

Guide 7: How do I engage volunteers?

Delivering a sport and physical activity service
A toolkit for mental health providers



Guide 7: How do I engage volunteers?

This guide covers

- The types of roles you could offer volunteers.
- Tips to help you recruit great volunteers.
- Suggested topics to cover in your volunteer training.
- Ideas to help you ensure that volunteers get the most from their experience.

Recruiting volunteers to help run your sessions is a great way of offering people opportunities to develop their skills and provide you with greater capacity to support your service. Volunteers with experience of mental health problems often have a greater understanding of the challenges your participants face, so can help advise on how to tackle particular issues. For people with mental health problems, volunteering can be a brilliant way of developing social and leadership skills.

I do get quite a sense of wellbeing from being able to help out effectively. It gives me confidence, it gives me purpose and new skills, and helps me practise socialising too. It makes me interact with the world in a better way, a more successful way.

Get Set to Go Volunteer

Which roles can I offer volunteers?

Activity volunteer – this role supports the coach or leader to deliver sessions by helping with admin, setting up equipment and supporting participants. They may also plan and deliver sessions if they have the right skills and experience.

Activity buddy – this role acts as a ‘friendly face’, and accompanies participants to sessions within the programme and wider community. They help participants overcome challenges and build their confidence around getting active.

Peer mentoring volunteer – this is a similar role to Activity Buddy, but the volunteer has their own experience of mental health problems. The volunteer can use their experience to support the participant. This is a form of peer support, more information on which can be found on [Mind's website](#).

Seeing a peer navigator has got me through a really hard time. Talking to her has helped me a lot. She's understanding, supportive and cheers me up – thank you!

Get Set to Go participant, Mind in Croydon

How do I attract great volunteers?

It's important to attract volunteers who are a good fit for the role, and who will also benefit from being involved.

Top tips include:

- Be clear about:
 - The skills and experience you are looking for.
 - Approximate time commitment.
 - Activity locations.
 - The support you can offer.
- Highlight the support volunteers will receive: induction, training and supervision sessions.
- Highlight the benefits of volunteering: the chance to learn new skills, meet new friends, access to your resources and social activities.
- Expenses: if you can afford to cover these, say what you'll pay.
- Share stories from your existing volunteers in your recruitment material – include quotes or full case studies so people can see the positive impact of volunteering.

Join In, a national sports volunteering charity, has developed insight into why people volunteer. You can download it from the Making Time pages on the [Join In](#) website.

If you already have an existing volunteer programme then start there. Your volunteers might be interested in trying something new and developing a different set of skills. Where possible, it is also useful to integrate your volunteer training with other volunteer programmes in your organisation.

It's best practice to write a volunteer role description to help potential volunteers decide if they are right for the position. An example can be found at the end of this guide. Remember – this is not a contract.

- Information on the national and regional sites to advertise volunteering opportunities can be found on the volunteering section of the [Knowhow Nonprofit](#) website.
- The Volunteering Explained page on the [Sport England](#) website also addresses some of the common questions asked when setting up a volunteer programme.

What else do I need to consider?

- Should the role be paid? If you think the role requires a contractual commitment, it might not be suitable as a voluntary role.
- If your organisation doesn't have a dedicated volunteer support role, what is your capacity to recruit, train and manage volunteers?
- Do you have a budget for volunteer expenses?
- For volunteers who are receiving benefits, provide clear information and guidance on what they can/can't claim for as a volunteer. Find out more through the government's '[Volunteering while getting benefits](#)' guide.
- Make sure you safeguard both the volunteers you recruit, and the participants they'll be working with. A safeguarding checklist can be found at the end of this guide. Further information on safeguarding volunteers and the criteria for the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks can be found on the Safeguarding and Volunteers page on the [Knowhow Nonprofit](#) website.
- What support is available for volunteers during evenings or out-of-hours?
- Like participants, volunteers with personal experience may have to take time off if they're experiencing a period of poor mental health. Be prepared to be able to cover potential absences.
- Do you have the capacity to offer volunteer support for participants on a one-to-one basis? Insight from Mind's Get Set to Go programme shows that it can take time to match a volunteer and participant based on their interests and the types of activities they want to try. Volunteers may require additional training and support when working with participants with complex needs or severe mental health problems.
- Do you have the capacity for regular supervision sessions to ensure your volunteers feel supported and get the most from their experience? Supervision topics may include:
 - Achievements and challenges since the last meeting
 - Review of goals and what the volunteer would like to get out of their experience
 - Areas of concern, including discussing any boundary or safeguarding issues
 - Issues around engaging a participant within the peer mentoring relationship, such as a potential lack of motivation to engage, which could be a result of poor mental health
 - Skills development or training needs
 - Discuss any questions regarding key policies, such as lone working, safeguarding etc.

