**Guidance for volunteering in social care settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic**

This guidance provides information on the general principles of volunteering for staff who are or likely to manage volunteers within social care, whether they be from a local authority, an independent provider or a voluntary sector organisation contracted to provide care and support services in the following settings:

* Care Homes
* Supported Living provision for people with a learning disability
* Domiciliary Care
* Day Services
* Other community support services

**Reason for guidance**

The current pandemic of COVID-19 is likely to impact on social care services for several months to come. Many volunteers are likely to be unable or unwilling to volunteer, for example because they or their families are vulnerable to infection. At the same time there will be increased strain on social care services, with likely increased demand for volunteer services as well as new opportunities for volunteers to be involved. New legislation aims to make it easier for people to volunteer to help support public services, including organisations being able to make basic DBS checks (see page 5) for those wishing to volunteer.

A [one-page checklist](https://wcvagroup-my.sharepoint.com/personal/srees_wcva_org_uk/Documents/Coronavirus/Volunteering%20in%20social%20care%20settings/Guidance%20on%20voluntenteering%20checklist%20v2.docx) summarises the key points from this guidance.

**Care for volunteers and minimising the risk of spreading Covid-19**

Some volunteers will need to stop volunteering for the time being, on the grounds of their age (over 70 years) and those who have underlying health conditions which will put them at risk, including those who have received the shielding letter and are advised to stay at home for 12 weeks. A risk review of current volunteers may be appropriate, asking key questions about vulnerabilities and encouraging those at risk to ‘pause’ their volunteering. Volunteers may feel duty bound to carry on and need your active encouragement to stand down and move to minimal risk activities, such as providing helpline or befriending support.

**Volunteering: things to consider**

**Health first**

Anyone can volunteer in many ways. In the first instance, and a as priority to lessen the risk of spreading the virus organisations, those working in social care settings need to think about non-contact volunteer roles which can be performed through remote access using phones, emails, FaceTime or WhatsApp video facility for example. These roles are just as important as many others to prevent loneliness and disconnection. People who should be in self-isolation with possible infection or at risk of infection can also undertake these distance roles if they are well enough, but importantly they must not break their isolation to volunteer.

Volunteers should not be expected to:

* Be involved in any moving or handling as this requires training,
* provide intimate personal care,
* undertake food preparation or housework, and
* not give medication.

As the crisis deepen, and volunteers are asked to assist, then they should only do so if they are provided with and in line with the latest guidance on [Personal Protective Equipment (PPE](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control)). Volunteers must adhere to the same standards as the paid workforce and comply with an organisations or local authority advice.

**Optimising volunteer services**

Most volunteer activities will have been stopped in social care settings in to minimise direct contact. For example, volunteers in hair and beauty, pets as therapy and musicians who go into care homes or supported living services or other activities organised by activity co-ordinators in care homes which involve volunteers coming into care settings from the local community.

Some activities may need to be reduced simply due to a limited number of volunteers or due to increased priorities elsewhere. If you need to operate restricted volunteer services in one area temporarily, be sure to communicate this clearly to staff.

**Time to get creative**

With the need to limit contact and maintain social distancing there is a need to find alternative ways to volunteer and the types of activities which can be safely achieved at a distance using, for example, through social media platforms. Providing ongoing opportunities for people to have mental stimulation and social interaction is important for their health and well-being

There have been some good examples of where children have been making cards and sending messages to local care homes, as long as care homes take the appropriate measures to social distance and use antibacterial spray to limit any chance of passing on the infection to very vulnerable residents.

**Other volunteering activity could include:**

* Arranging to send videos to connect residents in care homes, supported living provision and those being cared for at home to their families, by offering technical support to do this. This activity is likely to boost both the person being supported and their families and reduce the impact of social isolation and loneliness.
* You could look at alternative volunteering activities such as live streaming classes to care home residents or doing a beauty or hair tips video.
* Schools, where open for children and young people of critical workers, could create short videos of them singing or sending messages as intergenerational activity has been shown to be mutually beneficial.
* In some care settings volunteers, who are exercise specialists, would have been able to do sessions directly, but these could be done by video link to maintain movement and reduce the risk of muscle wastage.
* Telephone befriending is another way people can volunteer with existing third sector organisations who provide this service but could also be delivered via FaceTime for people being cared for at home to increase social interaction for people who are more isolated.

**Maximising the volunteer workforce in social care**

You will need to decide where more volunteers are needed and how you might be able to fast track recruitment and training pathways, to manage new volunteers or redeploy volunteers in new roles during the coronavirus emergency.

Where volunteers have had to step down from their usual volunteering roles there maybe opportunities to move into paid roles temporarily with the right level of support and training. Contact your local authority or visit [www.wecare.wales](http://www.wecare.wales) for further information.

**Training for volunteers**

Finding new ways to deliver training to volunteers which previously would have been delivered face to face will be essential.

