



# thinking of volunteering?

a step-by-step  
guide



**volunteer centres**

Ionaid d'Oibrí Deonacha na hÉireann

IRELAND

# This Step-by-Step Guide is one in a series of guides offering advice to people who think they might like to volunteer in Ireland but are unsure how to go about it

This guide is produced by Volunteer Centres Ireland, the national agency that promotes and supports volunteering nationally. VCI is delighted to acknowledge the support of Comhlámh, the Irish Association of Development Workers, in the production of this guide. Returning development workers (RDW) and international volunteers may find volunteering in Ireland helps them reconnect back into Irish society.

Please note that in this guide, we use the term 'organisation' to refer to all volunteer-involving organisations. Other popular terms used to refer to civil society organisations and international development agencies, and which might appear interchangeably in this guide, are 'community and voluntary organisation', 'charity', 'non-profit', 'not-for-profit' and 'NGO' (non-governmental organisation).

Volunteer Centres Ireland publish a number of Step by Step Guides aimed at both individuals and volunteer-involving organisations. For further information about Volunteer Centres Ireland, please see the back of this guide or check out our website on [www.volunteer.ie](http://www.volunteer.ie)

## step one what is a volunteer?

Volunteers are people from all walks of life, all ages and stages. What they have in common is the desire to make a difference in their community – and in their own life – by giving of their time. Volunteers are involved in virtually every aspect of society including health, education, social services, youth, sports and recreation, culture, the arts and the environment. Some volunteers give just one hour of time each week; others devote many hours. Volunteers are involved in once-off events, as well as ongoing activities. Some choose to volunteer out in the community, others are virtual volunteers and do their volunteering from the comfort of home. Volunteers can work on their own or with others, do hands-on work or volunteer at an administrative or leadership level. Volunteers play a vital role in Irish society. Across Ireland, volunteers are engaged in delivering services and programmes that improve and enhance the life of our communities. Volunteers are people just like you.



## step two who can help me?

If you are interested in volunteering, there are supports in place to help you learn more about volunteering and how to find a volunteering opportunity that is right for you. Local Volunteer Centres offer an advice, placement and support service to people who are interested in volunteering in Ireland. Staff there can help you identify the type of volunteering you would like to do and put you in touch with organisations that are looking for volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering outside Ireland, there are organisations that will be able to help you also. Please see the back of this guide for further information about Volunteer Centres and the work they do, and for useful contact information.

This guide outlines some of the points you might want to consider before committing yourself to becoming a volunteer. It also covers matters relating to what you can and should expect from volunteering and, likewise, what an organisation might expect from you. The points and issues covered here are the sorts of things that Volunteer Centre staff will cover with you if you visit them.



## step three some questions to ask yourself

### Why do I want to volunteer?

**Volunteering has much to offer people from all types of backgrounds and all walks of life. People volunteer for many different reasons. Some of the reasons people choose to volunteer include a desire to:**

- Do something they really enjoy
- Give something back to their community or society
- Be active in their community
- Make use of special interests and talents
- Learn new skills and/or develop new interests
- Meet new people with similar interests
- Make new friends
- Find out more about an area of work they are considering as a career
- Have a chance to take some responsibility and make decisions
- Gain valuable training and experience which may lead to paid employment
- Be an active citizen
- Make a difference

If you decide that you would like to get involved in volunteering but you are not sure exactly what you would like to do, then think about WHY you want to volunteer. This can be a useful way of helping you to focus on the sort of volunteering you want to undertake.

## When can I volunteer?

## How much time do I have to give?

## What kind of work would I like to do?

**If you are clear about why you want to volunteer, you may have some idea about the sort of volunteering that you would like to undertake. There are, however, a number of other factors that may influence the type of volunteering which you choose to do, including your current commitments and responsibilities. The following questions should help you to focus on what you would like to do and the time you have to offer:**

- How much time can you spare for volunteering? Remember your other commitments (family, hobbies, employment) and try not to over commit yourself.
- Are your circumstances likely to change in the near future?
- What period of time can you commit to volunteering? For example, one day? A month? Six months? Some voluntary projects require you to stay for a minimum period of time, so do check before you decide on a project.
- How much time do you wish to commit to volunteering? For example, one day a month, one hour a week, more than this or less?
- What times of the day are you free? Morning? Afternoon? Evening?

