

Volunteer Policy

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Windmill Hill City Farm Volunteer Policy

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General

Introduction

Windmill Hill City Farm (WHCF) seeks to meet the needs of local people through a wide range of social, environmental, educational, recreational and economic activities. Without volunteers, we could not continue this work and they are an integral part of the organisation. WHCF values volunteers for the diverse skills and experience they bring.

WHCF aims to offer volunteers the opportunity to become actively involved in their local community by offering a range of voluntary activities and events, as well as the support to facilitate initiatives of their own. WHCF is committed to helping volunteers to find an activity that suits their interests, aims and skills, and to working with each volunteer to enhance their experience. We believe the exchange to be mutual; volunteers contribute to the work of WHCF and should get a range of benefits in return. WHCF is committed to increasing participation of local people in the development of the organisation, and that they develop personally from their volunteering experience.

Accordingly, this policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- WHCF will ensure that volunteers are properly integrated into the organisation and that systems are in place for them to contribute to the settings work.
- Volunteering is a valid activity in its own right and not a substitute for paid workers.
- The organisation expects staff at all levels will work positively with volunteers and, where appropriate, will actively seek to involve them in their work.
- The organisation recognises that volunteers require satisfying work and personal development and will seek to help volunteers meet these needs, as well as providing the training and support for them to do their work effectively.

This policy shall apply to the involvement of anyone who intends to carry out work on a voluntary basis at WHCF. All WHCF staff shall understand and adhere to the policy.

Objectives of the Policy

This policy aims to set out good volunteering practice throughout WHCF so that all volunteers, support staff and members are able to access and understand the ethos in which volunteers are engaged in volunteering programmes at the farm. The policy aims to help ensure fairness and consistency across projects and areas so that decisions are made based upon the same principles. The policy also ensures that the interests of the volunteers are met, whilst bearing in mind the needs and purpose of the organisation and the health and safety of all. This is a working document which outlines the key details and practicalities of working with and managing volunteers at WHCF. Volunteers, members and all staff are encouraged to communicate with the Health and Social Care Manager regarding policy developments.

Types and Roles of Volunteers

Definitions

Volunteering is defined as:

“...any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation.”

Volunteering England, NCVO

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For the purposes of volunteer management, three categories of volunteer have been identified as follows:

- **Supported volunteers** – These volunteers have some form of health and social care need, such as mental health issues, a learning disability or are recovering from addiction resulting in them requiring greater support. Volunteers need to provide a reference from a current care provider, such as a recovery agency or third sector organization. These volunteers are primarily managed and supported by the Health and Social Care Manager. All prospective supported volunteers attend a meeting with the H&SC Manager before starting.
- **Independent volunteers** – volunteers who do not have an assisted support plan and volunteer either on a regular basis (at least once per fortnight) or at one off events. They will have an informal interview or informal meeting depending on volunteer role and will be supervised on a day-to-day basis by the member of staff running the project/section the volunteer is assisting with. Regular supervision meetings will be set up with each volunteer if they are volunteering on a regular basis.
- **Corporate volunteers** – volunteers from businesses that volunteer as a group on an ad-hoc basis, and usually as part of the business' social responsibility policy (i.e. not team building). The group will be managed by the member of staff leading the project the group works on. Corporate groups often make a financial donation as part of the project.

Role Descriptions

Through all of our volunteering roles, we aim to offer purpose, structure and meaningful work to people and help to develop life and work skills that aid recovery or personal development.

Groups of volunteers are organised on a rota throughout the week and vary from two-three hour sessions in the farm or gardens through to full days of work on maintenance or site development.

All volunteers are given a description of the role they are to undertake, which can be adapted over time to their role as and when it changes. Volunteers are entitled to a clear explanation of the responsibilities and tasks they will be undertaking during a project or activity. Volunteers are not expected to commit to an activity until they are clear about their obligations. All core volunteer roles have a role description with an associated 'skills' list. The role descriptions will state whether a DBS check is needed.

There are a number of ongoing volunteering roles in different areas of WHCF. WHCF is committed to constantly creating and developing volunteer roles in line with the organisation's need. Volunteer roles are developed by area through a process of negotiation between area staff and the Health and Social Care Manager. Through developing role descriptions, WHCF aims to clearly set out the overall aim of the role, specific tasks, skills and qualities needed for the role and expectations of achievements.

Volunteers' responsibilities

Volunteers' responsibilities are outlined in the volunteer agreement and include the following:

- Be punctual and notify staff as soon as possible if they are unable to attend a session.
- Help staff set up at the start and tidy up at the end of sessions.
- Help to provide a safe environment.
- Work as part of a team and under the supervision of the practitioners.
- Help ensure that equipment is maintained and that anything damaged or dangerous is removed and reported.
- To work within the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and the Vulnerable Adults Policy, including reporting procedures.