Making use of online training facilities, like Zoom, webinars and social media platforms will help deliver solutions for while operating remotely.

 Any training should include the importance of safeguarding themselves and those accessing volunteer support, even at a distance.

Contact your local authority to see what online induction training is available. You can also find example activity at <https://socialcare.wales/learning-and-development/induction-for-health-and-social-care>

**Volunteers could be recruited from:**

* The existing pool of volunteers who may need to be redeployed to focus on managing demand and those in greatest need.
* Former volunteers who you could encourage to increase your volunteer pool.
* Employees from local corporate organisations and businesses who are unable to work as they are not considered key workers.
* Students now home from universities and colleges (e.g. students from Arts, IT and Social Care courses.
* Retired staff across the social care sector.
* Members of the public who have not volunteered before.

**Redeploying volunteers**

A skills audit of existing and new volunteers could facilitate redeployment including identifying where volunteers have professional experience or skills that can be put to effective use and may not need to be trained in the same way as volunteers who do not have the same experience. Organisations across the social care sector may be able to recruit and train new volunteers speedily.

**Support and supervision**

Volunteers, within all social care environments, should be supported and supervised. The safety of volunteers and people in care settings is paramount. If there is not the capacity or infrastructure for fast-tracked recruitment to volunteering within social care (or an independent or voluntary organisation operating within the social care as a contracted provider), you may have to suspend recruitment temporarily but can signpost enquirers to your local County Voluntary Council (<https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/>).

**Advertising opportunities**

You could consider creating a ‘Covid-19’ volunteering opportunity on the [www.volunteering-wales.net](http://www.volunteering-wales.net) website in order to recruit and manage temporary volunteers over this period. There is a specific Covid–19 category for opportunities, which enables people to search for these easily. A **Covid-19 volunteer app,** connected to the volunteering-wales.net platform, was launched on 3 April 2020 to manage people wanting to volunteer for specific Covid-19 related activity. This add-on to the platform will allow administrators and providers to create specific tasks related to the Covid19 situation. Providers still need to register in the same way as do volunteers on volunteering-wales.net.

[County Voluntary Councils](https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/contact/), can advise on what ‘locally grown’ neighbourhood opportunities there are to support those who have self-isolated who need extra support, for example, with food deliveries.

**Changes to legislation**

The new [coronavirus legislation](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-bill-what-it-will-do/what-the-coronavirus-bill-will-do) aims to increase the available care workforce and to reduce the number of administrative tasks they have to perform. Changes have been announced by government on DBS requirements, in order to allow volunteers to be more quickly recruited. Employees will be entitled to take periods of unpaid leave to volunteer and to receive some financial compensation in recognition of their lost earnings. This is likely to result in an increase in offers from members of the public to volunteer.

Current volunteers who have an existing DBS check should be applicable for the new role they may undertake, and volunteer roles requiring specific skills could be targeted at particular employee groups

See also: <https://wcva.cymru/wcva-launches-guidance-on-dbs-checks-amid-covid-19-crisis/>

**Safeguarding**

**Safeguarding is everyone’s business**. If you think someone is in immediate danger, you should call 999. Volunteers should have a basic knowledge about safeguarding. The Wales Safeguarding Procedures app is available for download via the Apple App Store and Google Play Store. They can also be viewed in English at [www.safeguarding.wales](http://www.safeguarding.wales/) and in Welsh at [www.diogelu.cymru](http://www.diogelu.cymru).

For any safeguarding concerns, speak to your local authority and ask for adult safeguarding or child protection.

**Raising a concern**

You will need to make volunteers aware about what to do if they have a concern about how a service is operating. Make sure the volunteer is clear how to pursue a complaint and make them aware if you have a whistleblowing policy. You should also make them aware of support from the inspectorate and regulatory bodies for any queries or concerns.

For concerns about a provider or service, they can speak to Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) in confidence on 0300 7900 126  or email CIW@gov.wales.

For concerns about an individual worker, they can speak to Social Care Wales via the online form on <https://socialcare.wales/fitness-to-practise/raising-a-concern> or e-mail ftp@socialcare.wales.

**Finally, advice on handwashing and simple measures such as social distancing should be reinforced. Where there are likely more direct contact volunteers should only do so if they have access to and the correct Personal Protective Equipment (masks, visors etc). Advice on handwashing and simple measures such as social distancing should be reinforced.**

**Other useful information**

* WCVA guidance: Community response to Covid-19 <https://wcva.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Community-response-to-Covid-19.pdf>
* Social Care Wales website: <https://socialcare.wales/about/coronavirus-and-our-work-what-you-need-to-know> Social Care Wales will be hosting a range of other useful resources on health and well-being and is likely to have its own website or a hyperlink.
* Guidance for providers on how to recruit safely during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic <https://socialcare.wales/service-improvement/recruiting-staff>
* Temporary employment and the impact on benefits: <https://www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus/existing-benefit-claims> or <https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/opening-up-work/>