

GUIDANCE FOR COMMUNITY RESPONSE VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS

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Updated 23/03/20

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Introduction	2
Who should, or shouldn't volunteer?	2
How do we prepare people to volunteer?	3
What kind of tasks can volunteers do?	3
Helping with prescriptions	4
Handling money	4
How do volunteers stay safe?	4
Do I always need a PVG certificate to volunteer?	5
Can I have personal details for people? What about GDPR?	5
Do I need insurance to volunteer?	6
How can volunteers provide emotional support?	6
What should I do if I'm worried about someone's health?	7
What do I do if I'm identify someone I'm concerned about for other reasons?	7
What do I do if I identify someone who is experiencing mental distress?	7
Should volunteers be contacting vulnerable people they don't know?	9
Our volunteers will be providing prepared food – where can we get support?	9
Should I walk someone else's dog?	9
Where can communities and volunteers get a reliable, regularly updated source of information? ...	10

Introduction

It is anticipated that the current outbreak of Covid-19/Coronavirus will cause general disruption to services, both essential and non-essential. Many people in our communities are keen to help where they can.

This guidance supports community organisations to think through the issues relating to volunteers, and offers potential sources of support. **We strongly suggest that you nominate a Volunteer Coordinator(s)** who can support the volunteers, and be a first point of contact for a volunteer who has an issue they can't deal with. It would be helpful if this person had a PVG certificate, but that may not be possible.

If volunteer coordinators have any volunteering issue they need advice on they can leave a message on Volunteer Midlothian's answerphone on 0131 660 1216 or email info@volunteermidlothian.org.uk leaving a contact name and number and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Who should, or shouldn't volunteer?

Key message: Only help if you are well

First and foremost, if you or someone in your household has shown symptoms of the coronavirus (a new and continuous cough or a high temperature) and you are still in the 'stay at home' phase, do not attempt to help your neighbours. Follow advice on nhsinform.scot/coronavirus

If you are in a vulnerable group at increased risk from coronavirus infection, think carefully about the support activities you can safely take part in. Guidance for those at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus can be found [here](#).

There are many ways that we can help others in a safe way, including from our own home. For example, by checking on older neighbours by phone or via social media.

Young people, although less at risk from coronavirus, may find it difficult to deal with some of the situations that may arise in roles involving direct contact (in person or by telephone) with the vulnerable groups noted above. We are recommending that volunteers in roles where there is direct contact or crisis intervention should be over the age of 18 and should also receive additional briefings and training related to the requirements of their role.

Volunteers under the age of 18 could provide 'backroom' support (e.g. packing food parcels) and/or should only be placed in roles where there is a designated lead person to oversee their input. Younger volunteers should also not be left to volunteer alone and we recommend that where possible people work in teams of two or more help safeguard both the volunteers and those who are

receiving support. The use of younger volunteers should be balanced with the need to maintain social distancing where possible. We do not recommend larger groups of young people volunteering together and there should be a clear focus on the provision of essential services and activities only.

How do we prepare people to volunteer?

Key message: All volunteers should have ID and a formal induction.

All volunteers should have ID that states which organisation they are from. Before people start volunteering on your behalf they should have a formal induction that goes through the key health and safety issues, and tells them who they should contact if any issues arise (usually the Volunteer Coordinator.)

You can find an Induction Checklist at Volunteer Scotland that you can adapt to your circumstances: <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/for-organisations/guidance/all-guidance-and-templates/> There are also lots of useful documents in Volunteer Midlothian's Good Practice toolkit: <https://www.volunteermidlothian.org.uk/organisations/good-practice-toolkit1/>

We would suggest that people volunteer in pairs, but maintain all the social distancing advice of remaining two meters from both the person receiving support and the other volunteer. Avoid having volunteers meet up in groups.

What kind of tasks can volunteers do?

Key message: Choose tasks that are practical but minimise contact with people

There are simple ways you can help your neighbours without exposing yourself or them, if they are self-isolating:

- You could offer to do some shopping for them.
- You could place an online shopping order for them or talk them through the process over the phone.
- You can pick up their prescriptions or arrange a pharmacy delivery where available.
- You can support with general errands such as posting letters or putting the bins out.

If you are helping with prescriptions, you should remind people that they must only order the medication they need in their usual quantities; nobody should be stockpiling.

Helping with prescriptions

Key message: Ask the person to give their consent

If you are helping with prescriptions, you should remind people that they must only order the medication they need in their usual quantities; nobody should be stockpiling.

You will need to ask the person to contact the pharmacy to let them know that you will be collecting their medicines.

