

## Volunteer Support, Supervision and Recognition Policy

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This document describes the NDCS policy for the support, supervision and recognition of volunteers and is in 3 parts

- Part 1 – Volunteer support, supervision
- Part 2 – Volunteer recognition
- Part 3 – References for NDCS Volunteers

The policy should be read in conjunction with supporting policies and guidance documents referred to throughout the document.

Details of volunteer support, supervision and recognition, including problem solving, are recorded, managed and stored securely in accordance with the NDCS Data Protection policy using our CRM database (VIKI). A volunteer may request a copy of any information held on their record at any time.

## Part 1 – Volunteer support and supervision

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy describes the NDCS approach to the support and supervision of volunteers.
- 1.2 The National Deaf Children's Society recognises the value volunteers bring to the work of the organisation. We need to ensure that high quality services are provided to service users and volunteers are successful in their roles.
- 1.3 We are committed to providing all volunteers with regular support and supervision to enable them to:
  - a) develop their skills
  - b) learn from their experience
  - c) carry out their role effectively
- 1.4 All volunteers are offered both formal and informal support and supervision. This is integrated into the volunteering experience and continues throughout the period of volunteering. Providing good quality support and supervision demonstrates NDCS's commitment to volunteers and the services they support, and helps volunteers develop and feel motivated, valued and part of the organisation.

### 2. Principles

- 2.1 Regular support and supervision is essential for volunteers to:
  - a) discuss issues, ideas, problems and concerns
  - b) receive feedback on their contributions to the organisation
  - c) feel part of the wider team and combat the isolation of some roles
  - d) feel valued, accepted and motivated
  - e) enable their development and enhance their skills and knowledge
  - f) identify their learning and development needs
  - g) consider possible progression within the organisation
- 2.2 Regular support and supervision allows us to:
  - a) demonstrate our commitment to volunteers
  - b) ensure volunteers are satisfied with their roles and are motivated
  - c) ensure the volunteer role is being undertaken to the required standard
  - d) ensure NDCS policies and procedures are being followed
  - e) identify volunteers' aspirations and motivations
  - f) avoid problems or solve any problems that may arise
  - g) evaluate the effectiveness of our volunteer management practice
  - h) sustain a well-motivated volunteer workforce that feels valued, respected and committed to the organisation and provides high quality services to service users

2.3 Without support, many volunteers may have difficulty in undertaking their role or getting fulfilment from their involvement with us. With little encouragement or direction about their contributions, volunteers will soon feel demotivated and will probably leave. This is a waste of resources and may cause damage to our reputation.

### **3. Supporting and supervising volunteers**

3.1 Support and supervision may be provided in different ways depending on the needs of the organisation and volunteer. We will consider the needs of the individual as well as the role being undertaken. Approaches may vary during the time someone volunteers with us and a combination of methods may be used.

3.2 We recognise that:

- a) Support is usually for the benefit of the individual
- b) Supervision is usually for the benefit of the organisation

3.3 All volunteers are allocated a named supervisor who is responsible for providing support and guidance on a day-to-day basis. In their absence, another named member of staff should be available.

3.4 Informal support is provided through personal contact on a day-to-day basis. This may include:

- a) greeting and welcoming volunteers
- b) providing regular praise and thanks
- c) providing immediate feedback
- d) working alongside volunteers
- e) providing coaching and encouragement, especially in the early stages of a new role or when problems have been identified
- f) making regular, frequent contact by phone, text, Skype or email as appropriate

3.5 Volunteers who are involved with us on a regular basis receive scheduled support and supervision sessions held at regular intervals appropriate to their role.

3.6 Scheduled support and supervision sessions are provided to:

- a) discuss how the volunteer is performing in their role
- b) recognise successes, achievements and positive progression
- c) identify any development needs
- d) discuss any issues or concerns
- e) discuss plans or aspirations

3.7 Volunteers undertaking short, one-off opportunities receive support and supervision during and at the end of their involvement with us.