What does peer support look like?

Peer support – when people use their own experiences to help each other – can be a really useful way of engaging participants in your sport and physical activity service. You can engage volunteers with personal experience of mental health problems for the following forms of peer support:

- Community groups.
- Mentoring.
- Befriending.
- Self-help groups.
- Online communities.
- Support groups.

To make sure it's effective, safe, good quality and truly peer-led, you should embed the following principles.

Principles for good quality peer support	What does this mean?	Putting this into practice
Peer-led	People with experience of mental health problems input into design, development and delivery. Their experience is an asset.	Recruiting staff and volunteers with experience of mental health problems. Developing evaluation tools in collaboration with people who have direct experience of mental health problems.
Mutuality	There is a mutual sharing of experience and of goals. Everyone is able to benefit from giving and receiving support based on their own experience.	Providing appropriate training for volunteers, such as active listening skills. Supervision and catch-up sessions between staff and volunteers.
Valuing skills	The skills and qualities to facilitate effective peer support are valued and developed.	As above

Principles for good quality peer support	What does this mean?	Putting this into practice
Hope	<p>There is a focus on moving towards the future.</p> <p>Positive experiences are shared.</p>	<p>Individual goal setting and planning.</p> <p>Focus on setting short and long-term objectives.</p> <p>Identifying strengths to draw on/develop.</p>
Empowerment	<p>People are supported to have a voice and to make decisions for their own future.</p>	<p>Set out the scope and boundaries of the peer support relationship from the outset.</p> <p>Providing appropriate training for volunteers, such as facilitation and active listening skills.</p>
Relationships	<p>People respect one another and build strong, honest relationships based on trust.</p>	<p>Training and supervision offered to develop key skills and provide support.</p>
Social skills	<p>People have the opportunity to build personal networks, experience friendship and increase their social capital.</p>	<p>Provide routes to participation in activities in the wider community.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to take part in social activities together.</p>
Reducing stigma	<p>Recognition of the value of working together and of the shared challenges of having a mental health problem.</p>	<p>Recruiting people who understand mental health discrimination.</p> <p>Recruiting people with the skills to support others to gain the confidence to be more open to express their needs.</p>
Safeguarding	<p>A safe environment where people understand their role and accountability.</p>	<p>Rigorous and robust recruitment procedures.</p> <p>Ensure everyone has a working knowledge of safeguarding policies and procedures.</p> <p>Providing a code of conduct for participants and clear complaints/conflict resolution procedure.</p> <p>Ongoing supervision and support.</p>

What kind of training should I offer to volunteers?

This depends on the nature of the role, and your organisational policies and procedures. As a guide, you might want to include:

- Introduction and overview to the programme.
- Benefits of physical activity on mental health:
 - Why being active is important for mental health.
 - What are the common barriers?
 - How can these be overcome.
- Agree on key qualities needed in the role.
- Effective communication:
 - Active listening.
 - Asking open questions.
 - Importance of positive feedback.
- Goal setting and behaviour change:
 - How to find out what the participant wants from the programme.
 - SMART goals.
- Evaluation and outcomes (if applicable):
 - The information you are collecting to demonstrate the impact of your programme.
 - Why you're collecting this information.
 - How volunteers can get involved.
- Setting clear boundaries and keeping safe:
 - Defining abuse and vulnerability.
 - Types of abuse – categories and indicators.
 - How to record and report instances of abuse.
 - Keeping yourself safe – lone working, awareness of risks.
 - Key first points of contact.
 - Overview of relevant sections of organisation policies and procedures, including what to do in an crisis or emergency.

