

Volunteer Crawley - Frequently Asked Questions



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What is volunteering?

Volunteering means giving your time to a cause which benefits someone else, the community, or the environment. You don't get paid, but you do get the opportunity to use your skills and experience to make a real difference to people's lives.

People volunteer for all sorts of reasons. As well as 'giving something back' to the community, volunteering can provide opportunities to meet new people or offer something interesting to do in your spare time. Volunteering might lead you into new walks of life by giving you new skills - volunteering can give you useful experience if you are thinking about a career change or looking for work.

Anyone can volunteer whatever their age, background or experience. Everyone has a skill that someone else needs, and the range of volunteering roles is huge.

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I am under 18 years. Can I volunteer?

Yes you can! However, Volunteer Crawley is not the best organisation to advise you. [Outset Youth Action](#) is a county-wide charity which specialises as a volunteering agency for people aged 13 to 25 years.

You can find out more by visiting the Outset Youth Action [website](#) or by contacting the Crawley Youth Volunteer Advisor on 0771 232 5785

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I'm not sure about volunteering. Can I speak to someone who knows?

Yes. Our reception volunteers are here to help you. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have.

Because they are volunteers themselves, our reception volunteers have valuable 'insider' information and experiences they can share with you.

If our reception volunteers are not available, or if you need more detailed information, you can make an enquiry to our Engagement Officer, Elaine Illingworth:

- Call Elaine on 01293 657148
- [Make an appointment](#) - click on the link and leave your contact details. Elaine will get back to you soon.

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How much time will volunteering take?

This will depend partly on the organisation you choose to volunteer for. In some cases, the volunteer role will have clearly defined start and finish times. For example, someone volunteering for a school crossing patrol would be expected to volunteer at specific hours during term time.

Other volunteer roles may be more flexible. Many voluntary organisations recognise that flexible volunteering opportunities benefit both parties and try to adapt volunteering roles to suit the volunteer (where this is possible).

At any rate, the organisation should be clear with you about their expectations and be able to tell you about any time commitments there may be.

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How will I find the best volunteer role for me?

Finding a suitable volunteer role begins with you. Think about the causes you care about and the skills you have to offer. Perhaps you are a keen gardener or feel strongly about a local issue. Maybe you have had experiences that you could bring to a role. You should also give some thought to the amount of time you have to offer.

Once you have ideas about the type of volunteering roles you have in mind, you have several options: You can contact us here at Volunteer Crawley. We can answer your questions about volunteering, what it might mean for you, and provide the information you need if you want to start volunteering but don't know where to begin.

- Call Elaine on 01293 657148
- [Make an appointment](#) - click on the link and leave your contact details. Elaine will get back to you soon.
- [Complete a registration form](#) - let us know about your interests and Elaine will help find the right volunteering opportunity for you.

Or you can use [Do it](#), the national database of volunteering opportunities. It only takes a matter of minutes to register online and you can search for volunteering opportunities that suit your interests and skills

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What skills will I need?

That will depend on the role. Some positions do not require any specialist skills. Other roles require a certain amount of experience or perhaps a qualification.

Some organisations may offer training to enable you to do the work. This may be formal - such as structured learning, or less formally, through mentoring, for example.

Some organisations offer support through supervision to help you perform your role effectively. This is a good opportunity to talk about the things you might want to learn in your role and to comment on how your volunteering is going.

The organisation will be able to tell you if there is any need for specialist skills or expertise.

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What happens if I find a volunteer role I am interested in?

Contact the organisation and ask for more information. Try to find out as much about the role as possible. Have a look at the organisation's website (if they have one). If it is a registered charity, there may be more information available on the Charity Commission website.

Try to get a clear picture of the organisation and the tasks you will be involved in. You don't want to start volunteering and quickly find the role isn't right for you.

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What happens next?

Every organisation will have a different recruitment process. Depending on the role, you may be asked to complete an application form or attend an interview. If the role involves working with children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Check may be required.

The recruitment process is not meant to be a barrier to volunteering - it is used to make sure the right volunteer finds the right role. If you are invited to an interview, you may be asked any of the following:

- Why are you interested in volunteering?
- What interests you about that organisation?
- What relevant skills or experience do you have?
- How much time do you have to offer?
- What would you like to gain from volunteering with the organisation?

You can ask about anything you feel unsure about, such as:

- Reimbursement of expenses.
- The demands of the role.
- Opportunities for training and qualifications.
- Whether there will be opportunities for development or progression.
- The support and supervision that will be available to you.

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How long will it take before I can start volunteering?

This will depend on the organisation and the role. Some organisations have a formal interview process, others may invite you for an informal chat before you start. Others offer 'taster sessions' for potential volunteers to get a sense of whether volunteering is right for them.