You may also be asked to show ID to the pharmacy when you arrive and sign a confidentiality form. This only needs to be done once.

When you deliver the medicine to the person, you will need to witness them collecting the medicine from their doorstep.

Handling money

Key messages: Take extra care when handling money

Handling money could be risky for both parties. A volunteer could be accused of theft, or a vulnerable person could become a victim of theft.

Here are some possible solutions:

- Always have 2 volunteers present if cash is involved, but remember to keep your distance from each other
- Only carry out cash transactions if you know the person
- Ask people to pay the shop online in advance if possible

We are working to further develop our guidance in this area.

How do volunteers stay safe?

Key messages: Maintain a 2 metre distance and keep washing your hands

- It's safe to be on the doorstep as long as you stay 2 metres(6 feet) away from the person you are helping. Do not go into their house or share a car with them.
- If you are helping, the advice is to stay 2 metres away from people you are helping.
- Leave any shopping or other messages on the doorstep, but make sure that they have been collected before leaving.
- Do not place yourself in compromising positions where you may feel unsafe, for instance helping late at night.
- Remember to wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.

- Be aware that if you are helping someone you don't know personally, they may not want to share personal details with you like phone numbers.

You should also warn those you are helping not to let strangers into their home – and not to give strangers money under any circumstances.

Further information and guidance about COVID-19 for non-healthcare settings can be found in this document from NHS Health Protection Scotland. https://hpspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/2973/documents/1_COVID-19-Guidance-for-non-healthcare-settings.pdf

Do I always need a PVG certificate to volunteer?

Key message: Try to minimise close contact with vulnerable people.

No. Usually volunteers working in close contact with vulnerable people are required to join the Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) membership scheme. A PVG is required to do regulated work (and this includes certain volunteering roles).

The current time frame is 14 days for a turn round for a PVG and basic disclosure. The basic disclosure will suit some roles.

The information on PVGs may change as this is an emergency situation, and we will keep Volunteer Coordinators informed.

Can I have personal details for people? What about GDPR?

Key message: Keep information as secure as possible, but do not let it get in the way of responding.

The Information Commissioner's Office do not want GDPR to get in the way of a volunteer response. The key things for volunteers are that:

- They only collect information they need to know to deliver their service
- The information they collect is proportionate to what they are doing.

Groups should consider the minimum amount of information they collect, and restrict the information to as few people as possible. Any information should be stored securely (e.g. papers kept in a folder and locked cupboard, or on a password protected mobile device), and deleted as soon as is practicable.

This guidance is also relevant to volunteers: <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/news-and-events/news-and-blogs/2020/03/covid-19-general-data-protection-advice-for-data-controllers/>

Do I need insurance to volunteer?

Key message: Try to volunteer with an established group who already carry insurance, and check with your own provider if you are planning to use your own car.

Volunteering organisations should have public liability insurance to cover both the organisation and the volunteer in the event of a third party being injured through the actions of a volunteer. Community Councils and other established groups have insurance, but newer, more informal groups do not.

If volunteers are using their own cars they **MUST** check with their personal car insurance provider that they are covered for their volunteering activity.

How can volunteers provide emotional support?

Key message: Keep in touch with calls, text and social media

Self-isolation can be a really lonely time. However, Government advice is available to protect the most vulnerable in our society. We can help each other by staying in touch – whether neighbours or friends and family who live further away.

- You personally can help with regular calls, text messages and contact via social media.
- You can also help by setting others up with video calls so they can connect with their friends and family remotely.
- You can encourage people to stay mentally and physically active with activities such as cooking, reading, gardening, online learning or watching films.
- Swap suggestions about how to keep busy. If people are well enough; encourage them to do some light exercise and keep active around the home, perhaps by using an online exercise class.
- Share trusted sources of information. It's easy to become worried by online information, some of which may be deliberately designed to mislead people. Help your community by sharing trusted information from websites like
 - [NHS Inform](#)
 - [Scottish Government](#)
 - [Mind](#)
 - Our [list of services](#) providing additional support

What should I do if I'm worried about someone's health?

Key message: Encourage neighbours who are unwell to phone for help

Call 999 immediately if you believe someone's life is at risk.

If the health of anyone you are in touch with or supporting is a cause for concern for any reason, encourage them to call their GP practice or NHS24 on 111 if the GP is closed.

Similarly, if they cannot cope with their symptoms at home, their condition gets worse or their symptoms do not get better after 7 days, please call NHS24 on 111.

For the latest health advice on Corona Virus, check NHS Inform regularly – www.nhsinform.scot.