What kind of training should I offer to volunteers?

- Confidentiality and data protection:
 - Overview of relevant sections of your organisation's policies and the Data Protection Act.
 - Consequences of breaking confidentiality or of data breaches.
 - Circumstances when we would break confidentiality without consent and why.
- Other relevant policies and procedures including social media

Format – our learning from Get Set to Go has highlighted the importance of:

- a. Making it interactive – mix of videos/case studies/activities/e-learning

Creating dialogue and debate through the use of open questions and providing an opportunity to ask questions and share experiences.

- b. Including the voice of experience – could training be co-delivered with existing volunteers?

- c. Delivering sessions at a range of times to meet the needs of volunteers who work, those with families and other commitments. Many local Minds have scheduled regular sessions at a range of times to meet the needs of prospective volunteers.

How to keep volunteers interested and engaged

- Look out for opportunities to get motivated volunteers involved in more of your work. For instance, giving them the opportunity to get involved in some of the marketing and promotion. Offer opportunities that fit with volunteers' motivation, interests and goals for volunteering.
- Have a clear pathway which outlines the different volunteer opportunities available, both within your organisation and within partner organisations.
- Shout about their successes – include volunteer case studies and quotes in your internal/external communications. Ask volunteers if they would be happy sharing their experience on film as a short video or case study to use in your recruitment and training collateral.
- Keep volunteers in the loop through newsletters and other communications – this can help to maintain links if there are few volunteering opportunities available at any one time.
- Positive encouragement and saying thank you – you can never do it enough!
- Recognise their contribution publicly – this could take the form of an award ceremony or highlighting an individual's work in your organisation's newsletter/marketing.

- What incentives can you offer – freebies? Training? Event invites? Free gym membership?
- Hold exit interviews with volunteers that leave the programme or organisation to find out what changes could be made to improve the volunteering experience. An example feedback form can be found at the end of this guide.
- Further guidance on finding, recruiting and managing volunteers can be downloaded from the following organisations.
 - [National Council for Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#)
 - [Volunteer Scotland](#)
 - [Volunteering Wales](#)
 - [Volunteering Matters](#)
 - [Do-it.org](#)

Case Study: Steven, Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind

Steven has a personality disorder, anxiety, low mood and OCD. After several years in secondary mental health services, Steven became socially isolated and, in his own words, “felt like giving up.”

He sought help from Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind, who matched him up with a volunteer mentor. With his mentor’s support, Steven got involved in a local environmental project. His positive experiences here helped him to reflect on the progress that he’d made, and how he could use this to help others.

From there, Steven became involved in the Get Set to Go project where he was able to progress from participant to volunteer, and to test out his skills in a supportive environment. The positive feedback he got from staff and service users gave him confidence, and enabled him to make the step from informal helper to official volunteer. The positive impact on his self-esteem was evident to all those around him.

Steven has now taken responsibility for facilitating a weekly group bowls session as part of Mind’s Get Set to Go programme with Tees Active in Stockton. Allan McDermott, Sports Academy Manger at Tees Active, said:

“Steven’s involvement has really helped us to develop this session. Because of his background he has an understanding and empathy with service users that makes them feel at ease. It’s a brilliant example of how we can work in partnership and encourage different sectors of the community to access our facilities.”

Steven’s mental health has now improved significantly. He is able to see a clear future for himself, and is excited about what each day brings.

Resources

Below is an example job description we created for local Minds. This one is for Dudley Mind but can be easily adapted and developed for your own use by amending the relevant information.

Example volunteer peer navigator: role description

What is Get Set to Go?

We're often told that physical exercise is good for us, but we understand that having a mental health problem can reduce our desire to get up and go, especially when we're not well.

Mind's new sport programme Get Set to Go, aims to remove the barriers to sport participation, so those of us with a mental health problem feel more confident about getting active and see it as an important part of a healthy lifestyle.