Paid work and volunteers

Volunteers are integral to the functioning of the organisation at all levels. There is no clear line to distinguish which functions could only be undertaken by paid staff nor which could be undertaken by

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volunteers. Some functions can only be undertaken by volunteers (eg being a trustee). In a professional organisation of this one's current scale and scope there are some indicators that can be used to determine whether a job should be paid. Where a role has all or many of the following elements it is likely that it should be a paid role:

- management responsibility (could be for staff or for the success of a process or project)
- is essential to service delivery
- requires more than two days per week of work
- has significant required knowledge, skill, training or responsibility
- works alongside other paid staff doing the same overall role (beyond some shared tasks)
- cannot be quickly covered by other staff or volunteers

The nature of contract between the organisation and staff is very different to that with volunteers. A volunteer signs an agreement about what they can expect and what the organisation expects of them. However, they can leave when they wish and can be absent or turn down assignments without consequence. Staff have a contract which provides them with certain legal rights as an employee and which gives them obligations to do their job at set times and to a certain standard.

It is inevitable that in any area of work some of the same tasks are done by both staff and volunteers, however it is important to maintain a distinction between paid roles and volunteer roles overall. This may be through highlighting some tasks that volunteers never undertake (eg cashing up the till in the café; locking-up and alarming the site at the close of the day), or by the expectation of commitment (eg hours of work not being fixed, length of shift not exceeding a few hours).

Over time, volunteers may develop high levels of expertise in an area. It is important that we try to avoid developing a reliance on individual volunteers doing fixed tasks (the danger is the same for key staff). We need to be able to deal with their short-term absence or departure.

The knowledge and skills developed by volunteers as they undertake their role makes them very good candidates for some of the paid jobs that are required. This is particularly evident in the café and in the farm, gardens and site operations activities.

There are times when the organisation has urgent staffing needs or the need for ad-hoc, short-term cover. In such circumstances it may be of benefit to both the volunteer and the organisation to offer an existing volunteer a paid role. It is important to remain mindful of standard recruitment policy (See GN18) to ensure that

- 1) the job is genuinely required
- 2) the right person with the right skills is recruited to the job
- 3) the process is fair and open (as far as is possible given circumstances)

It is critical that volunteers are given an induction and the expectations of the paid role are clearly explained and distinguished from any volunteer role they have previously held. It should be stressed that the standard recruitment process should always be used for

- substantial or permanent contracts
- non-urgent vacancies
- where the volunteer's role is not directly related to the paid post.

In some circumstances paid staff may also be volunteers. In such circumstances it is important for managers to maintain a distinction between the paid and volunteer roles and to be very clear about which times are paid and which are volunteering.

Recruitment

Volunteers are recruited by the Volunteer and Project Coordinator and the Health and Social Care Manager. A variety of online and offline methods are used to recruit volunteers without identified support

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needs. We use these means to advertise for volunteers locally that take into account the principles of our equal opportunities policy. The recruitment process will also align with our recruitment policy.

Supported volunteers are recruited by the Health and Social Care Manager through self-referral, support services and agencies. The organisation actively promotes volunteering to people with additional needs including those with a mental health, learning disabilities or in recovery from addiction.

The organisation has to be able to offer support and supervision at a level that meets the needs of each individual which can impact on the number of volunteers that we are able to take on, and the speed at which we are able to start new volunteers. This will be kept under review.

Selection and Screening

Applications

Prospective volunteers are expected to follow the advertised application process. Specific volunteering opportunities will be advertised, with an application form attached, or with contact details of the Health and Social Care Manager to request an application form. Most volunteer applications are received completed online now and stored on Airtable. However, prospective volunteers may send/drop off their completed application form if preferred. Where possible WHCF staff can support a prospective volunteer to complete a form if required. This approach will help volunteers who may lack the confidence or basic literacy skills to feel supported and welcomed into the project.

Individual risk assessments may be requested by the Health and Social Care Manager as a way of monitoring risk and ensuring the farm environment is suitable. The individual risk assessments are completed by a professional providing care for the applicant and are completed before an interview is offered. The Health and Social Care Manager will determine whether an individual risk assessment is required.

Interviews/Assessments

Upon receiving an initial volunteer application form and ahead of starting at the farm, an informal meeting is organised in which the Health and Social Care Manager discusses the specificities of the role and what the volunteer would like to achieve, their skills, availability, suitability and how best their potential might be realised. Volunteers visit their preferred project or team. It might be that following the initial meeting it is deemed that the prospective volunteer is unsuitable for the service for one or more reasons. H&SC manager will use their discretion on this.

If there is more than one suitable applicant for a volunteering role or where a project requires a higher level of responsibility (especially if the project involves young people or vulnerable adults), informal interviews may be held to assess whether they are suitable for the placement or project.