- What days of the week are you free?
- Do you have your own transport? If not, is it easy for you to use public transport to get to your place of volunteering?
- In what ways do you feel you can best contribute?
- What are your particular skills and interests? What do you really enjoy doing?
- Do you prefer to work with people or not?
- If you prefer working with people, is this on a one-to-one basis or in groups?
- Do you prefer to do something practical i.e. with your hands?
- Would you prefer to do something you have already done, utilising skills you have already acquired, or would you prefer the challenge of doing something new?
- What skills and interests do you already possess? Many everyday skills are useful when volunteering. Make sure you don't overlook skills such as writing letters, decorating, talking, listening, DIY, driving, reading, shopping, sport, leisure and outdoor activities, entertainment, gardening etc.
- If you want to work with people, have you identified a particular group of people with whom you would like to work? For example, children under 5 years of age; young people; the elderly; families; people in hospital; homeless people; people with a physical disability or learning difficulty.



## step four some questions to ask the organisations

**Once you've found a possible placement, it is worth asking the organisation you plan to volunteer with the following questions:**

- Can they give you a clear description of the role you will be expected to undertake?
- Who will show you what to do and supervise and support you in your volunteering? Will you be formally supervised or will supervision occur less formally?
- What about expenses? Volunteers should not be out of pocket for the work they do. Although it won't always be possible, ideally, an organisation should cover expenses such as travel, lunch and childcare.
- What about insurance? For example, if your volunteering opportunity requires you to drive, do you need to tell your car insurance company?
- How often will you be expected to do voluntary work and for how many hours each time?
- How long is the volunteering role likely to last?
- Who do you tell if you can't make it one week?
- Is there a minimum time commitment you are required to make (some organisations will require you to make a commitment of one year or more).
- Is training required?



# step five

## types of voluntary work

**The range of voluntary work available is endless! Think of any activity or job and the chances are that someone, somewhere is doing it as a volunteer. Below are some of the types of volunteering opportunities that are available through Volunteer Centres – but remember this list is by no means exhaustive!**

### Conservation, the Environment and Gardening

Conservation volunteers repair footpaths, clear ponds and waterways, plant trees, build dry-stone dykes, create nature trails - the list is endless. The work can usually be done at weekends or out-of-office hours too. You could help out at a community garden project or do simple maintenance for someone who is unable to look after their own garden.

### Learning Disabilities

People with learning disabilities may have difficulty understanding new or complex information, learning new skills or coping independently.

#### **Volunteers can:**

- help with activities, sports and crafts and social clubs, youth clubs and resource centres.
- provide one-to-one support to families or individuals as befrienders or advocates.
- assist at summer play-schemes for children.

### Advice Work

Volunteer advice workers offer confidential advice and information to members of the public. Some advice centres give a very wide range of information e.g. Citizens Information Centres. Others are more specialist e.g. working with homeless people or people with a disability. Volunteer Centres also involve volunteers on this basis. Some advice agencies look for a long-term commitment from volunteers and training can last up to three months.

### Mental Health

Mental health problems come in a variety of forms. Many involve feelings of depression, anxiety and confusion, sometimes to an extent that makes it difficult for a person to cope with everyday life. Only a small number of people experiencing mental health problems are admitted to hospital. Most are treated and supported in their community.

#### **Volunteers can:**

- assist at drop-in centres and social groups by helping with activities, chatting to people or providing a listening ear.
- provide one-to-one support as befrienders or advocates.

### Adult Basic Education

Many adults and young people want to improve their reading, writing or numeracy. Adult basic education provides tuition in groups with paid and volunteer tutors.

Volunteers must attend a training course and be prepared to give a long-term commitment, perhaps helping once or twice a week for a minimum of a year.

#### **Volunteers can:**

- tutor people who have difficulty with basic skills.
- teach English as a second language.
- help deaf students with language development.
- help students who have a disability.
- work with people who have speech and language difficulties as a result of a stroke.
- provide basic information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

### Homelessness

Many volunteers work with people living in temporary or hostel accommodation, or those sleeping rough.

#### **Volunteers can:**

- help out at drop-in or night shelters, providing hot drinks and meals and giving support.
- be trained to give information and advice.
- work alongside paid workers in outreach work on the streets.

