

A Guide to Volunteering in Ealing

Hand in Hand Step by Step



Volunteer *Centre*
Ealing



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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.

Lizzie Saunders

Ealing Volunteer Centre Manager



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 during the day or which time of year is better for me?

Support

- What support would help me with volunteering?
- What are my concerns 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, coaching, practical work, driving and office management.

Volunteers can help in many different types of organisation 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 enjoyable – although serious – commitment. In order for it to be a success, it must be a pleasure for you and for those to whom you give your time and talents.

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



If you want some help with contacting organisations, we can phone them for you.

Many people enjoy volunteering for years, and before starting to volunteer it is important to think carefully about where you would like to volunteer.

Personal experience

There are almost as many reasons why people volunteer as there are volunteers, but here are some of them:

- To do something you really enjoy
- To make use of your interests and talents
- To learn new skills and develop new interests
- To meet new people 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
- To give something back to your community

It is important to understand your motivations for volunteering and what you hope to gain so that you will 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, for example, older people, youth, lone 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, befriending an elderly person may be more suitable than helping in an office. Where you volunteer is important, as is thinking about the environment, for example, a busy 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.

How much time should I give?

Just as you might think about giving money to charity, it is important to think about how much time you can afford to give as a volunteer. It is better to start off with giving a little time regularly than to start by 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 select, train and support volunteers.

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

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 and 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 Seeker's 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 Centre recommends that you let the Jobcentre or Department for Work and Pensions know when you start volunteering. You need to continue to seek paid employment if you are claiming Job Seeker's Allowance.



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 have been suggested to you. 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 Ealing Volunteer Centre know where you have decided to volunteer.**

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 when you start volunteering you will feel comfortable and 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 about you. 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 will check whether you have been convicted of a criminal offence through the Criminal Records Bureau. 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. If you are open and honest with an organisation at the start, it will help the organisation to give you an appropriate role and support when you volunteer.

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 travel to the organisation?
- What will I wear and how will I present myself?
- Do I have any health problems that I should tell the organisation about?
- What will the organisation expect me to do?
- Who can provide a character reference for me?
- Will the organisation check whether I have a criminal record?

Organisation

- What are the aims and work of the organisation?
- Who will supervise me?
- Do they have an equal opportunities policy?
- What part do volunteers play in the organisation?
- Do they have a health and safety policy?
- Who will I be working with?
- 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 reimbursed?
- How does their confidentiality policy affect me as a volunteer?

What happens when I start volunteering?

Organisations should help you to get to know about their work. They should show you around the workplace, introduce you to other volunteers, staff and service users, and tell you about relevant health and safety information. They should also give you an opportunity to discuss your role and show you how to carry it out. Some may write this down for you.

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 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

raise this with the organisation. **If you still have concerns, please contact 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 reliable volunteer?
- Is the organisation supporting me in my new role?
- 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 everyone – regardless of gender, age, ethnic origin, refugee status, disability, sexuality, marital status, education, faith, caring commitments, economic status, employment status, mental or physical health, or who is disadvantaged in any other way, 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 promote volunteering for people who are disadvantaged or who are from groups that are often discriminated against. To protect people from exploitation, Ealing Volunteer Centre complies with standards laid down by the national charity Volunteering England. These include the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

Volunteers' rights

- **To be recruited to do the things that match their skills and interests.**
- **To be recruited in line with their reasons for volunteering.** Someone who wishes to return to paid employment, ideally should be able to develop marketable skills while volunteering.
- **To be reimbursed for their out-of-pocket expenses.** 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 provide a substitute for them.**
- **To be given meaningful roles.**
- **To know what is expected of them and what their responsibilities are.**

- **To be treated with respect.**
- **To receive training, support and supervision.**
- **To have a safe working environment, including insurance cover.**
- **To know why they were not accepted for a volunteering role.**

Volunteers' responsibilities

- **Be reliable.** Attend as arranged or let the organisation know in advance if you can't.
- **Work within the aims and objectives of the organisation.** Do the things you have been asked to do.
- **Be honest if there are any problems.** If you are troubled by something when you are volunteering, it is important to let the organisation know.
- **Respect confidentiality.** Respect the privacy of the people you help in the organisation.

- **Respect other people.** Be kind and considerate – treat others as you would like to be treated.
- **Accept that everybody is different.** Habits, beliefs and values are personal and individual. Each person has a contribution to make.
- **Contact Ealing Volunteer Centre if:**
 - the organisation does not respond to your enquiry
 - you contact an organisation to volunteer, and they are not taking on volunteers
 - the volunteering is different from the description given to you by Ealing Volunteer Centre
 - you are not given guidance and support when volunteering
 - you have concerns that you feel unable to raise with your supervisor
 - you are not accepted for volunteering

Ealing Volunteer Centre's core values

Volunteering...

- is entered into freely
- is accessible to all sections of the community
- is not a substitute for paid employment
- should provide flexible and supportive opportunities

To support these core values...

- a prompt and efficient service should be provided to the volunteer and the organisation
- all volunteers should be treated with respect
- out-of-pocket expenses should be offered to volunteers
- Ealing Volunteer Centre supports equal opportunities practice

Devised by:

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How are we doing?

At Ealing Volunteer Centre, we constantly strive to improve our work. We hope you find this guide useful. Any comments you'd like to make will be welcomed and responded to. We have a complaints procedure.



We
can make
a difference
together.

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