

Volunteer Support Service

Guidelines for Volunteers

What is a Carer?

Carers look after family, partners or friends in need of help because they are ill, frail or have a disability. The care they provide is unpaid. Parents of disabled children are also carers. Carers can often feel isolated and under stress for various reasons, for example they may have had to put their own life "on hold" in order to care for someone else, they may have lost touch with many of their friends, and they are often struggling to come to terms with a loved one's illness or disability.

What does the scheme offer?

Our volunteers offer support and friendship to adult carers who are feeling lonely or isolated. They are not professional counsellors.

As a volunteer you can provide support in a number of different ways including:

- listening, giving someone time and space to talk about how they are feeling
- accompanying someone to a support group or other activity of their choice
- just enjoying a cup of tea and a chat

The aim of the scheme is to offer short term befriending to carers, 10 sessions initially, after which we can decide whether or not to continue. In this way carers do not become dependent on their volunteer, but the volunteer helps them towards finding other means of support, for example via carers support groups.

Meetings are usually, but not necessarily, in the carers' own home. You could choose to meet somewhere else if this would be more appropriate.

Volunteers should meet all or most of the following criteria:-

- An ability to empathise with carers and understand the unique stresses they face.
- Listening and inter-personal skills, and good communication skills.
- An understanding of the importance of maintaining professional boundaries with clients.

- The ability to acquire an understanding of Carers' Support's policies and the willingness to work within an Equal Opportunities framework and respect client confidentiality.
- A commitment to the project of 6 months, for a minimum of one visit per week of approximately one hour.
- **Two written references will be required and a Criminal Records Bureau enhanced disclosure form completed.**

What you should NOT do

As a volunteer you should not be undertaking such tasks as:

- Childcare
- Personal care
- House cleaning
- Washing clothes or bedding
- Handling clients' money
- Giving advice
- Buying anything from or selling anything to a client
- You should not have keys to their home
- **Under no circumstances should you change dressings or give medication**

Volunteers are not allowed to accept cash or expensive gifts from the carers they are befriending. If in doubt about whether to accept a gift from a carer, please consult the Volunteer Co-ordinator.

Personal Phone numbers

Please do not give out your home or mobile phone numbers to carers. If the carer needs to contact you this should be done through the office.

Identification

You should carry your identification card with you when you are visiting.

Personal Safety

As a volunteer please be aware of your own personal safety when doing home visits. Please ensure that someone knows when you are visiting a carer. If at any time you feel unsafe with the person you are visiting for any reason eg because of aggressive or threatening behaviour, you must contact a member of staff at Carers' Support (Bexley) as soon as you are able to. If you feel that there is a danger to either yourself, the carer, the cared for person or any other person outside normal office hours you should contact a member of staff immediately on either the office number or emergency number 07813 149030.

Health and Safety

We cannot allow our staff or volunteers to be subjected to passive smoking in the course of their work; we will therefore ask carers to provide a smoke free environment when volunteers visit their home.

Time Commitment

Initially volunteers will be required to undertake a six week training course involving a three hour session each week. From then on we would ask that our volunteers commit to six months with the project and a minimum of one visit per week (visits last approximately one hour).

Reliability

Once you have made arrangements to visit a carer please make sure that you visit at the time arranged. Not to do so can be very unsettling for them. If for any reason you are unable to make a visit when arrangements have been made please make sure that the carer knows in advance that you are unable to visit them at the appointed time. If you are unable to contact them directly, please contact the office.

To avoid a situation where you have a wasted journey the best rule is always to phone the carer before you set out on your journey.

Boundaries

It is important that you know the boundaries of the work you will and will not do and that this is clearly understood by you, by Carers' Support (Bexley) and by the carer. Doing this from the outset will make sure that you are not taking on more than you want to and that the carer understands your role.

- Don't do more voluntary work than has been originally agreed. If a carer requests more visits please discuss this with the Volunteer Co-ordinator.
- In view of the fact that your involvement with the carer will be time-limited, try not to allow them to become too dependent on you. You should be working towards linking them with alternative support eventually.
- Do not try to counsel the carer. Your role is to provide a listening ear and any counselling work should be undertaken by a trained counsellor. If you feel that the carer needs a counselling service contact Carers' Support (Bexley) and discuss this with the Volunteer Co-ordinator.
- Respect the privacy of the carer's home and only go into rooms where necessary or invited.

Expenses

As a volunteer you may claim all out-of pocket expenses. Expenses are paid for anything you incur for yourself, for example your travelling costs. If you are unsure about what you can or cannot claim for, please check with the Volunteer Co-ordinator.

Car Travel

As a volunteer you are under no obligation to take the carer you are visiting out in your car. However, if you wish to do so the Volunteer Co-ordinator should be given a copy of your driving licence together with a copy of your current insurance certificate. You should also check that your insurance covers you for voluntary work: if an additional cost

is incurred please speak to the Volunteer Co-ordinator, as Carers Support (Bexley) may be able to reimburse you.

Training, Support and Supervision

Before joining the scheme as a Volunteer, you will need to undertake a short training course (probably 6 x 3 hour sessions).

You will receive an induction pack which will include these guidelines, some information about Carers' Support (Bexley) and copies of relevant policies.

The Volunteer Co-ordinator will go through the induction pack with you and you will have an opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Regular support meetings will also be arranged which will give you the opportunity to meet with other volunteers and discuss issues around your role. These meetings will be facilitated by the Volunteer Co-ordinator and will encompass further training as required.

As well as the regular support meetings, the Volunteer Co-ordinator will keep in regular touch with you about how the volunteering is going. You may also contact her at any time if you have any concerns you need to discuss. If you are distressed about something and feel it cannot wait until the next working day there is an emergency telephone number you can contact, which will be given to you once you decide to volunteer for us.