south dublin county volunteer centre volunteer policy

statement of policy

The South Dublin County Volunteer Centre exists to promote support, recruit and train volunteers and place them in relevant agencies in the South Dublin area. We recognise that in order to achieve our goals we need to involve volunteers in our own work too. It is also essential that we present a model of good practice in volunteer management.

We regard volunteers as a valuable resource and encourage them to get involved at all levels of the organisation and within all appropriate activities. We aim to train, support and supervise our volunteers to the best of our abilities, and to act quickly and fairly if difficulties arise.

Procedural Guidelines

1. General principles

1.1 Purpose of this document

The purpose of this internal document is to provide guidance on all aspects of volunteering at the SDCVC. It does not constitute a binding contract. It supplements other SDCVC policies and procedures, as well as our definition of volunteering, our mission statement and our value base. These procedures apply to all non-elected volunteers who undertake tasks on behalf and at the direction of the SDCVC.

1.2 Responsibility

The SDCVC Manager is responsible for ensuring that the policy and the procedures in this document are implemented efficiently and effectively. All other staff and volunteers (including voluntary management committee members) are expected to facilitate this process.

1.3 Eligibility

The SDCVC will consider involving anyone as a volunteer. Individuals must, however, be able to demonstrate a commitment to the aims of the organisation and may only be placed if their needs as volunteers match the needs of the organisation. No person who has a conflict of interest with any aspect of the organisation will be accepted as a volunteer. Voluntary management committee members may not undertake other voluntary work within the SDCVC itself, but will be encouraged and supported by the SDCVC if they wish to volunteer elsewhere.

1.4 Relationship with paid staff

Volunteers are appointed to enhance the capacity of paid staff (including Community Employment workers), not as a substitute for them. Conversely, the SDCVC does not accept the services of its paid staff as volunteers. Clear roles are established to differentiate between paid staff and volunteers to foster mutually beneficial and complementary relationships.

1.5 Working conditions

Volunteers are treated as full members of the SDCVC team. They are treated as equally and fairly as paid staff and are included in the organisation's functions and decision-making processes wherever practical. Volunteers are provided with appropriate work sites and have access to the space, equipment and facilities necessary to volunteer effectively and comfortably.

1.6 Working times
Working times are negotiated between the SDCVC Manager and the volunteer and are as flexible as the tasks allow. Voluntary time commitment is never expected to match that of full-time paid staff, but unscheduled absences can create organisational problems. When expecting to be absent, volunteers should inform their supervisor as soon as possible, so that alternative arrangements can be made.

1.7 Appropriate behaviour
Volunteers are expected to work within the policies and procedures of the SDCVC and adhere to its ethos. As representatives of the organisation, they are responsible for presenting a positive image of the SDCVC to the outside world.

1.8 Representation of the SDCVC
Volunteers must seek prior approval from the SDCVC Manager before undertaking anything that might affect the organisation. This includes, but is not limited to, statements to the press, joint initiatives with other bodies, and agreements involving contractual or financial obligations.

1.9 Confidentiality
The SDCVC respects the volunteer's right to privacy and confidentiality. In turn, volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all privileged information to which they are exposed while volunteering with the SDCVC.

1.10 Records
A system of records is maintained on all volunteers, including dates and times of service, duties performed, evaluation of work, etc. Volunteer records are accorded the same confidentiality as staff records.

1.11 Service at the discretion of the SDCVC
Any voluntary service is at the discretion of the SDCVC. The SDCVC may, at any time, and for whatever reason, decide to terminate volunteers relationships with the organisation. Similarly, volunteers may at any time, and for whatever reason, decide to terminate their relationships with the SDCVC. Notice of such decisions should be communicated at the earliest opportunity, preferably in writing.

2. Recruitment

2.1 Role descriptions and person specifications
Like paid staff, volunteers require a clear and accurate description of the tasks and responsibilities they are expected to undertake. Prior to any volunteer assignment or recruitment effort, a role description must be developed for each voluntary opportunity. This must include a title of the volunteering role, starting and finishing dates, hours and place of work, name of supervisor and tasks to be undertaken. If appropriate, a brief person specification may also be drawn up. The role description may be amended in joint agreement with the volunteer and the SDCVC Manager. A copy of the final version must be given to the volunteer before commencing voluntary work, as it will be used in supervision and evaluation sessions. Role descriptions must define a time limit (no longer than one year) for voluntary involvement, after which time they are reviewed, and updated if appropriate.

2.2 Applications
Volunteers are recruited on a pro-active basis by the organisation using publicity avenues that are suitable for the roles that need to be filled. Potential volunteers may also apply speculatively or come via the volunteer placement service provided by the SDCVC. Volunteers are recruited in accordance with the SDCVC's equal opportunities policy. All volunteers are required to complete an application form.

2.3 Interviews
If necessary, applications are short listed and suitable candidates are invited to attend an informal chat with the SDCVC Manager, to ascertain their interest in and suitability for the role. Written records of all interviews are kept. All unsuccessful candidates are thanked for applying and encouraged to reapply for other volunteering opportunities, either current or in the future.

2.4 Checks for suitability
References are always taken up. If the role requires it, health (mental and physical) are also undertaken. Other checks such as Garda Vetting may also be completed but this will be articulated in the Role Description. Volunteers are always warned in advance of the intention to make these checks. If they refuse permission and cannot provide an acceptable reason, they will not be placed.

2.5 Appointment
Formal appointments are made only after the role description has been agreed and all necessary checks have proved acceptable. No placements are made unless the requirements of the volunteer and the volunteer's supervisor can be met.