## Advocacy and Campaigning

Many non-profit organisations campaign and lobby for their cause, be it local, national or global. International organisations campaigning on global issues often need to lobby in Ireland too. In all areas of advocacy and campaigning, non-profit organisations rely on volunteers.

### Volunteers can:

- join an interest group. For example, anti-racism, fair trade, human rights, trade justice, solidarity etc.
- speak out publicly about the cause.
- become involved in various actions supporting a campaign, such as sending letters or emails, posting flyers etc.
- support and/or assist in such campaigns events, including through designing campaigns, writing publicity material etc.

## Fundraising

Non-profit organisations often rely on fundraising to survive and need to have diverse and imaginative ways of raising funds for their work. Most organisations rely on volunteer fundraisers and there are always many, many volunteering opportunities in this area.

### Volunteers can:

- organise or take part in sponsored events, street collections, fun runs etc.
- help out in charity shops.
- be on a fund raising committee.
- help design a funding strategy for an organisation.



## Office Work

Many organisations have an ongoing need for volunteers to do office administration such as reception duties, typing and research. Others need volunteers to help out at busy times e.g. publicity campaigns or fundraising drives.

### Volunteers can do:

- reception and administration work.
- financial or management committee tasks.
- computing.
- 'once-off' pieces of work such as setting up a database, producing publicity material or devising a marketing strategy.

## The Elderly

Most opportunities to volunteer in this field take place in the daytime and are with elder people who are frail or experiencing some level of dementia.

### Volunteers can:

- help at lunch clubs or day centres, perhaps serving teas and lunches or assisting with quizzes, games and reminiscing activities.
- deliver 'Meals on Wheels' or library books to housebound people.
- befriend through making home visits.
- help out in residential homes and hospitals e.g. reading to patients, playing board games.

## Practical Assistance

Some organisations need DIY or building volunteers to paint and decorate, carry out repairs or put up shelves. This can be for the organisation itself or with its client base.

### Volunteers can:

- Paint the walls of community centres, childcare facilities, day care centres for elder people
- Make small improvements in the home or garden of people unable to undertake this work themselves.
- Offer professional building or decoration services.

## Befriending

Befriending involves giving support and friendship to someone who may be going through a difficult period, is feeling lonely, or is adjusting to a major change in their life.

Befriending schemes can support, for example: elder people, lone parents, young people, new parents, adults with disabilities or health problems.

Volunteer befrienders are matched with a client (perhaps because they share an interest or are of a similar age). They meet on a regular basis, perhaps to go shopping, go to the cinema or simply to have a chat over a cup of coffee. Befriending may aim to encourage the client's independence, build their self-confidence or offer social contact beyond their immediate family.

Befrienders are carefully selected and trained and receive ongoing support.

## Physical Disability

Many people are particularly interested in volunteering with people with a physical disability to assist them lead a more active or independent life.

### Volunteers can:

- help or assist with individuals or groups dealing with specific conditions such as arthritis, cancer, or epilepsy or with more general disability organisations.
- provide one-to-one support as a tutor, befriender or peer counsellor.

## HIV/Aids and Drug Dependency

Many people choose to volunteer with people directly or indirectly affected by HIV/AIDS or drug dependency issues.

### Volunteers can:

- help out at a drop-in or information centre.
- be a befriender in a 'buddy' scheme.
- provide practical help such as gardening, driving, baby-sitting, or painting and decorating.
- participate in preventative, educational and awareness raising work.

## Driving

Many elder people or people with a disability are unable to leave their homes due to a lack of suitable transport.

Volunteer drivers provide a vital service helping them to get out and about, perhaps to a day centre or social club. Some organisations have their own vehicles whilst others need drivers with their own car. Perhaps the best-known volunteer drivers are the 'Meals on Wheels' fleet.

The insurance requirements of organisations may differ, but usually a volunteer has to be aged over 23 years and have a clean driving licence. Minibus drivers may be required to sit a test. Volunteers using their own car will normally be paid petrol expenses.

## Children and Young People

There are a wide variety of volunteering roles with children.