References

All volunteers must provide the organisation with two referees on their application form. The Health and Social Care Manager or Volunteer and Project Coordinator will ensure that references are checked appropriately depending on what area of volunteering they are engaging in. For example, a volunteer supporting vulnerable adults will undergo more rigorous checks than a volunteer joining a supported group. WHCF will use their discretion on the depths of reference checks.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks

Volunteers may be subject to an enhanced DBS check depending on the nature of the work they will be undertaking. Volunteer role profiles will state if an enhanced DBS check is required. If required, the volunteer will be notified of the process for DBS application and any personal data that is required for the check will be passed to Capita for processing.

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Prospective volunteers with a criminal conviction are not automatically unsuitable to become a volunteer as only a small number of convictions would prevent a volunteer from involvement. WHCF follows the DBS Code of Practice, committing not to discriminate unfairly against any subject of a criminal record check on the basis of a conviction or other information revealed. The organisation has a written policy on the recruitment of ex-offenders, which is made available to all DBS applicants at the outset of the recruitment process if required. At interview, or in a separate discussion, WHCF ensures that an open and measured discussion takes place on the subject of any offences or other matter that might be relevant to the position. Failure to reveal information that is directly relevant to the position sought could lead to withdrawal of an offer of volunteer place. The decision of taking on a volunteer with a criminal record will be made by the Volunteer Coordinator and CEO

Induction and Training

Induction

Volunteers receive an induction into WHCF and their own area of work. This will include:

- The role of the volunteer
- A welcome pack introducing the Volunteer Handbook
- Introduction to key people
- Important safety information including health and safety, first aid, fire and evacuation, organisational structure and any relevant policies and procedures.
- Volunteer Action plan
- Invitations to attend regular meetings where they are able to meet new volunteers, socialise with volunteers from across WHCF, share experiences and make friends.

The Health and Social Care Manager will carry out inductions. Recognising the valuable knowledge that established volunteers have, WHCF is committed to encouraging them to carry out sections of the inductions for new volunteers. Project leaders and workers also deliver parts of the induction where appropriate.

Training

WHCF believes in the personal development of volunteers through training. There will be opportunities in supervision meetings for volunteers to request training that will enable them to do their role better or help achieve their aspirations. Training needs will be reviewed through regular support and supervision.

Monitoring and Supervision

WHCF is committed to monitoring volunteer progress and providing support that is appropriate to the role and the individual volunteer.

Supervisors

Volunteers are supported by the Health and Social Care Managers. The named supervisor will undertake the induction, training and supervision of the volunteer. In addition all volunteers have a supervisor who supports them in day to day tasks, and will be given their contact details. It is the role of both Health and Social Care Manager and day to day support staff to monitor the welfare of their volunteers and make themselves available and approachable.

WHCF believes in the potential for volunteers to support other volunteers where appropriate. In such circumstance, the volunteer is given adequate supervision and training to support their assigned volunteer.

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Supervision Meetings

Volunteers' support needs are established in their induction and regularly reviewed through supervision sessions. The frequency of supervision sessions is open to negotiation and dependent upon how often the volunteer participates and the volunteers' support needs. Generally speaking, for individuals volunteering for more than four hours per week, supervision meetings take place every 6 weeks with the Health and Social Care Managers. In meetings volunteers can review their volunteer action plan, feed back on progress, discuss future development and air any problems. Where appropriate personal development resources are adapted for supported volunteers.

Volunteers have an annual review which is an opportunity for them to reflect on the previous year as a volunteer with the organisation and for them to make plans and set goals.

Volunteers also have the opportunity to attend regular volunteer lunches which operate on a drop in basis once a month. These are a great way to meet other volunteers, socialize with staff and share experiences. Volunteers can also use this space to ask questions or raise any ideas for future work or activities. In this way lunches are seen as having a peer support function.

In the event of volunteers not turning up for sessions committed to, ad-hoc supervisory meetings are called to assess whether there are any issues and if they would still like to volunteer, and to discuss solutions to problems.

Evaluation

Measures are taken to improve the volunteering programme at WHCF. Evaluation questionnaires are given to all volunteers at regular intervals. Efforts are made for these to be completed anonymously, although the anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed. If volunteers do not want their name to be tied to evaluation data, they can opt out of evaluation processes. Once data is received then project reports are compiled with conclusions and recommendations for the future volunteering programme.

Prior to volunteers leaving, an exit questionnaire is given to them to find out why they leave. Where possible, WHCF adapt the volunteering programme to implement suggested changes.

Volunteer Recognition

WHCF recognises the work of its volunteers as extremely valuable. Volunteers who work in any capacity are respected and appreciated on a daily basis throughout WHCF. Recognition also comes in the form of structured events, mainly 'thank you' events and our annual volunteer Christmas party.