2.6 Probation
All placements are subject to an initial trial period of one month. At the end of this period, the SDCVC Manager meets with the volunteer to discuss the volunteer's suitability for their role. At this point, volunteers may continue in their current role, be reassigned to a more suitable role, or be asked to leave.

3. Training

3.1 Induction
All volunteers receive induction when they begin voluntary work with the SDCVC. This consists of a general introduction to the organisation, as well as a specific orientation on the purposes and requirements of their volunteering role.

3.2 On-the-job training
Volunteers receive initial and ongoing on-the-job training to provide them with the information and skills necessary to perform their tasks well. The training must be appropriate for the demands of the position and the capabilities of the volunteer.

3.3 Additional training
Volunteers are actively encouraged to identify training courses, seminars, conferences, and so on, which would help them to perform their roles better and which would aid their personal development. Approval to undertake such training free-of-charge must be given by the SDCVC Manager and this will only be done if sufficient funds are available. Priority is given to long standing volunteers and those who have received little or no training in the past.

3.4 Training information
If additional training was paid for by the SDCVC, any course or other materials belong to the organisation and must be filed in the SDCVC office. All volunteers are required to submit a short report outlining the content and usefulness of the course or meeting attended. Training information must be disseminated to relevant people within the organisation.

4. Supervision

4.1 Lines of communication
Lines of communication should operate in both directions and should exist formally and informally. Volunteers must have access to all appropriate information, memos, materials and meetings relevant to their assignments. Volunteers must be consulted on all decisions that would substantially affect their volunteering conditions.

4.2 Supervisors
Each volunteer must have a clearly identified supervisor who is responsible for the day-to-day management of that volunteer. The SDCVC Manager normally takes on the supervisor's role, but all staff members receive training and guidance on how to involve volunteers effectively in the work of the organisation.

4.3 Supervision sessions
Volunteers receive regular appraisals of their work, based on their role descriptions. Evaluation sessions take place at least once a month between the volunteer and his or her supervisor. These review the performance of the volunteer, suggest any changes in work style, seek suggestions from the volunteer on means of enhancing the volunteer's relationship with the SDCVC, convey appreciation to the volunteer and ascertain the continued interest of the volunteer in serving in his or her role. The sessions also serve as an opportunity to plan future tasks.

4.4 Corrective action
If appropriate, corrective action may be taken following evaluation sessions. Examples include the organisation of training for an identified training need, the reassignment of a volunteer, or the dismissal of a volunteer.

4.5 Dismissal
Volunteers who do not adhere to the organisation's rules or who fail to perform their volunteer assignments satisfactorily may be subject to dismissal. No volunteer's involvement will be terminated in writing until the volunteer

has had an opportunity to discuss the reasons for possible dismissal with their supervisor. Grounds for dismissal include, but are not limited to, the following: gross misconduct, being under the influence of drugs (including alcohol), theft, misuse of equipment and materials, abuse of clients and co-workers, breaches of confidentiality, failure to abide by SDCVC policies and procedures and failure to complete duties to a satisfactory standard.

4.6 Concerns and grievances
If volunteers are not satisfied that issues relating to their volunteering are being handled appropriately, they are entitled to have their concerns reviewed by the management committee. The management committee will discuss the issue as soon as practical after receiving a written complaint, and take appropriate action. The chair of the management committee makes the ultimate decision.

4.7 Exit interviews
Where possible, informal exit interviews are held with any volunteers who are leaving the organisation, either because they have reached the end of their project, or are leaving for some other reason. Interviews are usually conducted with the volunteer's ex-supervisor and written records are kept. The session should ascertain why the volunteer is leaving, how they found the volunteering experience and what suggestions they offer to improve the way the organisation operates. The offer of a personal reference for future employment etc. is made to each volunteer.

5. Support and recognition

5.1 Support
The SDCVC endeavours to provide the support necessary to encourage and empower volunteers to make a meaningful contribution and gain significant benefits from their voluntary work. Support forms part of the regular supervision sessions and gives volunteers a safe setting in which to express themselves, let off steam and discuss how they feel about volunteering. The SDCVC manager will always try to be available to volunteers who require support in other areas that are affecting their performance.

5.2 Recognition
Volunteers provide a unique service to the SDCVC, the benefits of which are difficult to quantify. It is essential that their efforts are recognised and rewarded. SDCVC staff are responsible for thanking all volunteers informally on a regular basis for the valuable contribution that they make to the organisation. The SDCVC Manager is responsible for ensuring that more formalised recognition takes place at key times.

5.3 Expenses
Volunteers give their time and skills free of charge, so it is essential that the SDCVC offers to reimburse any out-of-pocket expenses they may incur in the course of undertaking voluntary work for the organisation. The costs of volunteering should never be allowed to discourage those on low incomes. Current rates and procedures for claiming expenses are agreed by the management committee and publicised to all volunteers.

5.4 Insurance
Insurance is provided by the SDCVC to cover all volunteers working on behalf and at the direction of the organisation.

5.5 Personal and vocational development
Volunteers are encouraged to develop their skills while involved with the organisation and are assisted into assuming additional and greater responsibilities over time, if they desire this.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

6.1 SDCVC volunteer involvement
The SDCVC monitors and evaluates volunteer involvement in the organisation on a regular basis and seeks to make ongoing improvements.

6.2 Feedback
Constructive feedback on this document is always welcome. It must be given to the SDCVC Manager who will ensure that it is considered fully.