### Volunteers can:

- assist in crèches and playgroups for the under fives.
- help with after school clubs, junior youth clubs and holiday playschemes, helping with games, arts and crafts, music and sport for those aged under 12.
- help out with young people over 12 in youth clubs or youth cafés and 'drop-in' centres providing varied social, leisure and outdoor activities, as well as 'issue' based work e.g. health promotion or drugs awareness.
- provide one-to-one support for children who are experiencing difficulties at school or at home.
- There are also well known youth organisations such as the Scouts and Girl Guides.

Individuals who volunteer with children or vulnerable adults should expect to undergo Garda Vetting.



## Hospital Work

Many hospitals and residential care units involve volunteers in a variety of roles.

### Volunteers can:

- visit and befriend patients and/or residents.
- help in hospital shops.
- provide trolley and library services.
- escort patients on outings.
- help with social activities.

## Residential

You may wish to get involved in voluntary work on a residential basis. This will involve a period of 'live in' with the organisation. Residential volunteering opportunities can last from one week to several months or more. Your local Volunteer Centre will be able to advise you on organisations that offer residential opportunities

### Volunteers can:

- help out in summer camps for children
- assist in care units for people affected by homelessness
- assist residential drug rehabilitation centres
- undertake environmental volunteer projects

## Team Volunteering

Groups of friends or colleagues can get together for a one-off volunteering project e.g. painting a mural, creating a wildlife garden, decorating premises or organising an outing for a group of people. Your local Volunteer Centre will be able to let you know of available projects.

### Other areas of volunteering include:

- support for victims of crime.
- working with ex-offenders.
- telephone help lines.
- bereavement / relationship counselling.
- mediation services.

## step six what can i expect? what should i expect?

**As a volunteer you are offering your valuable time, energy and skills to an organisation - free of charge! There are basic conditions that you should expect of the organisation you are helping with and there are also reasonable things that the organisation should be able to expect from you. Below are some guidelines about what these things might be.**

### A clear idea of what you will be doing

Organisations that involve volunteers should be able to give the volunteer a clear idea of what they will be doing before they begin their volunteering assignment. This can come in the form of a role description, a volunteer position description or an assignment summary.

Most organisations meet with or interview potential volunteers before they begin their volunteer assignment. This meeting will usually be an informal two-way 'interview' or chat. The person will be trying to find out if you will fit in with the organisation. You should also try to find out whether the organisation or project is what you imagined it to be, and whether you really want to be involved with it. Any questions that you may have about your role description could be asked at this stage.



## Some of the questions that you might ask on your first meeting or visit to the organisation might be:

- What exactly will I be doing?
- Is there anything that I will not be allowed to do?
- How many hours will I be expected to commit myself to and when will these hours be?
- Will I be working alongside lots of other people or mostly on my own?
- Are there any particular skills volunteers are expected to have?
- How soon will I be able to start?
- How long will I be expected to volunteer with the organisation?

## Training

Any organisation that involves volunteers should give some kind of induction or introduction to the organisation and to the activity you will be doing.

You should get any training you need to be able to handle the tasks expected of you before you start volunteering, as well as any ongoing training you need to develop your skills. You should never be put in a situation where you do not feel you have the skills or experience to cope. Don't be put off by the word 'training' - these courses are usually fun to do, as well as an opportunity to meet other volunteers and learn some useful information.

Also, think about your own needs and motivations for volunteering. If you want to develop new skills and gain volunteering experience, then structured training opportunities will be of benefit to you.



## Support and Supervision

There should be a named person who is responsible for you while you are volunteering, and you should have regular access to that person to discuss how things are going, whether by phone, email or in person. This person should ensure that, as a volunteer, you are given adequate support.

If you are unclear about any aspect of your volunteering role, you should clarify it with the organisation as soon as is possible. Ask as many questions as you need to in order to feel comfortable in your role.

You should also know who to contact if you have any questions, concerns or if anything goes wrong, and how to find them.

## Equal Opportunities

All individuals should be treated fairly and equally when volunteering. If you do experience any kind of discrimination – because of your gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, race, disability or membership of the travelling community – the organisation you are volunteering with should be made aware, take the matter very seriously and support you in challenging it.

Many volunteer-involving organisations have an Equal Opportunities Policy stating their commitment to treating all volunteers fairly and equally and explaining what steps will be taken if problems occur. Feel free to request a copy if this has not already been given to you.

