

VOLUNTEER POLICY

1. Value statement

Advice Space values the involvement of volunteers in our work because they help reflect the interests, needs and resources of the local communities that we serve and bring a unique perspective on all our work.

Advice Space recognises volunteers as a core part of our team with a distinctive but complementary role alongside paid staff.

2. Status of Volunteers

Advice Space is clear in its intent on volunteering and views volunteering as enhancing and complementing existing structures.

3. Beneficial Experience

Advice Space benefits from the skills, experience and enthusiasm of volunteers. We believe that volunteers should be able to gain personal benefits from the experience too. We are committed to managing volunteers in a way that ensures that the needs of both parties are met.

4. Equality and Diversity

Advice Space strives to create a diverse and inclusive organisation within a diverse and inclusive community. We are committed to ensuring equality of access to high quality volunteer opportunities and equality of treatment for our volunteers which is reflected in all our policies and practices.

5. Expansion of our work

Our work can be extended because of the wealth of skill and experience that is brought to the organisation through our volunteers. Volunteers are involved at every level of the organisation in roles which complement the roles of paid staff.

6. Industrial Dispute

Volunteers will not be used in times of industrial action to do the work of paid staff. They may continue with their regular tasks but will not be asked to undertake additional duties.

7. Volunteer Roles

All volunteers are provided with a written volunteer role description, outlining the purpose, tasks and main expectations of their role. This role is reviewed at least once a year with the volunteer's supervisor.

8. Out of Pocket Expenses

Advice Space reimburses volunteers' reasonable out of pocket expenses for travel and lunch when claims are submitted on a standard Expenses Claim Form and accompanied by proof of expenditure. Details are contained within the Volunteer Handbook.

9. Resources

Advice Space endeavours to provide adequate and appropriate facilities, equipment and resources to enable volunteers to fulfil their roles.

10. Day to Day Management

The service manager is responsible for the overall management of volunteer involvement, including overseeing the implementation of this policy and dealing with any complaint relating to volunteers.

The volunteer's designated Volunteer Supervisor provides support and supervision, identifies training requirements, countersigns expense claims etc.

All staff required to undertake such duties are provided with training in the management, supervision, support and training of volunteers.

11. Recruitment and Selection

Advice Space is committed to serving and representing all the people of Belfast and wishes to see all sections of the community represented among our volunteers.

Volunteer opportunities are widely promoted, and we will endeavour to make recruitment and selection materials available in a format accessible to any individual or group, upon request. Furthermore, Advice Space regularly reviews the make-up of the volunteer team to identify and target any under-represented group(s).

Advice Space implements a fair, effective and open system in the recruitment and selection of volunteers and treats all information collected in this process confidentially.

All potential volunteers will go through a recruitment and selection process that is appropriate to the role offered. Advice Space uses application forms, references and interviews.

In accordance with the approach outlined within the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1978, all successfully selected volunteers who would be in volunteer positions of trust with access to personal information and contact with Advice Space clients at risk will, be required to self-disclose unspent convictions. Further details on the process following any disclosure can be found in the Advice Space policy on the recruitment and engagement of ex-offenders.

12. Induction

Volunteers are provided with a Volunteer Agreement, which outlines the expectations and responsibilities of both the volunteer and Advice Space and is signed by both parties. This agreement may be reviewed at any time with the consent of the volunteer and his/her supervisor, including during the initial review meeting at the end of the settling in period.

All volunteers are provided with an induction on joining. The induction: provides background information on Advice Space; explains its structures and procedures; describes the volunteer role and the work team and outlines how s/he will be supported, including practical information on e.g. expenses.

During the induction period volunteers will be provided with written information on relevant legislation, organisational policies and codes of practice and will be given the opportunity to discuss any of the issues with the Director, Service Manager or supervisor.

All volunteer placements are subject to a settling in period, the length of which depends on the nature and hours of the voluntary work. During this period volunteers are given additional support and a review meeting between the volunteer and his/her supervisor is held at the end of the settling in period to ensure that all parties are satisfied with the arrangement.

13. Support and Supervision of Volunteers

All volunteers are allocated a named member of staff as their Volunteer Supervisor (although the Service Manager can also be contacted in case of an emergency or if the designated supervisor is unavailable). This individual can provide day-to-day help and guidance on any issue related to the voluntary work and is responsible for providing regular support to, and supervision of, the volunteer.

The frequency, duration and format of this support and supervision is agreed between the volunteer and his/her supervisor at the end of the settling in period
Advice Space is committed to improving the effectiveness of volunteers.