Dudley Mind is one of eight local Minds across England that will start providing Get Set to Go sessions this spring. The programme is being supported by Sport England and the National Lottery.

What are the benefits of volunteering on Get Set to Go?

We really want you to get the most out of your experience. By volunteering on the programme you will have opportunities to:

- Gain training to offer high quality peer support to help people with mental health problems overcome barriers to getting active.
- Develop new practical skills and have the opportunity to gain sports-related qualifications.
- Attend training and events provided by Mind and external providers.
- Try a range of activities in a fun and welcoming environment.
- Volunteer for other services offered by Mind.
- [Insert any subsidised leisure memberships or other incentives].

What will I be doing?

- As a volunteer peer navigator, you'll provide one-to-one support to a range of people with mental health problems to help them participate in weekly sessions that focus on a particular sport or physical activity. In this role you will receive support from the Sport Coordinator at Dudley Mind, who is responsible for running Get Set to Go in your area.

You will help support people so they are more confident being active or using leisure and sports facilities in your community, either on a one-to-one basis or as part of a group. The relationship between the peer navigator and participant is an equal one, working together to build a relationship that benefits you both.

You will also have opportunities to use your knowledge and experience as a volunteer peer navigator to help us shape key aspects of the programme, which may include assisting with the production of training materials and the broader marketing and promotion of Get Set to Go.

As a volunteer peer navigator you will need to:

- Create a mutually helpful and supportive relationship between the volunteer peer navigator and participant that will be of benefit to both. Build the confidence of individuals by encouraging and motivating them to overcome any barriers to getting active and taking part in sport.
- Support people to attend sport-related activity sessions together in the community, specifically within the following geographical areas ([insert bulleted list of areas](#))
- Work with Get Set to Go participants to help them achieve realistic goals and identify how they can stay active in the future.
- Encourage participants to consider their health and wellbeing more broadly, for example improving their diet, smoking cessation, sleep hygiene and developing social networks that can benefit their mental wellbeing.
- Give information about local services that can offer support to participants with needs not related to sport.
- Support the sports coordinator as requested.
- Work within agreed boundaries.
- Be a positive role model.

As a volunteer of Dudley Mind you will also be asked to:

- Complete Dudley Mind's volunteer induction programme and attend any other training necessary for the role.
- Attend regular supervision with the sports coordinator.
- Provide feedback and attend relevant meetings (where able).
- Work in a professional, confidential and non-discriminatory manner at all times and promote equal opportunities for all.
- Work in accordance with Dudley Mind's policies and procedures and maintain accurate records when required.

Disclosure: This role is subject to satisfactory references, Mind's policies on the Protection of Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults and an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and subsequent re-checks.

Practical considerations

- We welcome applications from people with personal experience of mental health problems.
- The application process could take a number of months due to the DBS check that must be completed before you can start to engage on a one-to-one basis with participants. Please only make an application if you are prepared and able to wait this length of time before you can start volunteering.
- The minimum time we ask that you to support a client is XXX weeks, so please only apply if you are able to volunteer for at least XXX months after the application process has been completed.
- We have a limited expenses budget, so we will be able to pay expenses that we deem as reasonable. Please speak to XXX for further details.
- Please note: The service, and therefore the role support is only available during office hours (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

How much time do I need to commit?

Hours are flexible although we do ask that you commit to X hours per week OR one weekly session.

What knowledge and experience will I need?

To help you make your decision we have listed the experience, knowledge and qualities that will help you to make the most of the role in the table below. Some are felt to be essential and are marked with an E (essential), others are great to have, but you can develop as a volunteer peer navigator and are marked with a D (desirable).

Don't worry if you don't already possess everything on the list: a number of the items will be included in the volunteer training and you will develop others as you gain experience in the role.

