

Involving young volunteers (Appendix 3)

It is the Home's policy **not** to take on volunteers under the age of 18 at the Rehoming centre or in the any of its charity shops. However, the information in this is still relevant in other aspects of the Home's operations and is important and should be read thoroughly.

Introduction

Young people are legally classed as vulnerable and therefore we need to take this into account when involving them as volunteers. As people over the age of 16 can undertake an apprenticeship, our protection policies are more stringent in relation to the under 16's (such as our policy which prohibits those under 16 from volunteering in RSPCA animal centres due to the health and safety risks).

While there are legal restrictions on employing young people, these are not all relevant to volunteers. However it is worth being aware of the legislation and to remember that young people have other demands on their time outside volunteering, such as school, homework, socialising and so on.

Many local authorities have bye-laws restricting the work young people may do and these bye-laws apply to volunteering. You must therefore contact your Local Authority (via your local Council switchboard or website) if you are thinking of taking on a volunteer who is still at school.

The Local Authority may require you to complete an 'Application for Employment Certificate' which applies to volunteers, even though they are not actually employed (see Young volunteers in charity shops below). They will also advise you of the maximum hours the young person is permitted to volunteer.

In general, adhering to some basic principles means we can involve young people as volunteers:

- Always complete a Young Person's Risk Assessment before involving a young volunteer (see Health and safety below).
- Ask for parental consent in writing (see Parental permission below).
- Young volunteers should always be closely supervised - it is important to ensure you can provide adequate supervision and that young volunteers will not be left unattended at any time.
- It is safer if young people are supervised by two or more adults. Any departure from this best practice must be reflected in a comprehensive risk assessment which includes the activities the young person will carry out, for how long, where the activities will take place, the level of supervision that will be provided and the measures taken to mitigate risks.

Practicalities

Health and safety

Section 3 (5) of the Children Act 1989 states that 'An individual shall do what is reasonable for the purposes of safeguarding or promoting a child's welfare while the child is in his or her care'. There is

also an enhanced duty of care towards young volunteers, reflecting their relative immaturity. This means that risk assessments cannot take responsible behaviour for granted, and are likely to imply increased supervision, more explicit instructions and so on. This needs to be well judged - 17 year olds are likely to be more mature than 14 years olds, but everyone is an individual, and some 17 year olds are more mature than others.

The Young Person's risk assessment form can be found in the Health and Safety manual. This applies to volunteers up to the age of 18.

All volunteers should complete a medical enquiry form once they have been offered a role, to ensure the activities involved pose no risk to their health. (Please refer to the standard volunteer medical enquiry form).

Parental permission

Parental consent should be sought when involving young volunteers. Parental responsibility continues until the age of 18, unless the young person is 16 or over and living independently of parents or social services. It is strongly advised that you obtain a signed parental/guardian consent form (a sample is provided). Both the young person and their parent or guardian should fully understand what the voluntary work entails. Provide clear information about the work the volunteer is expected to do. Make sure that they are aware of time commitments, where the work will take place and how it will be supervised.

Insurance

The RSPCA's employers' liability insurance provides cover for volunteers if they are injured or involved in a serious accident during the course of volunteering for the RSPCA. The RSPCA's personal accident policy provides cover for volunteers, with a limited death benefit for volunteers under the age of 16.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks (formerly CRB checks)

There are specific roles within the Society which require DBS checks. However, if you agree to take on a young volunteer, it is not a requirement to DBS check staff or volunteers who will come into contact with the young volunteer.

Specific volunteering roles

Young volunteers in animal centres

RSPCA policy prohibits the operational involvement of volunteers under 16 years of age in national Society animal centres. The exception to this ruling is where a school requests work experience for

final school year students and a plan of work is agreed in advance. Please refer to the 'Work experience guidelines' for more detailed information.

Young volunteers in charity shops

Volunteers in charity shops are assisting in a trade carried on for profit and are therefore classed as 'employed'. Therefore it is vital to check with your local authority before taking on a volunteer of compulsory school age in a charity shop. For detailed information regarding young volunteers in charity shops please refer to the People section of the 'Shops operational guidelines' on The Link.

Participation in fundraising activities

For children up to the age of 16 years, it should be for the parents to decide whether or not a child may take part in a fundraising event. Participation in any fundraising activity must always be authorised by a parent or guardian.

Challenge events in aid of the RSPCA can only be done by those aged 18 or over.

Sponsored events

Children may participate in low risk sponsored events, but with the consent and supervision of a parent or guardian. For sponsored events the signature of the parent or guardian must be obtained on the sponsor form.

Sponsor forms must show clearly the maximum time available to do the event or the maximum number of units (e.g. laps, lengths) in order that the sponsor can determine the maximum level of money promised at the time of sponsorship.

Clear information about when the event takes place and when the child will be collecting their sponsorship money should be given to sponsors at the time the child requests the sponsorship. If any sponsorship money is paying for a place/participation in the event the amount and/or proportion should also be clearly stated on the form.

All participants and parents/guardians should make sure all the amounts collected go to the advertised charity. Failure to do so is a breach of trust and may amount to a criminal offence.

Asking for money

It must be emphasised that children should not approach strangers for money and collecting in the street and door-to-door is against the law. Collectors must be at least 16 years of age.

Children should only approach friends and relations for sponsorship. Children should be encouraged to discuss first and fully with their parents or guardians whom they may approach and examples of 'safe' sponsors should be given.

Badges

Children should be warned to take care when handling pin badges. They should not be given to very young children (under 3) and preferably not under 7 years old.

Photography

You may want to capture your fundraising activity on film. Please be aware that permission should be sought from the participants themselves, plus where the participants are under 18 you should also seek permission from the parents/guardians before undertaking photography or filming of any sort.

Summary

RSPCA establishments attracting young volunteers must have safeguarding procedures in place. All national volunteers and staff should be made aware of the Safeguarding policy available on the Society intranet, this sets out adequate safeguards around day to day working practices, routes for complaints and procedures to deal with any problems, plus recruitment procedures. Branches must ensure they implement a Safeguarding policy.

Young volunteers should always be closely supervised - it is important to ensure you can provide adequate supervision and that young volunteers will not be left unattended at any time. It is safer if young people are supervised by two or more adults.

Be aware that contact with a young volunteer via email and/or other electronic media (such as Facebook, or Twitter), may be misinterpreted.

It is important to ensure that younger volunteers are never exposed to euthanasia.

Involving younger volunteers is a sensitive area. Any incident involving children may lead to bad publicity, which is damaging to the Society's reputation, in addition to the risk of potential legal claims. The law and policy changes public opinion. For that reason this guidance is not exhaustive and should not be relied upon as an accurate statement of law. It is important to take specific professional advice if you are not sure.

Checklist - involving young volunteers

- What is the age of the volunteer?
- If they are still at school have you checked with the local authority re: any bye-laws restricting the work of young people and filled in any necessary paperwork?
- Have you considered health and safety and carried out a young persons risk assessment? (required up to age 18).
- Have you discussed and agreed the duties of the role and the times of work with the volunteer and the parent/guardian?
- Do you have the consent of their parent/guardian in writing?

- Have you asked the volunteer to complete a medical enquiry form?
- Have you considered any training that those working with the young volunteers may need?
- Do you have safeguarding procedures in place and are all staff & volunteers aware of them?
- Can you provide adequate supervision and support?
- Are you adequately insured?

Have you recorded the details of discussions/training/guidance you have provided to the young volunteer?