

INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS AS VOLUNTEERS:

guidance for volunteer-involving organisations

Encouraging young people to consider volunteering is about widening their horizons; it's about helping them to dream in colour again. Young people may have much to offer your organisation – including energy, commitment and new perspectives on the work you do.



WHY INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS AS VOLUNTEERS?

They have a great deal to offer in terms of energy, commitment and diversity:

- Given the opportunity to take part in something positive, they can prove to be particularly motivated and hard-working volunteers, keen to make a fresh start and often inspired to 'give something back' to society.
- It can provide an opportunity for young ex-offenders to work with and get to know others in their community, breaking down barriers and supporting social inclusion.
- It can be a way for you to increase the diversity of volunteers and ensure that your volunteers bring a wide range of skills and experiences to your organisation. It also demonstrates that you are committed to equal opportunities.
- Volunteering can help ex-offenders boost their confidence and build their skills. All this can help reduce the risk that they will re-offend.

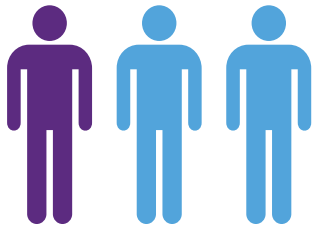
I can at least help some people with my experience because my life's varied ... I've done everything I shouldn't have done so it's about time I started doing something right, so that's the way I look at it.

Young ex-offender

DID YOU KNOW?

Having a criminal record is quite common.

Around one-third of men in England and Wales have at least one conviction for a 'standard list' (non-motoring) offence.



Volunteers with criminal records already make a significant contribution. E.g. the national charity Sue Ryder benefits from **111,000 volunteering hours contributed by serving prisoners** each year. Over **1,200 prisoners volunteer as Listeners** – trained by the Samaritans – to provide support to their fellow-prisoners.

CASE STUDY: A CHARITY FOR HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE

The charity offers accommodation and other help for homeless young people. It provides volunteering opportunities both for the young people resident at the service, ex-residents and others. Some of their volunteers have offending histories but this is not a barrier to volunteering. The volunteers are able to build up their confidence and improve their CVs as part of getting their lives back on track. The charity offers various kinds of volunteering opportunities ranging from working at central office to participating in outreach work to raise awareness about homelessness in schools.

ARE YOU READY?

This section aims to help you think about your approach to recruiting young people with criminal records and helps you to identify and overcome potential barriers by offering some practical tips.

Proactive recruitment in a whole system manner... takes time...it isn't something that you achieve overnight.

Unlock
www.unlock.org.uk

Are you recruiting positively?

Make sure it is clear that you have an inclusive and positive approach to involving young people with criminal records. You may wish to include a statement such as – 'we do not discriminate against people with criminal records and will consider each application on a case by case basis'. For those new to volunteering, taster sessions or open days may help break down barriers and make them aware of the opportunities within your organisation.

You should think carefully about how you make recruitment decisions about people with offending histories. Consider:

- The nature of the role they are applying for including the setting in which it will take place.
- Their suitability for the role.
- The nature of their prior offending and whether it has any relevance to the role.
- What support needs they may have and how you will ensure these can be met.
- Whether a culture change is required in the organisation to ensure you are being proactive in recruiting ex-offenders across the work you do. This can be different to an experience of recruiting ex-offenders to work on a specific project.

Risk and safeguarding

Having considered the above, think through whether there are any safeguarding issues to consider for everyone involved in your organisation. A good approach to safeguarding includes clearly assessing risk and taking actions to mitigate these risks including:

- An effective recruitment process e.g. robust references and DBS checks where appropriate to the role
- Adequate training and supervision
- Clear guidelines on what to do in the event of an allegation or incident

The approach you take to safeguarding should be determined by, and proportionate to, the risk inherent in the volunteering activities in question. This helps to ensure that you have effective safeguarding measures in place without creating unnecessary barriers.

Expenses

Reimbursing out-of-pocket expenses is an important way to ensure that financial constraints are not a barrier to volunteering.

Where possible you should allocate a budget for this. You should only reimburse actual costs incurred by volunteers. Expenses over and beyond this can be liable for tax and could affect the volunteer's benefits.

Do you have suitable opportunities or roles?

Think about whether the volunteering opportunities you have would be appealing to young people. You could consider asking young people how they might like to be involved and what skills they have and design roles around them.

Are you able to offer the support that they will need?

Young people with criminal convictions may need extra support to begin and continue volunteering. They may have additional needs and be vulnerable. Ongoing support and supervision offers the chance to discuss and address any concerns. Clear guidance should be provided about what is required of the volunteer, their role and how they should complete tasks which may be unfamiliar to them. Effective induction and training for the role is also important. Praise and encouragement will help young people to feel welcome and valued in their role.

JOINT WORKING

Young ex-offenders may well be receiving support from other voluntary or statutory organisations such as probation, a Youth Offending Team or a mentor.

It may be beneficial to work with other organisations to support young ex-offenders in their volunteer role.

It is also important to involve the young people themselves in any discussions and decisions that affect them.

These organisations specialise in working with people with convictions and can offer further information:

NACRO
www.nacro.org.uk

Unlock
www.unlock.org.uk

St Giles Trust
www.stgilestrust.org.uk

Volunteers don't come to make cups of tea or do washing up or clean up... volunteers are here to gain experience, gain confidence, to learn new skills.

Volunteer organiser

Disclosure and Barring Service (previously CRB) checks aren't required for every volunteering role and can be off-putting for potential volunteers. It is important to understand which roles require DBS checks to avoid completing unnecessary checks. DBS checks are only one element of safeguarding and processes put in place should be proportionate to the volunteering role and the context in which it is taking place.

For more information you can visit the DBS website and read the NCVO information sheet.

www.knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers/keeping/safeguarding-volunteers

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service/about

How volunteering will affect welfare benefits may be a concern for potential volunteers. However, people claiming state benefits can volunteer as long as they keep to the rules for getting them. It is important for potential volunteers to speak to the relevant advisor before starting volunteering. Volunteers on benefits can still be reimbursed for actual out-of-pocket expenses they incur whilst volunteering.

More information is available from the Department for Work and Pensions.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/volunteering-while-getting-benefits-leaflet

This briefing is produced by



This project was made possible by funding from the **Paul Hamlyn Foundation** and the **Barrow Cadbury Trust**.

Other briefings in this series are guidance for:

- Young people
- Resettlement organisations

Available at
www.ivr.org.uk/ivr-projects/ivr-current-projects/ex-offenders-and-volunteering

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