Criteria	Standard	E/D	Measured by
Qualifications	None required.		
Experience	Experience of using physical activity to improve physical and/or mental wellbeing.	E	Application form/ interview
	Experience of a mental health problem, either personally or from a close relative or friend.	D	Interview

Criteria	Standard	E/D	Measured by
Experience (continued)	Experience of working with people with mental health problems.	D	Application form/ interview
	Experience of providing one-to-one peer support.	D	Application form/ interview
Knowledge	Knowledge of the health benefits of physical activity.	E	Application form/ interview
	Knowledge of mental health problems.	D	Application form/ interview/training
Skills	Ability to communicate with both men and women of different ages and backgrounds in a friendly and supportive manner.	E	Interview/training
	Ability to provide positive feedback.	E	Interview/training
	Good time management skills and reliability.	E	References/training
	Ability to maintain professional boundaries and confidentiality.	E	References/training
Attitude	Open and non-judgemental attitude.	E	Interview/training
	Positive, patient and tolerant approach towards supporting people with mental health problems.	E	Interview/training
	Commitment to Dudley Mind's aims and objectives.	D	Interview/training

Who do I need to contact if I have any questions?

If you have any questions or would like further information then please contact [XXX](#), the Sport Coordinator at Dudley Mind on [TEL](#) or [EMAIL](#)

Safer Recruitment of volunteers peer navigators - A checklist from the Get Set to Go Programme

Safer recruitment of staff and volunteers is not just about DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checking. A DBS may form one part of your safer recruitment practices. The following checklist will help support safer recruitment of volunteers for your programme.

- Write a clear role description (what tasks the volunteer will do) and a role profile (what skills the person will be expected to have). This will help you to determine whether the post is regulated and is subject to a DBS check.
- Use an application form to assess the volunteer's suitability for the role. This makes it easier to compare the experience of potential volunteers and helps you to collate the important information you need to ask.
- Make it clear that your local organisation has a commitment to safeguarding and protecting vulnerable people. This should be included in the volunteer pack.
- Conduct a face-to-face interview with pre-planned and clear questions.
- Include a question on the application form and during interview about whether the applicant has any criminal convictions, cautions, other legal restrictions or pending cases that might affect their suitability to work with vulnerable adults.
- Check the volunteer's identity by asking them to bring photographic ID such as a photo driving license or passport.
- Check that the volunteer holds any relevant qualifications they say they have by asking them to bring the certificates with them to interview – for example, sports coaching qualifications, first aid certificates, etc.
- Take up a minimum of two references. These should be from a previous employer, volunteer manager or from a school/college/university tutor. Ask specifically about an individual's suitability to work with vulnerable adults.
- Provide a copy of your organisation's safeguarding procedures and employee/volunteer code of conduct/behaviour (what is and is not acceptable behaviour in relation to working with vulnerable adults), and ask them to sign when they have read it.
- Agree who will line manage the volunteer and agree the boundaries for their role. Read the DBS Guide to Eligibility – Supervision Guidance for more information.
- It may be your organisation's standard policy to apply for a DBS check, or you may deem the work of the volunteer to be 'regulated activity' – in which case you will need to apply for a DBS check. Read the DBS Guide to Eligibility for further information. Alternatively ask the volunteer to complete a self-disclosure form.
- Safeguarding vulnerable adults training should be provided to the volunteer before they start volunteering with you.

If you have any concerns about a volunteer's suitability to volunteer with vulnerable people you have a duty to follow this up with additional training or checks as required.

Additional information:

- DBS Guide to Eligibility
- Supervision guidance
- Adult workforce guidance
- DBS Direct
- Regulated activity adults guidance
- NCVO website

Example volunteer feedback form

Thank you for volunteering for **XXX**. We are really interested to hear how you think we can improve the experience for volunteers and appreciate any feedback you might have.

To help, we'd be really grateful if you could answer the following quick questions.

Why did you decide to volunteer for XXX ?
Did your volunteering experience meet your expectations? If so, how did it meet them?
Was there anything you felt could be improved?
Were there any further training/development opportunities we could have offered to support you in the role?
Has volunteering for XXX been useful in any other part of your life?
Are there any changes/improvements you would like to see made to the volunteering programme? Please be specific.
How likely are you to recommend the XXX volunteer role to others? (1 being 'not at all likely' and 10 being 'very likely')
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Is there anything else you'd like to add?