



Volunteer Policy

1. Introduction

For many individuals, their animals are their only companions and best friend and provide a source of continuity and comfort at times of illness and when partners or friends have passed away or moved. *Our Special Friends* is an independent charitable organisation which aims to facilitate and enhance this human-companion animal bond, by providing support for individuals with illness, disability or reduced mobility. This can enable clients to keep their pets with them. Alternatively we can fill the void by sourcing new companions or by arranging visits from volunteers with suitable animals.

People volunteer with our charity for a variety of reasons. For some it is an opportunity for them to get involved in visiting someone with their pet, others walk dogs, assist with administration, or help with fundraising or the coordination of volunteers.

All our volunteers are highly valued by us. This policy briefly describes the key policies and procedures we have put in place to ensure that all involved understand the standards we aspire to and the way we operate as a charitable organisation. Our overall aim is to ensure that the relationship between the charity and each volunteer is a mutually beneficial one and that volunteers find their experience of working with us rewarding and productive.

2. Our commitment

Our Special Friends is committed to the highest standards of professional conduct and working relationships. The charity aspires to treat all its volunteers with integrity and fairness and tries to ensure that their involvement in the charity matches the skills and experience they bring.

In return, the charity expects all volunteers as ambassadors of the charity to respond by respecting and adhering to the high standards set by the charity for general behaviour and conduct and the performance of duties.

If there are any issues with regard to standards not being maintained, Our Special Friends will ensure that the situation is managed and appropriately dealt with in a fair and straightforward manner so that the quality of services provided to those who use them, and the standards observed by other members of charity are not compromised.

All volunteers will be made aware of the existence of this policy and have access to a copy on the website.

3. Responsibilities

3.1 Chief Executive Officer

It is ultimately the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer to ensure that the culture of the charity overall encourages, supports and motivates each volunteer according to their needs and the role they undertake.

3.2 Volunteer Coordinator

It is the responsibility of the Volunteer Coordinator and/or Chief Executive or deputy, to allocate volunteer roles and duties so that they match the skills and experience of each volunteer and the needs of each client.

3.3 Volunteer

It is the responsibility of the volunteer to perform their role and responsibilities to the best of their ability and to meet their agreed commitments or give as much notice as possible when these cannot be met. Please see our Volunteer Agreement which all volunteers are asked to sign when joining the charity.

4. Health and Safety

In accordance with the current Health and Safety Act and other relevant provisions, it is the aim of Our Special Friends to ensure that volunteers work in conditions which are safe and healthy.

All volunteers are briefed on relevant health and safety when they join and are made aware of their individual responsibilities to take reasonable care for their own safety and that of others, so as to comply with the charity's Health and Safety Policy.

Further training on health and safety matters, including mandatory training, will be given as appropriate depending on the role of the volunteer and to reflect changes in any legislation or best practice guidelines.

The charity reserves the right to end a volunteer's period of work or decline to offer them a volunteer role if they refuse to undertake any mandatory health and safety training.

Whilst volunteering for the charity, the volunteer may encounter an event which proves to be stressful for them. If this occurs, the volunteer is encouraged in the first instance to contact the Volunteer Coordinator or if they are unavailable the Volunteer Support Team to discuss the situation and so appropriate support can be put in place for them.

A full copy of the charity's Health and Safety Policy is available on request.

5. Volunteer Procedures

The following information relates to the processes and procedures which Our Special Friends have put in place to cover the recruitment, supervision and support provided to all its volunteers.

5.1 Recruitment Process

The process is in place to ensure that volunteers recruited are suitable to work in the area of their preference and that all volunteer enquiries and applications are handled professionally.

5.1.1 Volunteer Enquiries

When a member of the public expresses an interest in volunteering an application form can be downloaded from the website or sent to them via post or email.

On receipt of a completed application form, the applicant will be invited for an informal interview to discuss the application further and any suitable volunteering opportunities. If there is a volunteer pet involved, then the recruiter will also ask to see the pet or make arrangements so that it can be assessed for temperament, health and overall suitability.

Prior to the interview, the applicant may also be asked to complete a DBS (Disclosure and Barring) form and present relevant proofs of identity at the interview, if their volunteer role is likely to involve working unsupervised with vulnerable people. In addition, if there is a pet animal involved then the applicant will be asked to provide appropriate veterinary evidence relating to the health of the animal e.g. up to date vaccination history and worming regime for the pet.

If the applicant (and pet) are deemed suitable for a placement with the charity, then references and any further pre placement checks required for that role will be taken up, before the individual takes on any role with the charity. Further information about this process can be found in the charity's Recruitment Policy which is available on request.

5.1.2 Induction

All volunteers will be asked to attend either a 'one to one' or group induction meeting before they start working for Our Special Friends. The induction process will cover essential guidance and safety information as well as information relating to the vision and aims of the charity.

5.1.3. Further support and training

Volunteers will be encouraged to develop their skills while working with the charity. Support for individual volunteers will be provided by the Volunteer Support Team in the first instance or Chief Executive if required. Group support sessions for volunteers may also be set up from time to time to share learning and experience.

