

Welcome to Ealing Volunteer Centre

Why read this?

This guide is written to give you the information you may need, to help you help others.

You don't have to read it all now, but keep hold of it and use it later, to guide you in your volunteering. By answering some frequently asked questions, we hope to help you to volunteer successfully.

We are always pleased to hear from volunteers, so if this guide does not answer your questions, contact us and we will do our best to find answers for you. We constantly work to improve our service, so it helps us if you keep in touch and let us know how you are getting on.

Ealing Volunteer Centre is part of Ealing Community and Voluntary Service.



Getting ready to volunteer

The following questions will help you think about volunteering and if it is the right step for you.

What is volunteering?

Personal Experience

- What am I hoping to gain from volunteering?
- What experience have I got that will be useful?
- What do I want to learn from volunteering and how will I record this?
- What are my limitations?
- Where do I want to volunteer?
- Which group of people do I want to volunteer with? Why?
- In which environment is it best for me to volunteer?

Time

- For how long do I want to volunteer?
- When do I want to start to volunteer?
- What commitment do I need to give?
- How many hours should I volunteer?
- Am I ready to make a commitment?
- When in the day or year is better for me?
- Where does volunteering fit into my life?
- What would be successful volunteering for me?

Support

- What support would help me with volunteering?
- What are my fears about volunteering?
- What are the financial aspects of volunteering?
- Am I well enough to volunteer?
- Do I have the physical, mental and emotional energy to volunteer?

Some Answers

Volunteering is a valuable activity, enjoyed by millions of people in Britain. People give their time and skills - unpaid - to help individuals or organisations. Some people may give two hours a month or less, while others may help out every day.

There is a wide range of volunteering opportunities within the borough of Ealing, including administration, befriending, teaching, practical work, driving or management.

Volunteers can help in many different types of organisations in and around the borough of Ealing - for example, small voluntary groups, local branches of national charities, community groups, housing associations and statutory services, such as day centres and hospitals. Wherever you volunteer, the experience should be an agreeable - although serious - commitment. In order for it to be a successful venture, it must be a pleasure for you and for those to whom you give your time and talents.



Ealing Volunteer Bureau likes volunteers to have a choice of organisations to volunteer for and for the organisations registered with us to have choice a of volunteers. During your meeting with Ealing Volunteer Bureau, we try to find you three or four opportunities, which are near your home and match your skills and interests.

If you want some help with following up these opportunities, we can contact each organisation for you and come with you to meet the organisations.

Many people enjoy volunteering for years and before starting to volunteer it's important to take time to find the best opportunity for you.

Personal Experience

There are almost as many reasons why people volunteer as there are volunteers, but here are some of the reasons you may wish to volunteer

- To do something you really enjoy.
- To make use of special interests and talents.
- To learn new skills and develop new interests.
- To meet new people with similar interests and make new friends.
- To find out more about the work you are considering as a career.

- To have a chance to take some responsibility and make decisions.
- To gain valuable training and experience which may help you into paid employment.

It is important to understand your motivations for volunteering and what you hope to gain in order to find an opportunity that will make you feel fulfilled.



Our Lifetime Guarantee of Satisfaction

People's reasons for volunteering often change as they develop new skills and interests through their volunteering; but, whatever your reasons for volunteering, you not only change the lives of those you help, you also enrich your own life.

Before you start volunteering, it is helpful to think about what skills and experience you have to offer an organisation.

You may already have an idea of what you would like to do, or there may be a group of people you would like to help, e.g. elders, youth, young parents or people affected by disability or illness.

On the other hand, you may be new to volunteering and unsure of what you want to do. There may be some things you definitely don't want to do.

At Ealing Volunteer Centre, we respect your preferences and help you to find a volunteering opportunity that suits your interests and lifestyle. It is important to think about what you can and can't do due to your health, skills and circumstances. If you are recovering from work-related stress, talking to an elderly person may be more suitable than helping in an office. Where you volunteer is important, as is thinking about the environment, e.g. a noisy or a quiet office, in a group or one to one.

Once you know your motivations for volunteering and what you want to learn, it may be helpful to start a "volunteering record book" to write down what you want to learn and add to it as your volunteering develops. Would volunteering for a month or six months be a success for you?

How much time should I give?

Just like donating money to charity, you need to think about how much time you can afford to give. It is better to start off with giving a little time regularly than to start with doing a lot, and later finding it hard to keep up.

Many volunteering opportunities are suited to a commitment for more than six months, because it takes time to train and support volunteers.

It is useful to think about times of the day that are better for you. You may have on-going commitments or be better at coping at some times of the day.

By volunteering you are making a commitment to an organisation.

What support do I need?

Volunteering is not suitable for everyone. Before volunteering, decide whether you are well enough physically, mentally and emotionally. It may be better to wait a few months to develop support networks before volunteering. An unsuccessful volunteering experience is not helpful for anyone.

All organisations should offer support or supervision to their volunteers. If you need particular support due to health or personal issues, this needs to be considered when volunteering.

What if I am on benefits?

Volunteering does not necessarily affect your benefits. It does not affect Disability Living Allowance, pensions or Child Benefit.

Volunteering does not directly affect your entitlement to Job Seekers Allowance but in order to qualify as being available for work, a volunteer must be available to attend a job interview after 48 hours notice, and start work at a week's notice. Volunteering does not affect Income Support, Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance.

