-projects/ivr-current-projects/ex-offenders-and-volunteering)

Volunteer-involving organisations should be willing to discuss things like potential roles available and how to get involved.

## FINANCIAL BARRIERS

It is good practice for organisations which involve volunteers to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses that people incur whilst volunteering, eg travel.

## ARE THEY READY?

- Do they feel that that volunteering is something they want to do?
- Do they feel it's a good next step for them?
- Have they found a role they are interested in?
- Have they discussed the role with the organisation they will be volunteering with or visited it? Have they done a taster session or trial if that's possible?
- Have you managed expectations? Some volunteering roles are popular and not everyone who applies will get a place. For most roles there is also a recruitment procedure to go through. You may be able to help the young person prepare their application.

# WORKING WITH VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

***Most organisations that involve volunteers will be happy to liaise with you to help find the right volunteering opportunities for the young people you work with.***

You may find that some organisations have misconceptions about ex-offenders. A good way to deal with this is to highlight the many positive aspects of involving young people with offending histories as volunteers.

These include:

- They have a great deal to offer in terms of energy, commitment, experience and skills.
- They can be particularly motivated and hard-working volunteers, keen to make a fresh start and often inspired to 'give something back'.
- It's an opportunity for the organisation to break down barriers, increasing the diversity of their volunteer base and helping to encourage the social inclusion of ex-offenders and others in the local community.

Your local Volunteer Centre can inform you about what opportunities are available locally.

Find your local Volunteer Centre here

[www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/i-want-to-volunteer](http://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/i-want-to-volunteer)

# FINDING SUITABLE ROLES OR OPPORTUNITIES

***We want to work with the young people to help them identify what they want to focus on, what they need, what they want to achieve.***

**Volunteer co-ordinator**

Getting the right role is crucial to ensuring young people's initial experience of volunteering is enjoyable and worthwhile. It is important that they feel supported to make their own choices about the roles that appeal to them and their interests. You should discuss what they would like to do, what skills and experience they feel they have to offer and what they want to gain from volunteering.

Practical considerations such as when they are available to volunteer, how often and in what location will also need to be thought through.

## JULIE'S STORY

Julie is in her early 20s. A few years ago she was homeless, and it was then that she was convicted of theft.

***My reasons for volunteering here were quite personal. It's not like "I need work experience", it was more like "I want to give something back".***

Volunteering has given Julie self-confidence, developed her team-working skills and helped her get into college. Today she has paid work in the organisation she volunteered for.

# CAN YOUR ORGANISATION OFFER ONGOING SUPPORT TO YOUNG PEOPLE WHEN THEY ARE VOLUNTEERING?

*Young people with criminal convictions may have complex needs and be vulnerable and may require extra support to begin volunteering. You may wish to check if the organisation they are volunteering for is aware of their needs and can provide adequate support.*

Also think about what ongoing support you can provide after they have started volunteering.

Ongoing support will ensure the young people have a chance to discuss and address any issues or concerns with someone independent of the organisation they are volunteering for and can share positive aspects of their experience.

**Praise and encouragement** in the role will be important to young people. It will partly be the responsibility of the organisation they are volunteering for to ensure that their contribution is recognised, but they may also need encouragement from you.

It may be useful to find a way to **record and recognise** what achievements and skills they gain through volunteering. This will be useful when they are seeking future employment, education or training. You could also check whether they can obtain references from the organisation or if the organisation offers certificates or awards to its volunteers.

**Disclosure and Barring Service (previously CRB)** checks aren't required for every role and the prospect of completing a check might be off-putting for potential volunteers. Organisations involving volunteers should avoid completing DBS checks when it is not appropriate and recognise that DBS checks are only one element of safeguarding. The processes put in place should be proportionate to the volunteering role and the context in which it is taking place. Organisations should also consider carefully whether the offences someone has committed in the past are relevant to the voluntary role they will be undertaking.

*For more information you can visit the DBS website and the NCVO information sheet.*

[www.knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers/keeping/safeguarding-volunteers](http://www.knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers/keeping/safeguarding-volunteers)

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about)

**How volunteering will affect benefits** may be a concern, but people claiming state benefits can volunteer as long as they keep to the rules for getting them. It is important that people receiving benefits speak to their advisor before starting to volunteer. Volunteers receiving benefits can still be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses incurred whilst volunteering.

*You can find more information from the Department for Work and Pensions*

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/volunteering-while-getting-benefits-leaflet](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/volunteering-while-getting-benefits-leaflet)

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Other briefings in this series are guidance for:

- Young people
- Volunteer-involving organisations

Available at [www.ivr.org.uk/ivr-projects/ivr-current-projects/ex-offenders-and-volunteering](http://www.ivr.org.uk/ivr-projects/ivr-current-projects/ex-offenders-and-volunteering)

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