Further training and development opportunities which relate to the needs of volunteers and their roles will be provided as and when required.

5.2 Management of Volunteers

5.2.1 General

It is ultimately the responsibility of the Chief Executive to manage the volunteers and to ensure support, help and guidance is provided. This responsibility is however delegated on a day to day basis to the Volunteer Management Team who are responsible for the deployment of volunteers

and their welfare whilst working for the charity.

5.2.2 Supervision and Support

Volunteers are an integral and important part of the entire 'human resource pool' that makes the charity successful. Support will be accessible on a one to one basis to ensure that volunteers can receive support and guidance when required. The Volunteer Coordinator will also contact volunteers from time to time to review an assignment, offer support or training and receive feedback on the assignment.

5.2.3 Volunteer Meetings

Volunteers will be invited to attend meetings from time to time to receive an update on the work of the charity, meet with other volunteers and share feedback on their ideas and experiences with the Volunteer Management Team. Our Special Friends welcomes the ideas and contribution of volunteers to the ongoing development and work of the charity.

5. 3 Disciplinary Action

Where a volunteer's behaviour is deemed unacceptable, or they fail to comply with the organisation's policies and procedures, it may be inappropriate for them to continue as a volunteer.

Should a report be received of inappropriate behaviour or misconduct in relation to policies or procedures, then the matter will be thoroughly investigated to gather evidence before any decision is made.

No volunteer will be released without proper consultation between the volunteer and the Volunteer Coordinator/Chief Executive and the charity undertakes to treat all volunteers with dignity and respect whilst the matter is being investigated.

If necessary, the organisation reserves the right to terminate any current or future assignment with immediate effect if this is deemed appropriate.

Please refer to the charity's Disciplinary Procedure for further details which is available on request.

5.4 Complaints and Grievances

Our Special Friends encourages direct and open communication between volunteers and the organisation.

Volunteers are stakeholders in the organisation and their views are valid and important.

Those responsible for others in the organisation are encouraged to deal with issues raised by volunteers and clients in a sensitive manner and to liaise with the Chief Executive if a matter cannot be resolved quickly.

The organisation undertakes to follow a fair and suitable process dependent upon circumstances, to ensure a satisfactory outcome from any complaints or grievances.

Please refer to the charity's Grievance Procedure for further information.

5.5 Equal opportunities

Our Special Friends will ensure that potential volunteers are not subjected to discrimination on grounds of their race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, gender, marital status, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or any other equality issue.

Individuals are assessed on their ability and suitability for the volunteer role, rather than their age. Volunteer roles 'as workers' are subject to age discrimination under the Equality Act in the same way as paid employees.

Where volunteers are presenting with their pets for particular roles, e.g. visiting a person who is housebound, then the volunteer must be aware of the fact that their pet will be subject to assessment by the charity for suitability in relation to any particular assignment.

A full copy of the charity's Equal Opportunities policy is available on request.

5.5 Insurance

Personal Liability and Accident Insurance is provided for all volunteers engaged in the business of Our Special Friends.

Volunteers who use their cars to carry out their volunteering role must consult and inform their own car insurance provider. In addition, volunteers must have a valid and current Driving Licence, appropriate Insurance and MOT Certificate. Drivers are also required to advise us of any change in status i.e. motoring offences incurred.

5.6 Confidentiality

Volunteers are bound by the organisation's Data Management Policy in the same way as paid members of staff.

Volunteers are required to sign a Volunteer Agreement and a Confidentiality Statement before commencement of their volunteering responsibilities with Our Special Friends.

Volunteers must agree to:-

- i. Uphold the interests and good name of the charity in its relations with the general public, clients and suppliers
- ii. Hold in the strictest confidence all information of a personal nature that they learn about other volunteers, employees, donors, clients and their animals.
- iii. Only share such information within the organisation where required by their volunteering responsibilities and in a way that safeguards its sensitive nature.
- iv. Undertake not to share any confidential information with anyone outside Our Special Friends charity, unless they have prior permission to do so.

All material, data and information collected during the course of volunteering remains the possession of the charity and must be returned upon termination of the Volunteer Agreement.

Volunteers should not disclose information relating to the storage of money, valuables and equipment that would put the organisation or its assets at risk.

The above obligations remain even after volunteering responsibilities have ceased.

See separate Confidentiality Statement.

5.7 Leaving the charity

Volunteers may resign or retire from their volunteer service at any time but are encouraged to give the organisation one month's notice.

6. Related policies and guidelines

The following policies have particular relevance to volunteers. Important information from these policies is included in the Volunteer Handbook. Separate copies of these policies are available on request:

Recruitment & Selection Policy
Health & Safety Policy
Equal Opportunities Policy
Disciplinary Procedure
Grievance Procedure

7. Monitoring and Review

This procedure will be reviewed by the Chief Executive and Trustees at 3 yearly intervals, unless an earlier review is required e.g. due to changes in legislation or organisational structure.