Expenses

Volunteers cannot be paid for voluntary activity. However, all regular volunteers are entitled to have their travel expenses paid up to a value of £4. If working for over 6 hours a day, lunch vouchers are available. Volunteers must provide receipts in order to claim their expenses so that the accounts can show the volunteer expenditure.

Unfortunately the organisation's current funding situation prohibits greater payments as it would mean that the number of volunteers would need to be limited. The organisation's ability to pay further expenses will be kept under review and will be updated if the funding situation changes. Greater payments may be made on a discretionary basis – this will be based on the organisation's needs and must be approved by the CEO, each request will be considered on its merits.

Health and Safety

WHCF aims to provide and maintain safe and healthy working conditions, equipment and systems of work for all volunteers and the people they come into contact with. We aim to make volunteers aware

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of health and safety issues and to minimise the hazards and risks to volunteers to thrive in a healthy and safe environment.

All staff, volunteers and visitors are covered by the organisation's Health and Safety Policy, a copy of which will be provided during the induction process. All volunteers are expected to adhere to this policy.

Volunteers are given the names of the assigned First Aid and Fire Safety staff members and made aware of the fire evacuation procedure.

Risk Assessments are carried out for all volunteering activities and will be based upon the WHCF model document.

WHCF strives to offer a fair, high quality service to all volunteers, customers, members, partners and other interested stakeholders. We will do what we can to address the individual's concerns promptly. If a volunteer has any problems, they should talk to their named supervisor. If there are any issues that cannot be discussed with staff then the volunteer should talk to either the Chief Executive or a member of the Board of Trustees and they will be advised about how to follow the organisation's complaints procedure (a copy of which will be given during the induction process).

Disciplinary Procedure

WHCF set out the standards of conduct expected of all volunteers and staff and provide a framework within which managers can work with volunteers to maintain satisfactory standards of conduct and to encourage improvement where necessary. Volunteers are given a copy of the organisation's disciplinary policy and procedure on induction.

If the organisation believes that the volunteer is unsuitable for the role they have been placed in, the Volunteer Coordinator will discuss with the volunteer options for adapting the role to suit them. If the role has been adapted a number of times for the volunteer and performance is still unsatisfactory, the volunteer will be asked to cease volunteering.

If there has been misconduct on the part of the volunteer the procedure set out in the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure should be followed.

Harassment

WHCF recognises that harassment is a serious issue should it occur when volunteering and can affect the confidence of volunteers and enjoyment of the volunteering opportunity. Any volunteer who feels they are being harassed should not accept the situation and should make it clear from the outset that this behaviour is unwelcome. In such circumstances volunteers will be encouraged to talk through the issue with their supervisor and should refer to the Respect and Dignity Policy.

If they feel it is more appropriate to discuss the situation with their named supervisor they are encouraged to do so. The volunteer may elect to have the complaint investigated in the full knowledge that the matter will be dealt with seriously, promptly and with the strictest of confidence.

Equal Opportunities

WHCF's equal opportunities policy will be adhered to at all times during interactions with volunteers and service users.

WHCF is committed to promoting diversity and equality of opportunity for all staff members, job applicants and volunteers. We aim to create a working environment in which all individuals are able to make best use of their skills, free from discrimination or harassment, where individuals are respected, treated fairly and able to give their best and all decisions are based on merit. Please refer to our equality and diversity policy for further information. Volunteers will be expected to have an understanding of and commitment to this policy.

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Insurance

All volunteers are covered by the insurance policy of WHCF whilst they are engaged in any work in the organisation. The organisation will provide a safe workplace and provide insurance cover against any injury caused by negligence. All volunteers are covered by the settings employer's liability and public liability insurance.

Confidentiality

All staff and volunteers will be made aware of the Volunteer Privacy Notice which is in line with current GDPR laws.

when joining the organisation through the staff or volunteer induction process. Volunteers will be bound by the same requirements for confidentiality as paid staff.

Alcohol and Drugs Policy

WHCF prohibits the drinking of alcohol by volunteers when participating in volunteering activities. Volunteers are informed in their induction that if they arrive under the influence of alcohol or drugs they will not be allowed to participate in volunteering activity. The Volunteer Coordinator and/ or Health and Social Care Manager can discuss the issue with the volunteer and support them to ensure their own and others wellbeing, especially for those in recovery or who have alcohol and/or drug dependency. Arriving under the influence of alcohol or drugs may be considered as gross misconduct and dealt with under the disciplinary procedure.

Due to some volunteers being in recovery from alcohol and drug dependency, the decision to have alcohol at events will be made by the Volunteer Coordinator and area leaders after serious consideration of the impact it will have on volunteers' wellbeing. Any decision made about the presence of alcohol at events is final.

Policy review

This policy will be reviewed on an 2-yearly cycle.