Our Special Friends

Volunteer Policy

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Purpose

This policy supports our staff and volunteers by making clear what the key principles and standards of conduct and behaviour are that outlines our approach to volunteering and our commitment to volunteers. It is a tool to ensure our staff approach to working with volunteers is consistent and aims to help volunteers understand what they can expect from the charity.

Introduction

Volunteers are essential in helping us to create a world in which the power of animal companionship is recognised and integrated into effective care and support plans for people with animals. Our volunteers have helped us deliver services to more than 2,700 cases to date (Jan, 2024).

Volunteers are at the centre of all we do as a charity, increasing our impact and helping us to reach more vulnerable people in the community ensuring they have access to animal companionship support services.

Volunteering Definition

Volunteering by definition is the relationship between us and someone who gives their time, skills and knowledge in order to carry out a clear role on our behalf. Volunteers are NOT paid but can claim reasonable out-of-pocket expenses as a result of their volunteering.

This policy benefits volunteers who carry out a defined volunteer role for the charity. It does not however, cover people who take part in one-off or ad-hoc activities.

Volunteers, unlike staff are not covered by employment law instead we have a responsibility for health and safety and data protection. Here at Our Special Friends we will endeavour to work within the spirit of policies that protect our staff and mirror where possible for volunteers.

Commitment & Guidelines

We are committed to making sure our volunteers have a meaningful experience with us. To achieve this, we endeavour to match the skills, experience and interests with our clients and the roles required at the time. We will monitor and review the roles and relationships to ensure they are both meaningful and in line with the Charity's goals. We will provide clear role profiles and flexible relevant learning and development opportunities to ensure we are all operating safely.

Volunteers help us reach more people and deliver more services in the community at the time they are most needed. We want to get the most out of the time you generously give us whilst ensuring you are rewarded by the positive effects your valuable contribution brings.

To help bring this to life we have set out what you can expect from us and what we expect from you when volunteering.

What we offer our volunteers

Fair recruitment process based on charity need and a clear role profile.

We provide essential training helping you to carry out your role to the best of your ability. We will also offer developmental training enabling you to provide an enhanced service.

We will keep in touch with you ensuring you are supported in your activity by giving you access to newsletters, bulletins, social media and other communications so that you are up to date and well informed.

We will have all relevant and appropriate policies and procedures in place to protect you, our clients and the charity whilst carrying out your volunteering activity.

You will have a named first point of contact and access to the Volunteer Support Manager who can talk about your role and any queries you might have.

We will cover agreed out-of-pocket expenses you have paid for as a result of your volunteering activity.

Provided you have completed our full recruitment processes, you will be covered by our public liability insurance whilst volunteering with us.

We will deal with any concerns or issues you raise with us fairly and consistently. (see our Solving Problems Together Guidelines)

What we ask of you

You will work within the parameters of the volunteering policies ensuring that all involved are safe.

You will be required to complete any essential mandatory training relevant to your voluntary role.

You will be a positive ambassador for Our Special Friends when carrying out your voluntary activities knowing that you are representing the charity.

You will maintain client confidentiality and the data protection regulations under GDPR.

You will work flexibly with us understanding the changing nature of the work we do.

You will respect and embrace difference treating all equally in line with Our Special Friends' Values & Behaviours and The Equal Opportunities Policy.

You will not speak with the press or other media outlets without the express permission of Our Special Friends.

Recruitment & Selection

We have an open and honest, two-way volunteer recruitment process which aims to help us match the skills, location & availability of the volunteer with the need of the charity and/or client. It is important to us that we help you find the right role ensuring that you also get as much fulfilment out of the role you are doing.

We welcome and celebrate the diversity of our volunteers and are committed to equal opportunities for all people in society. We are working hard to ensure we have inclusive policies, procedures and ways of working and welcome your input so we can continually review, update and improve our offer. We are committed to making sure volunteers are not subjected to discrimination, prejudice or oppression in terms of age, gender, sexuality, disability, race, nationality or ethnic origin.

Volunteers will be required to complete an application form. An online or face to face interview will take place for all roles. We require 1 reference and client facing roles will require a Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS) before they start. All client facing roles will be introduced to their client and the initial meeting will be supported and supervised.

Training, Learning & Development

Induction

All volunteers will receive a full induction and training supporting their integration and engagement with the charity.

Whilst we recognise we recruit volunteers with an abundance of skills it is important to us that we ensure our volunteers are prepared for their role and are able to speak with confidence about Our Special Friends. It is a joint responsibility to ensure you are safe whilst volunteering. We take our responsibility seriously and expect our volunteers to as well. Some training will therefore be mandatory and will include: - Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Confidentiality, Lone Working, Boundaries and Safeguarding. These are all featured in our Welcome Session.

We appreciate you are already giving up your time to volunteer with us so we will ensure that our induction and other training is flexible and easy to access.