If you don't feel able to talk to anyone within the organisation about equal opportunities, then staff at your local Volunteer Centre will be happy to talk with you about what has happened and to help you decide what to do next.

## Out-of-Pocket Expenses

Volunteers are not paid for the hours they give to an organisation; volunteering is something you do for free. Ideally, however, you should not find yourself out-of-pocket for the volunteering you do. That way, people who are on a low income aren't prevented from volunteering. You can reasonably expect to be repaid for the cost of travelling from your home to the place where you are volunteering. If you are volunteering over lunchtime, many organisations will provide lunch or pay for you to buy a sandwich. If you need any special equipment or clothing then this should be provided by the organisation. A few organisations will pay for the cost of child-care or care of any adults who are dependent on you, if you want to volunteer but have caring responsibilities.

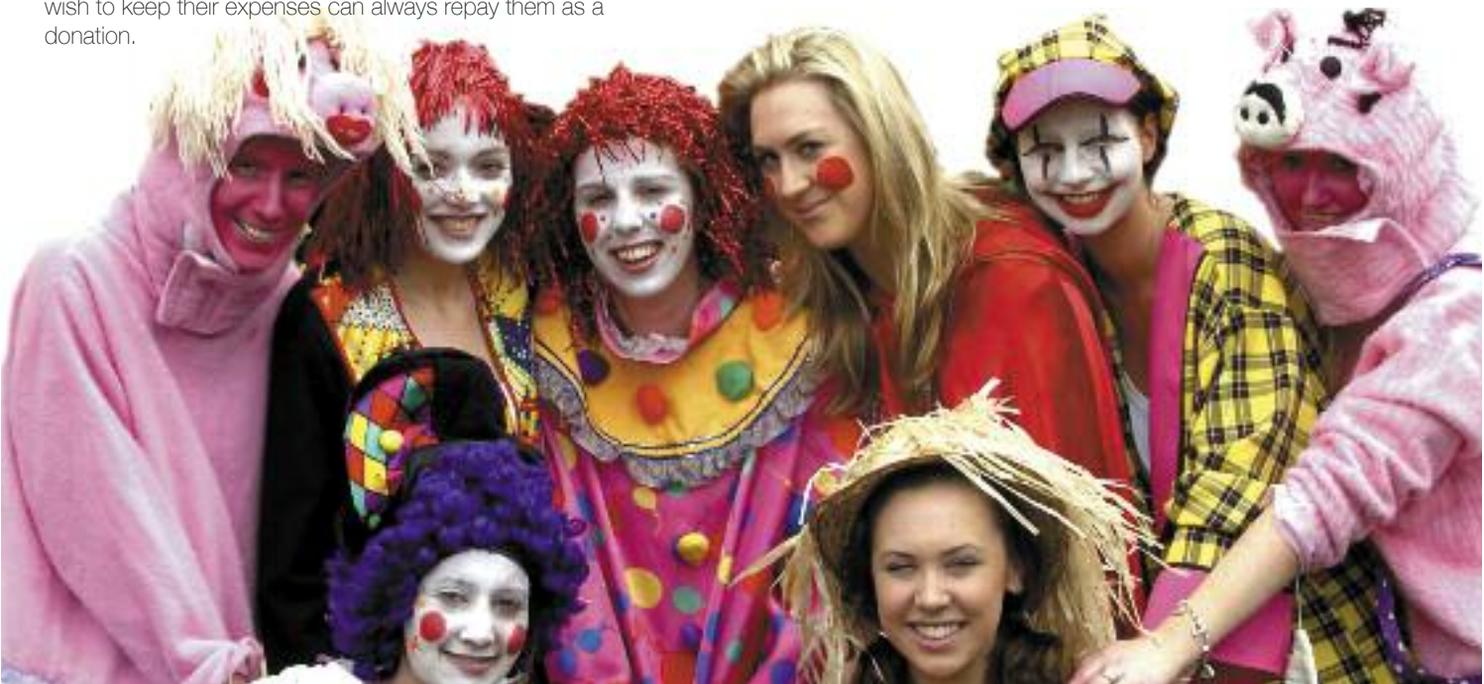
Although organisations that register with Volunteer Centres are asked to refund expenses, many say they simply cannot afford to do so. If it is important that you have your expenses repaid then your Volunteer Centre can tell you which organisations will be able to or, if they don't know, they can find out for you.