Ealing Volunteer Bureau recommends that you let the Job Centre or DSS know when you start volunteering.



Organisations should try to reimburse all your out-of-pocket expenses for travel, food or childcare/dependent care. But for some organisations with a limited budget this may not always be possible. You should discuss this with organisations before starting to volunteer.

What is my next step?

Contact the organisations that you have been given. Most organisations will invite you to come and visit them. This will give you the opportunity to look around and ask them about their work and their plans for the future. When you have visited them, you can then choose the one you think will suit you best. We ask you to let each organisation know which organisation, you have decided to give your time to.

Visiting an organisation for the first time

It is a good idea to contact more than one organisation, so you have a choice and to make sure that you start volunteering where you feel comfortable and will be able to commit.



Before meeting with an organisation, think about questions you'd like to ask them and information that it would be helpful to give them. Some organisations will ask you to complete an application form; others will ask for two references. Some will invite you to visit the organisation for an interview or an informal chat. Many voluntary organisations working with vulnerable people conduct a criminal record bureau check. You will need to sign a form to allow this check to be carried out. Having a criminal record will not necessarily prevent you from volunteering.

We have included a few questions for you to consider. The more open and honest you are with an organisation at the start, the more appropriate the support and role the organisation will be able to provide you with.

Some questions to consider

Personal

- What can I offer the organisation?
- Why do I want to help this organisation?
- How much do I tell the organisation about myself?
- How can I prepare for an interview?
- How will I get to my organisation? Can I try out the route?
- What will I wear to volunteer and how will I present myself?
- Do I have any health problems I should inform the organisation of?
- Do I have an emergency contact number that I can give to the organisation?
- What is appropriate behaviour for volunteering within the organisation?
- What will the organisation expect me to do?
- Who can provide a character reference for me, if I'm asked for one?

Organisation

- What are the aims and work of the organisation?
- Who will supervise me?
- Do they have an equal opportunities policy?
- What roles do volunteers have in the organisation?
- How many volunteers are there?
- Who will I be working alongside?
- When does the organisation need me?
- How does the organisation select volunteers?
- How does the organisation support volunteers?
- Will I be trained?
- What happens about lunch?
- What expenses are paid, and how do I get them?
- How does their confidentiality policy affect me as a volunteer?
- Will I need to be checked by the criminal record bureau?

What happens when I start volunteering?

Some organisations have an induction programme to help you get to know about their work. You will be shown around the work location, meet other volunteers, staff and service users, and be told about relevant health and safety information. You should also have an opportunity to discuss your role and be shown how to carry it out. This may be written down.

Some organisations require you to attend training before you can start.

Sometimes there is a trial period to see how you get on, before you can make a firm decision to get involved.

Once you have started volunteering, we hope that it will be an enjoyable and fulfilling experience. The process of finding a volunteering opportunity should have helped with this. If there are any problems with your volunteering, please

talk to your manager. If you still have concerns, please contact the Ealing Volunteer Centre.

How are you getting on?

Some questions for you to consider:

- Is this what I want to do?
- What do I do if I discover I do not like volunteering?
- What do I do if I make a mistake?
- What do I do if I am going to be late?
- Am I a punctual and a reliable volunteer?
- Am I getting enough support?
- Am I having fun and learning things?
- How do I leave?

Rights and responsibilities of a volunteer

What do we mean by Equal Opportunities?

Ealing Community and Voluntary Service recognises that every human being - regardless of gender, age, ethnic origin, refugee status, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, education, religious beliefs, geographical location, caring commitments, class, employment status, mental or physical health problems, HIV or AIDS status, who is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements, which cannot be shown to be justifiable, has a right to equal recognition, treatment and opportunities. Ealing Community and Voluntary Service promotes equal opportunities in all aspects of its work.

To support this, we particularly broker volunteering to people who are disadvantaged or who are from groups which are often discriminated against. To protect people from exploitation, we have set out (below) the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

Volunteers' Rights

Volunteers have a right to be recruited to do the things that match their skills and interests.

Volunteers have a right to be recruited in line with their reasons and motivations for volunteering. For example: A person who wishes to return to paid employment, ideally should be matched with an opportunity in which they can develop marketable skills.

Volunteers should have the right to reimbursement of their out-of-pocket expenses. For example: The costs of travelling to volunteer and meals taken while volunteering should be re-paid to the volunteer.

Volunteers can supplement the work of paid workers – not substitute for them.

Volunteers have the right not to be exploited.

Volunteers have the right to be treated respectfully.

Volunteers have the right to training and support.

Volunteers have the right to proper health and safety procedures and adequate insurance cover.

Volunteers have the right to know why they were not accepted for a volunteering opportunity.

Volunteers' Responsibilities

Be reliable. For example: Attend as arranged or inform the organisation if you cannot do so. Do the things that you have been asked to do.

Work within the aims and objectives of the organisation. For example: Follow the rules laid down by the policies of the organisation.

Be honest if there are any problems. For example: If you are troubled by something when you are volunteering, you need to let the organisation know of your concerns.

Respect confidentiality. Be respectful of the privacy of the people whom you help in the organisation.

Treat people fairly. For example: Be kind and considerate - put yourself in other people's shoes.

Accept that everybody is different. Habits, beliefs and values are personal and individual. Each person has a valid contribution to make.