- 3.8 Peer-to-peer support may be provided by a competent volunteer undertaking the same or a similar role who is available and able to support volunteers new to the organisation or to a new role. This can be informally (eg. one-to-one, in pairs or in small groups) or more formally as mentors or buddies. However, where this is done, it is important to identify the support, knowledge and skills the experienced volunteer needs to carry out the support role.
- 3.9 Where groups of volunteers carry out a similar role or are involved in a specific activity, regular group sessions may be arranged as a useful, cost effective way to provide support and supervision.
- 3.10 Group sessions (organised electronically or in person) are provided to:
- a) discuss common issues and concerns
  - b) facilitated group learning and development
  - c) share ideas and suggestions
  - d) present information and updates
  - e) build relationships and peer support
- 3.11 Support and supervision sessions are the best way to make sure volunteers give and receive feedback as they provide an opportunity for an open and honest two-way conversation. It is an opportunity to talk in a confidential setting and for the supervisor to listen to and discuss the wants, needs and concerns of the volunteer.
- 3.12 Feedback provided to the volunteer should be clear, honest and competence-based. It should balance positive feedback and praise for achievements with any specific areas of concern or areas for development. Where there are problems with performance or behaviour these should be raised and presented as a shared problem and discussed to agree ways to address any issues<sup>1</sup>.
- 3.13 We are committed to providing positive and rewarding experiences for volunteers. However, we realise problems do occur occasionally and we are committed to making sure a transparent process is available to resolve any issue. We aim to resolve all problems openly, fairly and quickly to:
- a) Protect deaf children, young people and families
  - b) Protect the volunteer and anyone else involved
  - c) Minimise any disruption to other volunteers, service users or staff
  - d) Demonstrate we respect our volunteers
  - e) Protect the reputation of the organisation
- 3.14 See the NDCS Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure for details of how we deal with issues that are raised about or by a volunteer.
- 3.15 Details of volunteer support and supervision, including problem solving, are recorded and managed using our CRM database (VIKI).

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<sup>1</sup> See the Volunteer Problem-Solving Procedure for further guidance

## Part 2 – Volunteer recognition

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The National Deaf Children's Society greatly values and respects the wide-ranging contributions made by volunteers to the work of the organisation. Their time, commitment and support are vital in delivering the organisation's services and support for deaf children, young people and their families.
- 1.2 We are committed to ensuring every volunteer feels appreciated and respected. We recognise and appreciate the many skills and talents as well as the enthusiasm that volunteers bring to their role.
- 1.3 We strive to ensure that all volunteers feel important to the organisation and want them to feel involved, welcome and part of the team.

### 2. Recognising volunteer contributions

- 2.1 We know volunteers offer their time and skills for a variety of reasons and therefore want to recognise individual contributions in different ways. This may include:
  - a) informal and formal recognition
  - b) personal recognition that is specific to an individual's needs and wants
  - c) acknowledgement of the learning, skills and experience volunteers have gained
  - d) helping volunteers develop and take on additional or expanded responsibilities
  - e) offering learning and development opportunities which may include accredited training
  - f) involving volunteers in relevant meetings and working groups
  - g) consulting volunteers on decisions that affect them
  - h) organising volunteer events
  - i) providing certificates or awards
  - j) celebrating NDCS Volunteers as part of external volunteer initiatives (eg. Volunteer Week)<sup>2</sup>
  - k) supporting volunteers who wish to maintain records of their experiences to help with future career opportunities, both paid and voluntary
  - l) providing references to volunteers where appropriate (see Part 3 below)
- 2.2 To identify appropriate ways of recognising volunteer contributions and achievement, we will:
  - a) identify the personal motivations of each volunteer
  - b) maintain accurate volunteer records such as time, contribution and achievements
  - c) develop volunteer award schemes
  - d) maintain up-to-date details of external volunteer initiatives

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<sup>2</sup> For further information see Guidance on External Volunteering Initiatives

- e) identify and plan for forthcoming events and awards so that timely nominations are made
- f) allocate resources to recognition activities
- g) ensure our recognition activities are timely and make best use of NDCS resources

2.3 In all instances any volunteer recognition activity should not include monetary gifts or rewards. Any personal financial gain to a volunteer could be judged as income and risks establishing an employment relationship between NDCS and a volunteer. In addition, as income, it could impact on any state benefits received by the volunteer.