What do I do if I'm identify someone I'm concerned about for other reasons?

Key message:

There are several non-health reasons that people might need help, including:

- running short of food
- running short of medicine
- running out of money

Volunteers might also encounter people who are currently managing but they think are at risk in the future.

Volunteers might also encounter people they think are at risk of harm from others.

We are working to further develop our guidance in this area.

What do I do if I identify someone who is experiencing mental distress?

Key message: Keep calm, listen, and seek support

The unprecedented and rapidly changing nature of the coronavirus crisis means that the coming weeks and months are going to be challenging and anxiety provoking for everyone, particularly those who need to practice social distancing for an extended period of time. It is likely that this will

lead to adverse effects on people's mental health and as such there will be a need for increased support in order to help people maintain their mental wellbeing. Volunteers will need to be alert to this issue and ready to provide advice and assistance to people in distress as necessary.

There are some excellent resources online that address the issue of how to stay calm and resilient in times of crisis. This information from the UK charity Mind provides specific examples of things people can do to stay mentally well: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

The Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) have also created a webpage that they will be updating regularly with information and advice about what to do if a person is struggling with their mental health due to anxiety about coronavirus or from being in isolation. The page contains guidelines about what to do if a person urgently needs help with their mental health. It can be found at this link: www.samh.org.uk/coronavirus

The following mental health first aid tips may be useful for volunteers coming into contact with anyone experiencing acute distress. If you are a volunteer organiser you may need to hold a training session with your volunteers about this issue to ensure that they know what to do in this situation:

- Stay calm. The situation may provoke anxiety in you as well, but it's important to stay calm so you can think clearly.
- Listen to the person. What they're saying may not make sense but try not to argue or talk over them, let them talk and make sure they know that you're listening, and that you care.
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- If the person is a danger to themselves or others, police or other emergency services should be contacted by calling 999.
- Ask them what support they would like. Some people will know they're unwell and may want you to contact a family member, carer or mental health professional. They may know that going somewhere or doing something may help the crisis pass.
- Help with practical concerns as far as possible. In the moment it's amazing what feels impossible. The person may need support with sorting a prescription or feeding a pet. Try to think about what stresses you'd want taking away if you were this crisis yourself.
- Ensure they get professional support. Depending on the level of the problem, the person may need to see their GP or other relevant professional because of their mental health. They may already be in contact with a local mental health team, in which case this is who to contact. Otherwise the GP or NHS 111 should be contacted.
- Call for help if needed. If a volunteer has concerns about safety, either their own, that of the person concerned or anyone else, they should seek additional support from a lead volunteer or volunteer co-ordinator. Read more: <https://metro.co.uk/2018/02/10/mental-health-first-aid-what-is-it-and-how-can-i-do-it-7296678/?ito=cbshare>

Should volunteers be contacting vulnerable people they don't know?

Key message: Be sensitive about contacting people you don't know – it might be distressing for them

The short answer to this question is no. Ordinarily, any volunteer coming into unsupervised contact with vulnerable people or groups would need to be PVG checked. We appreciate that these are extraordinary times but it could be distressing for some people (e.g. with dementia) to be contacted by people that they don't know.

Volunteers must make themselves known to the individual. It is very important that as far as possible the vulnerable person knows the name of the person who is going to provide help, what they are coming to do and when. For example that a named person is visiting to do their shopping at 10am on Tuesday.

This could be done by phoning the person in advance or even by putting a note through the person's door.

Our volunteers will be providing prepared food – where can we get support?

Key message: Get support from Environmental Health

In order to avoid any food safety issues, advice is available for those who may be considering involvement with food preparation and/or the distribution of prepared food, within their communities. Email the Midlothian Council Environmental Health Team on EnvironmentalHealth@midlothian.gov.uk

Should I walk someone else's dog?

Key message: Keep your distance from the owner and wash your hands

Keep the handover as brief as possible and make sure you both wash your hands before and after handling the dog. Maintain a minimum two metre distance at all times from the dog-owner. (PDSA) <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/what-we-do/blog/vet-qa-coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-self-isolating-pet-owners>

Where can communities and volunteers get a reliable, regularly updated source of information?

Key message: Advice changes quickly - keep checking NHS Inform and Midlothian Council's website

Key relevant websites are:

Midlothian Council:

https://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/360/community_safety_and_crime/622/coronavirus

NHS Inform: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>

Volunteer Midlothian: <https://www.volunteermidlothian.org.uk/>

Ready Scotland: <https://www.readyscotland.org/coronavirus/helping-in-your-community/>

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations: <https://scvo.org.uk/support/covid-19>