Some roles have particular responsibilities such as handling cash or working with vulnerable clients. In these cases, there may be formal procedures to assess the suitability of the volunteer. This might include [Disclosure and Barring checks](#) for volunteers working with vulnerable clients or providing references.

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Is there anything I should know before I start volunteering?

Often, voluntary organisations are quite dependent on their volunteers. Try to be reliable, keeping to the times and dates you have agreed to volunteer and let someone know if you cannot make it in to the organisation when you are expected. If the amount of commitment or responsibility you can offer an organisation is likely to change, let the organisation know as soon as you can.

Organisations have responsibilities for the safety and wellbeing of their volunteers, staff, the clients and the general public. You may be asked to comply with the organisation's policies and procedures to do with health and safety, confidentiality, equalities or codes of conduct.

Often these 'rules' are set out in a volunteer agreement that you may be asked to read and sign at your induction.

In most cases volunteering is enjoyable and rewarding for the volunteer and the organisation, but sometimes things do go wrong. There may be a nominated member of staff who can answer questions or the organisation might set out a complaints procedure in the volunteer handbook. Either way, don't be afraid to raise concerns.

The organisation may not be aware there is a problem, they might be pleased to have an opportunity to improve life for their volunteers or they might simply try to find you something different that suits you more.

As a volunteer you are not legally bound by a contract, so you are free to leave an organisation that you are unhappy with.

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Will volunteering affect my benefits?

If you are receiving state benefits, you can volunteer, and in most cases your benefits will not be affected. All benefit rulings agree that volunteering means choosing to give your time and energy to benefit other people without being paid for it. You can do voluntary work with:

- A charity, voluntary organisation or community group.
- A public sector organisation, like your local council.
- A local business.

It's not volunteering if you are:

- Helping out a family member.
- Given money (apart from your expenses).
- Under contract to do it (this does not include volunteer agreements).

If you are receiving benefits, you should talk to Jobcentre Plus or your benefits agency before you start volunteering.

- **Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA)** People receiving JSA can volunteer as long as they remain available for and are actively seeking work. This means they have to show that they are looking for work and applying for jobs where appropriate.

Organisations which use volunteers who receive JSA should be prepared to be flexible, as claimants may need to visit the Job Centre or attend interviews when they come up. Be sure to advise the volunteer involving organisation that this might be the case before you start volunteering.

- **Income Support** Volunteering should not affect Income Support as long as the volunteer is not receiving any money other than reimbursed expenses.
- **Incapacity Benefit** People in receipt of Incapacity Benefit can volunteer. Volunteers must still attend work-focused interviews when asked to do so and tell Jobcentre plus about any expenses received.
- **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** Volunteering in the UK or volunteering abroad for less than six months won't affect DLA OR Attendance Allowance. If you are in receipt of DLA and want to work abroad, tell the Disability and Carers Service.

Expenses and Benefits

Apart from DLA, only people who are not in paid work are entitled to claim these benefits. Any kind of *paid* work may lead to benefits being docked or suspended. However, volunteer expenses *are not* seen as payments, so volunteers can be reimbursed for reasonable out-of-pocket expenses (expenses which have been incurred as a result of volunteering) without their benefits being affected.

The information about volunteering and benefits is taken from [Volunteering while getting benefits](#) (Jobcentre Plus 2010) and from information provided by Volunteer Centre Kingston and Chelsea. If you are in receipt of benefits please talk to Jobcentre Plus for more detailed information.

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How much will it cost me to volunteer?

Volunteering means giving your time for free. The law is very clear that volunteers should not receive any payments or gifts for the time they give. However, any costs which arise as a direct result of your volunteering are usually repaid by the organisation. These out of pocket expenses could include travel, costs of clothing, printing or telephone calls, or lunch if you are working from the morning through the afternoon.

Generally speaking, expenses can only be reimbursed if a receipt is produced. Most organisations are happy to pay volunteer expenses and will be able to advise you when and how expenses are reimbursed.

Some volunteers choose not to claim their expenses. That is their choice. For the organisation though, it makes it difficult to understand the true cost of taking on volunteers.

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I want to volunteer but I have a criminal record.

A criminal record will not be a barrier to many volunteering opportunities. Volunteers with criminal records might need a [Disclosure and Baring Service Check](#) if the role involves certain types of work with children or vulnerable adults.

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I want to volunteer but I have a health concern.

There is a wealth of different volunteering opportunities, many of which are irregular or one-off and some which allow you to volunteer from home. Volunteering doesn't necessarily mean you are committed to being available at a given time and place.

Some organisations recognise that flexible volunteering opportunities benefit both parties and try to adapt volunteering roles to suit the volunteer (where that is possible).

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that volunteering can be good for health, wellbeing and mental health.

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