14. Training

Volunteers may choose to attend any in-house training course that they feel is relevant to their voluntary work, subject to the approval of their supervisors and availability of places and cost. Volunteers may also apply to the Service Manager for financial and practical support to attend external courses, where they can be shown to have a clear relevance to the voluntary work.

Volunteers attending approved training courses, internal or external, may do so within their normal hours of voluntary work and may reclaim out-of-pocket expenses.

15. Relationship between Volunteer and Employees

Advice Space aims to reflect the voluntary nature of our relationship with volunteers in all policies and procedures for managing their involvement.

In working together, paid staff understand and appreciate that given the relationship outlined above, volunteers are able to refuse any request or demand which they deem to be unrealistic or unreasonable.

A formal complaints procedure for volunteers is available in the event of any issues that may arise.

16. Communication with Volunteers and Feedback

Advice Space recognises the core role that volunteers fulfil at every level of the organisation. It endeavours to communicate with volunteers in appropriate ways.

It also recognises the importance of seeking volunteers' ideas and opinions at regular intervals and conducts an annual volunteer survey. Feedback from volunteers is always welcome and any volunteer may make representations to the Director.

17. Records which We Hold

In order to effectively monitor what volunteers do and how they are managed, a volunteering file is maintained for all volunteers, which includes: contact details and other relevant personal information; details of the application and selection process; agreements made; hours volunteered; records of support and supervision activities; training undertaken and any complaints made or received. Some of this information and other relevant information may also be recorded in computerised records.

All such information is treated in accordance with the Data Protection legislation.

18. Use of Advice Space Resources and Facilities

Volunteers should use Advice Space's resources and facilities with care in accordance with our procedures and guidelines. Resources and facilities should not be used for personal use.

19. Intellectual Property Rights

Both volunteers and the organisation agree that the intellectual property rights of original work produced by volunteers automatically transfers to the organisation.

20. Complaints Procedure for Volunteers

Volunteers are encouraged to raise any concerns with their Volunteer Supervisor via the usual support and supervision procedures and discuss any demands which they feel are unrealistic to enable these to be resolved.

In the event of a complaint in relation to their volunteering, volunteers can use the following Complaints Procedure.

A complaint is viewed as an opportunity to improve our level of service and assists accountability within that service. All complaints will be dealt with in confidence and in accordance with the complaint's procedure. We try to get things right but occasionally we fall short of Volunteers' expectations. We therefore welcome comments on how volunteering with us can be improved. However, if something is not right volunteers have the right to make a complaint.

In the first instance a complaint should be directed to the Volunteer Supervisor. They will try to resolve the matter informally but if this is not possible, you will be asked to make a formal complaint.

If you wish to proceed formally you should address your complaint to the Service Manager. Your complaint will be addressed within **14 days**. If this target cannot be met, you will be advised of the reason for the delay.

If you are not satisfied with the response you may contact the Director who will respond within **21 days**. Their findings and response will be final.

21. Advice Space Policy for Dealing with Volunteer's Behaviour

If there is an issue with a volunteer's behaviour which Advice Space needs to resolve the following process will be followed:

Many issues can be due to training needs and inappropriate roles. Where informal measures are not sufficient, the Volunteer Supervisor will raise the issue in a formal meeting with the volunteer. The volunteer will be able to put their case. The meeting may result in a formal caution with the understanding that following any repetition the volunteer will be asked to leave.

If the volunteer is believed to have conducted themselves in a manner that has or could have seriously affected the organisation, for example theft, bullying, harassment, serious breach of health and safety, breach of data protection, violence or act outside Advice Space which would bring Advice Space into disrepute, they will be immediately suspended from volunteering while the matter is investigated by their Volunteer Supervisor.

The volunteer will be able to put their case and a decision will be made within **14 days**. If the complaint is upheld, they may be excluded from volunteering.

In all cases volunteers can be accompanied to such meetings by another volunteer or member of staff.

Volunteers can appeal the decision to the Director and will receive a response within **14 days**. The decision of the appeal will be final.

In the case of a particularly serious offence this process may be bypassed, and the volunteer may be immediately asked to leave.

Where a criminal offence is suspected the matter will be handed over to the Police.

In the case of particularly serious offences, this process may be bypassed and/or the subject of the complaint asked to leave.

22. Ending Volunteering

A volunteer may at any time decide to end their relationship with Advice Space and their intention should be made known in advance.

Advice Space may at any time, for relevant reasons, terminate the volunteer's relationship with Advice Space.

23. Exit Interviews

Advice Space welcomes feedback and we would appreciate if you complete and return an anonymous questionnaire when you leave your volunteering. This will assist us in reviewing and improving our volunteering experience.