

INFORMAL & FORMAL VOLUNTEERING

Informal volunteering is defined as unpaid volunteering that is not coordinated by a volunteer-involving organisation or institution. Many of us may be involved in informal volunteering, without even thinking about it. In fact we often call it “lending a hand” or “helping out”.

Informal volunteering means giving your help as an individual to other people who are not relatives. For example, getting shopping for an elderly neighbour, clearing snow from the streets or taking bins out for a neighbour.

On the other hand formal volunteering relates to people giving their time and help through groups, clubs or volunteer-involving organisations.

Formal volunteering often involves a regular time commitment. There is usually a Volunteer Manager who will oversee and support volunteers in their role. More often than not formal volunteering will usually involve being recruited by a volunteer-involving organisation and then trained to complete specific tasks.

DUTY OF CARE



In emergency situations and national crises lots of people come forward to offer their help and assistance through both informal and formal volunteering.

Whether it is formal or informal the organisers of any volunteering have a duty of care to volunteers.

VOLUNTEERING INFORMALLY

While many people will volunteer with an organisation, others will volunteer as individuals or in small informal community groups. This is especially true during times of crisis when communities come together to look after our most vulnerable members.

One simple way is to offer assistance to your neighbours in your local community. It is great to show support to members of your community who might need it but there are a few things to bear in mind:

- 01** You may not have met these people before or maybe you just know them to see across the street. It is important to approach the situation in the right way. Some individuals may not have had anyone at the door in months. Many may be nervous about opening their door right now. The best approach is to write the person a short note to introduce yourself. Include your location and telephone number and let them know that you can help and are just a phone call away.
- 02** If someone has asked you to help them, do not enter their home unless absolutely necessary. If you are dropping off shopping or a prescription, simply call or text to let them know that you are at their door. Remember to practice social distancing, keeping a space of two metres between you and the person.
- 03** Don't offer your assistance if you are sick in any way. Our priority right now is to stop the spread of COVID-19 so it's important to follow HSE guidelines.



SUPPORTING AN INFORMAL VOLUNTEER INITIATIVE

If you are getting an initiative together there are a few elements of volunteer management practice to think about. An emergency or disaster situation does not mean we should drop all the usual protections in place to protect volunteers and the wider community.

- 01** Very often a lot of people will express an interest in informally volunteering, a lot of these people will not have volunteered before. Sometimes people will express an interest but not actually come forward to volunteer. Think about how you will manage this.
- 02** A clear role description is the corner stone of a good volunteer programme. It makes sure that you as the organiser and all the potential volunteers are on the same page ensuring that you can all reach your shared goal. It provides clarity when deciding who is or isn't suitable for the volunteer role. There are some sample role descriptions specific to emergency situations on volunteer.ie
- 03** Sometimes the number of volunteers may be greater than the numbers of people looking for help. For volunteers the biggest complaint can often be "there was nothing for me to do". How will you manage potential volunteers expectations?

04 Volunteering at a time of disaster can be stressful and challenging for everyone involved, even on a simple task. Volunteers may become more aware of the isolation and loneliness that some people experience, perhaps even neighbours on their own street. Be mindful of these stresses and try to ensure that volunteers are not pushing themselves too hard or taking on more than they can do. We all want to do the right thing, but sometimes the right thing might be taking a break ourselves. You can find guidance on this on volunteer.ie

05 Volunteers should be encouraged to be aware of their own circumstances and any underlying health conditions they may have. These may be mild but might be exacerbated by the type of volunteering or may in fact be a risk to the volunteer or other members of the community. If a volunteer feels sick or unwell they should immediately withdraw from the programme and notify the person in charge.

MORE INFORMATION

There are a broad range of resources and tools available to support you to set up a volunteer programme on the Volunteer Ireland web site.

