

4.8 Keeping things safe

If you are going to set up or be involved in the running of a volunteering project you have a responsibility to make sure that the people who you are helping and the people who are volunteering are going to be safe. This might just mean knowing the policies of your partner organisation but depending on the project you might have to think about some of the following as well.



Here is a quick checklist of how to keep a project safe:

Health and safety

- ★ Ask your partner organisation what their health and safety policy is and make sure you all read it.
- ★ If your STAR group is responsible for any activities you should fill out a risk assessment well in advance. This lets you see what the potential problems might be and what you can do to prevent people from being hurt e.g. if you are doing craft activities you need to make sure sharp scissors are kept away from small children.
- ★ Make sure you all know what to do if there is an accident or an emergency e.g. if a child fall and bangs their head.

Insurance

- ★ Check that what you are doing is covered by your volunteering partner organisation/student union insurance.

Training

- ★ Check that you are all getting the training you need to volunteer safely.
- ★ If your partner organisation or university don't offer the training you feel you need STAR national may be able to help - so get in touch!

Volunteer checks

- ★ Ask your volunteering partner organisation what kind of information they need from new volunteers. How the suitability of volunteers is checked will depend on the kind of volunteering project. If someone is just collecting clothes for a local destitution project you probably don't need much information and their name and contact details will do. However, if volunteers are going to be working with children, vulnerable adults (e.g. people with mental health problems, learning or physical disabilities), handling money or confidential information you need to know more about whether they are the right kind of person for the role. In these cases your partner organisation should ask new volunteers for references and a CRB check (see below).

- ★ *What is a CRB check?* – It is short for Criminal Record Bureau check and allows organisations to find out if people have criminal records which might affect the kind of work/volunteering they want to do - e.g. someone who wants to be a volunteer treasurer but has been convicted of fraud or someone who want to volunteer with children who has committed violent offences. There are two kinds of CRB check; Standard and Enhanced. If you want to volunteer with children or vulnerable adults you will need to complete an Enhanced CRB check. CRB checks are free for volunteers and most Universities can do them for you – check with your partner organisation as they might only accept CRB checks completed through them. These can take some time to be processed – between 2 weeks and 2 months– so make sure you factor this into the project planning.

Volunteering with children or vulnerable adults

- ★ If you are going to be volunteering with children or vulnerable adults you need to make sure that your partner organisation has a child/vulnerable adult protection policy. If they don't, contact STAR national for advice.
- ★ All volunteers will need to complete a CRB check (see above). This can take some time so factor this in to your project planning.

Keeping children safe: Child Protection

- ★ Make sure that you are all aware of your partner organisations child protection policy and that you know what to do if you have a child protection concern – always follow the procedure you have been given by your partner organisation!
- ★ *If you are unable to contact your volunteering partner organisation or you have reported a concern to them and don't feel that it has been dealt with properly you can contact Emma Williams at STAR national on 0207 729 8880 or 07920487955.*
- ★ If you are working with children you should all attend child protection training. Many universities offer courses, your partner organisation or STAR national can organise a training session for you.

Immigration advice – the law

- ★ *Don't give people any advice related to immigration!* It is a criminal offence for anyone to give immigration advice or services in the UK unless they are regulated by the OISC (Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner), a regulated solicitor, barrister or legal executive (or European equivalent) or exempted by Ministerial Order.
- ★ As well as the legal implications for volunteers, immigration law is incredibly complicated and each person's situation is different. You might just want to help but if you give the wrong information it could have serious consequences for the person, so please leave it to the experts!

Photographs

- ★ Always get people's permission if you are taking photographs. If you are photographing children you need to get the permission of their parents (see the useful documents for a template form)
- ★ Remember, because of their situation some asylum seekers and refugees may not want their photograph to be displayed publicly, especially on the internet, so make sure you ask and explain where the picture will be seen.

Keeping things clear and looking after yourself- setting boundaries

Boundaries are very important for volunteers and the people they are working with. They give clear guidelines for how you should behave and help avoid misunderstandings and stress. Ask your volunteering partner project what is and isn't acceptable while you are volunteering. Also think about what your personal boundaries are and don't take on too much. Helping people with everything they ask you to might seem like the kindest thing to do, but if they start to depend on you too much this can cause problems for them in the future, especially if you are not always going to be around. It can also put you under a lot of stress.

What are boundaries?

- ★ a dividing line between what is appropriate and acceptable behaviour and what is not
- ★ they are your limits in relationship to someone or something

Why do we need boundaries in volunteer roles?

- ★ it is important to have clear and firm boundaries at work and in your personal life - they clarify what you are able to give and tolerate without having a negative impact on your physical and emotional health
- ★ the people you are volunteering with will have a clear idea of what to expect from you and other volunteers and this will help build a solid relationship with them.
- ★ people from different cultures may have differing expectations of what a project will provide and clear boundaries will prevent misunderstandings
- ★ if your boundaries are clearly defined you will know how to behave in different situations which will give you more self-confidence
- ★ there will be consistency between what different volunteers are doing
- ★ they help deal with stress because they separate work and private lives

General boundary guidelines:

DO

- ★ discuss boundaries with the other volunteers and project staff to agree on them to make sure you are all doing the same thing
- ★ make sure that boundaries are clear to people you are working with by explaining what they are and how you will be working together
- ★ think before you say 'Yes'!
- ★ avoid getting into situations that could be misunderstood
- ★ challenge other volunteers if you think their behaviour is not appropriate (challenge the behaviour and not the person and not in front of other people)
- ★ speak to the project workers if you experience any difficulties or are not sure how to proceed

DON'T

- ★ give out personal information about yourself, other volunteers or the people you are working with
- ★ give out your personal phone number – once someone has it they can call you whenever they want!
- ★ become emotionally over involved
- ★ have informal chats (e.g. with friends) about the people you are working with

- ★ leave any confidential information where others can see it
- ★ accept any form of harassment/violence
- ★ accept personal gifts
- ★ lend to or borrow, buy or sell to/from those you are volunteering with



Don't forget you are not a counsellor or support worker and there are lots of organisations out there to help asylum seekers and refugees – don't put too much pressure on yourself and make sure you refer people on to organisations that can help them.