## Part 3 – References for NDCS Volunteers

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The National Deaf Children's Society is keen to recognise the valuable contribution volunteers make to our work.
- 1.2 Volunteers offer their time, skills and experience for a wide variety of reasons and we are committed to supporting the development of our volunteers. This can include moving into or between both paid employment and voluntary roles with other organisations.
- 1.3 We respond to requests for references where they are made by a specific organisation in respect of volunteers who comply with the criteria set out below. However, we only provide factual information about a person's volunteering with us.

### 2. Provision of references

- 2.1 We offer volunteers a reference to support their application into alternative voluntary or paid work where the volunteer has:
  - a) carried out defined volunteering activities with us and;
  - b) been assessed in their role and;
  - c) completed a minimum amount of volunteering with us<sup>3</sup>
- 2.2 References will be provided for a reasonable period<sup>4</sup> after a volunteer has left the organisation.
- 2.3 An inaccurate or defamatory reference in support of paid employment can be the subject of an action for negligence or defamation against the organisation and/or the individual author. Therefore the author of a reference owes a 'duty of care' to the person about whom it is written.
- 2.4 Where the author of a reference is proven to have acted negligently, the subject of the reference does not have to prove 'actual loss', but only that he or she has lost a 'reasonable chance' of employment or other volunteering and thereby sustained loss.
- 2.5 References for current or former volunteers are provided only by the person or one of the people who supervise or supervised the volunteer requesting the reference. Where requests are received and no current staff member fulfils this criterion, either the request should be declined or further authorisation requested. At the discretion of a relevant line manager or the Head of Volunteering, the request may be completed by another staff member where full volunteer support and supervision records are available.

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<sup>3</sup> This will vary between volunteer roles and is the decision of individual managers

<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to specify a time period as NDCS Volunteering may be relevant to future job or volunteer applications

- 2.6 Any reference provided should be in writing and approved by the author's line manager before being sent out and a copy kept on file.
- 2.7 Any reference should contain only the information listed below:
- a) Name of the volunteer.
  - b) Confirmation of the dates the volunteer started and (if appropriate) stopped volunteering with us.
  - c) Volunteer role(s) the volunteer carried out.
  - d) Brief description of the volunteer's key activities for each role as stated in the volunteer role description.
  - e) A factual statement about the achievements of the volunteer based on documented evidence. Supervisors providing references for volunteers must be careful when stating an opinion about a volunteer's performance or conduct. The supervisor must ensure all statements are based on accurate, documented evidence about an individual and avoid any facts or opinions of which they are unsure; if in doubt, leave it out.
  - f) Whether the volunteer left NDCS of their own accord or was asked to leave.
  - g) Confirmation of how long the referee has known the volunteer and in what capacity.
  - h) Referee's name.
  - i) Referee's job title.
  - j) Date the reference is provided.
- 2.8 If asked to express an opinion on an issue about which the supervisor cannot make an unequivocal statement, for example regarding a volunteer's honesty and integrity, it is appropriate to use a phrase such as: *I know of nothing that would lead me to question X's honesty.*
- 2.9 A reference must contain the following disclaimer in its final paragraph:  
*While the information provided is, to the best of NDCS' knowledge, completely accurate, NDCS cannot accept any liability for decisions based on it.*
- 2.10 Under the Data Protection Act 1998, individuals who make a Subject Access Request have a right to see references written about them and those writing references should take this into account.
- 2.11 Care should be taken not to refer to spent criminal convictions in references.
- 2.12 It is generally inadvisable to provide unsolicited references addressed 'to whom it may concern'. If exceptionally, a staff member's line manager agrees such references can be provided, they must be limited to factual statements as listed in 2.7 and 2.8.