Each new volunteer will receive a welcome pack, relevant role specific information and useful contact details.

Learning journey and development

Post induction there are other training courses that volunteers can take advantage of. These are aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding helping volunteers to enhance client interaction and growing volunteer confidence.

Support

Every volunteer has a named contact at Our Special Friends; this may be a lead volunteer/assessor, a well as the Volunteer Support Manager. This will be outlined during induction. We will keep in touch on role related matters in a variety of agreed ways including group email, phone, social media, newsletters and bulletins, WhatsApp and face to face.

We will provide opportunities for networking and peer learning between volunteers. This should be a two-way process allowing teams and individuals to come together and review how the relationships are progressing. Positive reflection enables us to refine how we work together going forward.

Appreciation & Recognition

We proactively recognise the huge contribution our volunteers bring in our day to day management by regularly saying “Thank You” and positively reporting on the difference volunteers and volunteering makes to the outcomes the charity achieves.

The skills and knowledge volunteers bring enhance every area of the charity often in ways we could not otherwise afford to engage.

We recognise volunteer contribution in many ways including; nominations, celebration events and in our newsletters by celebrating long service awards and volunteer stories.

Volunteer Expenses

It is important that volunteering is financially accessible for all volunteers. We are sincerely grateful for the generosity of many volunteers who donate the expense their volunteering activity incurs. However, we do not want any of our volunteers to experience any financial burden as a result of the time they give.

As a charity it is important that we are sensible with every penny we spend but we want to remind you that you are entitled to claim reasonable expenses for any expense you incur as part of your voluntary role.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding of vulnerable people is in the most part an essential element of the work we do. Safeguarding is taking a common-sense approach to keeping vulnerable adults safe from harm and understanding what you need to do if you are worried about the safety or wellbeing of someone.

Safeguarding will be covered during induction and is accompanied by our mandatory Introduction to Safeguarding video, so everyone understands how it relates to their role in practice. From time to time we will require volunteers to undertake refresher safeguarding training to ensure we keep up-to-date.

We encourage all volunteers to read the safeguarding policies.

Data Protection

There are some very clear rules about how people's information should be handled. These rules are part of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and The General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (GDPR) GDPR sets out the standards expected of anyone who has access to records of personal or sensitive information.

In brief people trust us to store and use their information properly. All our staff and volunteers are expected to follow the guidelines.

Health & Safety

We have a responsibility for the health and safety of people when they are volunteering for us and those who are affected by our work. We undertake to assess the hazards and risks faced by volunteers in the course of their activity with the aim to reduce the risks to an acceptable level.

To keep everyone safe our volunteers must meet their duties under health and safety legislation whilst volunteering. Volunteers are also reminded they have a responsibility for their own health and safety and of anyone else affected by their volunteering activities. Failure to comply could result in us ending the volunteering relationship immediately.

Volunteering alone

Volunteers regularly work alone without close or direct supervision. To make sure you are safe we expect you to follow important guidelines and procedures. This includes:

Taking reasonable care of your own safety and that of others

Follow any safety practices outlined in the Lone Working Policy.

Report any incidents, accidents, suspicions, injuries and near misses to the volunteering team frances.day@ourspecialfriends.org or phone the office on 01284 335351

Social Media

We use social media across all areas of the Charity's activities. It's a great way of reaching people and making sure they know about our work. Whilst we do not instruct who you are connected with on Social Media, please consider how much information you share. You are an ambassador and representative of Our Special Friends.

Solving Problems Together

We want our volunteers to have a fulfilling and positive experience. However, we recognise that from time to time there may be some problems that affect how you feel about your volunteering activity and maybe your relationship with the charity. When this happens, we will work with you to try and resolve this and bring it to a positive outcome making sure you feel the matter has been dealt with in a fair, consistent and timely manner. We want you to feel comfortable to raise and discuss your concerns in confidence. Please refer to the Solving Problems Together Guidelines.

Leaving

As a volunteer you can leave at any time as there is no formal obligation. As we work with clients who rely on our support we encourage our volunteers to provide some notice or speak with their local lead volunteer or Volunteer Support Manager, enabling them to provide a suitable replacement for the activity or client.

Our Special Friends have the right to discontinue a volunteer relationship with immediate effect if we feel the relationship has irretrievably broken down or is no longer mutually beneficial. Please see Solving Problems Together Guidelines.

Volunteering Policies and Resources

The following policies have particular relevance to volunteers. Important information from these policies is included in the Volunteer Handbook. Solving Problems Together Guidelines, Lone Working Guidelines, Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, Safeguarding Children, Equal Opportunities Policy, Duke of Edinburgh Policy.

This volunteer policy will be reviewed by a team of staff and volunteers every two years unless an earlier review is required e.g. due to changes in legislation or organisational structure.

Date of review: 18/11/2025

Date of next review:18/11/2027

Owner: Frances Day (VSM)

Signed: F.Day

Dated:18/11/2025