



# Volunteers

Volunteers can be a great asset to an OOSH centre by utilising the skills in your community and bringing outside expertise to the centre. Both volunteers and the organisations they work with have rights and responsibilities. Volunteers are engaged to perform a specific job and the organisation agrees to provide the volunteer with a worthwhile and rewarding experience. In return, each has the right to some basic expectations of the other. In relation to child care, volunteers should never take the place of a paid worker and never be left alone to supervise children. Many centres find it difficult to find, manage and keep good volunteers. The key is to offer the volunteers the same level of respect and rights as centre staff.

### ■ APPROPRIATE USE OF VOLUNTEERS

There are certain situations where volunteers can be used effectively, for example:

- An older person might come in to assist with general activities or special interests/life skills (such as gardening or cookery) at the centre.
- Family members may be used to help make up the staff child ratio on excursions.
- Ex-service users might want to come back to do work experience at the centre.
- The service could enlist the help of volunteers for a working bee, when painting the centre, fundraising or planting a garden etc.
- Someone in the community with a special talent (dance, crafts, sport etc.) may be able to spare time to help out occasionally.

### ■ RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers can be found in a number of ways. The centre could advertise in its newsletter, in the local newspaper (many have a section where community organisations can advertise such



requests for free) by word of mouth, through the local community centre or school or by contacting a local volunteer resource centre. The Centre for Volunteering has a list of volunteer centres across NSW on their website – go to: [http://www.volunteering.com.au/working\\_with\\_volunteers/nsw\\_volunteer\\_centres.asp](http://www.volunteering.com.au/working_with_volunteers/nsw_volunteer_centres.asp)

Volunteers should go through the same recruitment process as paid staff, they should be interviewed and references checked before being offered a position within the organisation. The way you recognise volunteer efforts is important. This is because one volunteer may regard one type of recognition as valuable whilst another volunteer may feel it has little worth. If you are aware of the volunteer's motivation in working for the organisation then this will provide a good indication for the type of recognition that the volunteer is seeking.

## MANAGING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers need to be managed in much the same way as paid staff. A job description needs to be drawn up for each volunteer position, detailing exactly what that particular position entails (this will be a very helpful document to help potential volunteers know exactly what you are looking for and as a guide for staff as to the role of the volunteer).

Volunteers should be given an induction to the service and offered all the training they need to help them in their position. Volunteers have a right to support and supervision, as well as access to the same grievance procedure as paid staff. All of the above should be detailed in a volunteer's policy for the centre, a copy of which should be given to volunteers with their position description when they start with the service.

It is also a good idea to start a file for each volunteer, just as with paid staff, so that records of training, supervision and all other important information can be kept and referred back to. Make sure that all policy and procedures and orientation processes apply to volunteers.

## WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECK

While it is not compulsory for all volunteers to complete the Working With Children Check, all volunteers engaged in a child-related role should sign a Volunteer/Student Placement Declaration (formerly known as a Prohibited Employment Declaration). For more information, please see the NSW Commission for Children and Young People website at:  
[https://check.kids.nsw.gov.au/#are-you-volunteer\\_which-volunteers-need-a-check](https://check.kids.nsw.gov.au/#are-you-volunteer_which-volunteers-need-a-check)

## USING VOLUNTEERS ON EXCURSIONS

During vacation care, volunteers can be used to form part of the carer: child ratio of 1:8, so long as there is still a ratio of 1:15 paid staff. This can be a good way of increasing family involvement with the centre as you could invite parents/ grandparents/ older siblings along to help with ratio in return for the opportunity to join in with activities. Some important things to decide and make clear before setting out on the excursion:

- What is expected of the volunteer – that they are expected not to nip off for coffee and not tell anyone where they are or solely focus on the children they are related to.
- What expenses will be covered by the centre, such as entry fees/ fares/ lunch etc.
- Centre policies on volunteers and anything else that may be appropriate.

Some centres chose to give accompanying family members reduced rates for their child care costs for the day that they volunteer, as an incentive to get them along or simply to say thanks. This should be discussed with the management committee and put into policy so that the rules on this are clear.

## INSURANCE

Because volunteers are not covered by workers compensation, The Centre for Volunteering strongly advises all organisations with volunteers to obtain volunteer accident insurance. Not-for-profit organisations engaging volunteers must carry public liability insurance and volunteer personal accident insurance. We strongly recommend that you contact your Insurer to determine what insurance is available and appropriate.



66 Albion Street,  
Surry Hills NSW 2010  
Telephone: 02 9212 3244  
Fax: 02 9281 9645  
[www.netoosh.org.au](http://www.netoosh.org.au)