Some people feel uncomfortable taking the cost of their expenses from a group, especially if it is a charity or good cause. You should remember that you are giving your time for free; it is only fair that volunteering doesn't cost you anything more than your time! We encourage all volunteers to take up expenses so that those who need to do not feel stigmatised. Those who do not wish to keep their expenses can always repay them as a donation.

## Enjoyment!

Volunteering should be something you enjoy doing and from which you get some feeling of fulfilment. Over time with an organisation, you should be able to develop your skills and your role so that you remain interested. If you find that you are not enjoying what you do then ask yourself why this is the case. For example, you might feel that it is time to do something different, either with the organisation you currently volunteer with or another organisation. Perhaps it is that you are not happy with the way you are being treated by other volunteers, paid staff or the organisation itself. Perhaps what you are doing is not what you expected or wanted. Whatever the reason, you should feel able to discuss your concerns in the first instance with the volunteer organiser or named person who is responsible for volunteers or, if this is not possible, with somebody else within the organisation. You are always welcome to come and talk things through with a member of staff at your local Volunteer Centre.

Sometimes people try a number of different sorts of volunteering before they find the thing they really want to do. So don't be embarrassed to come back to the Volunteer Centre and look at what other possibilities there might be!



# step seven

## what will the organisation expect from me?

**Just as you need to ask questions about an organisation, so too will they have questions to ask of you.**

**Organisations have different ways of trying to find out if a volunteer is suited to their particular project.**

**For example, they may ask you to:**

- visit the organisation, take a look around and have a chat.
- fill in an application form.
- supply references before you begin to volunteer with them.
- you may be asked about your personal circumstances as some organisations need volunteers to stay with them for a reasonable length of time
- some organisations may ask you more personal questions. They may ask about your health or criminal convictions, and some may have an age limit for their volunteers. This particularly applies to statutory agencies such as hospitals, probation or social services.
- if you are volunteering with children or vulnerable adults, you should expect to be Garda Vetted
- Organisations are entitled not to accept a volunteer if they feel a volunteer might not be suitable for the work of the organisation.

### References

Many organisations require references from prospective volunteers before they begin volunteering with them. This is especially the case for volunteers who have contact with children or vulnerable adults. You should not be alarmed by such requests – every volunteer will be asked in the same way and it really is best practice. Remember that it's important, both from the perspective of the organisation and the volunteer, that the match is a right one.

When asked to identify referees, you should think about who knows you well and can confirm that you are reliable and trustworthy. Usually a referee should be someone who has known you for some time and who is not related to you. This could be a previous employer or someone who you have volunteered for, a social worker or key-worker, a doctor, health visitor or probation worker, someone who has taught you recently, a landlord or landlady, or a colleague or friend. If you are finding it very difficult to think of a referee, then talk about this with the person who has asked you for a reference or talk to someone at your local Volunteer Centre.

### Garda Vetting

Garda Vetting is the process by which the Gardáí disclose details regarding prosecutions and convictions against an individual, with their consent, to a prospective employer or organisation they wish to volunteer with. If you want to volunteer with children, young people or vulnerable adults, then as well as references, you will probably be asked to allow the organisation to check that you do not have any criminal convictions that would stop you being allowed to do this type of volunteering. You should not be discouraged if an organisation requires you to be Garda Vetted. It represents best practice and shows that the organisation cares for its clients and volunteers. Remember too that prosecutions and convictions do not necessarily preclude you from volunteering. Depending on demand, it can take a long time for an organisation to obtain Garda Vetting on an individual so you may need to be patient. Organisations sometimes devise volunteering roles for individuals awaiting Garda Vetting.

Vetting obtained for a college course, work requirement or a previous volunteering opportunity may not be considered as sufficient Garda Vetting for beginning a new volunteering opportunity. Organisations or roles that require Garda Vetting will require you to complete a Garda Vetting form and go through the process with them, even if you have been Garda Vetted previously. Another popular misconception is that you can get 'clearance' from your local Garda station before you go to an organisation to volunteer. The correct procedure for obtaining Garda Vetting is to receive the relevant forms from the organisation you are applying to volunteer with or, on their behalf, from your local Volunteer Centre. Once you have completed the forms, you then return to the organisation that you are applying to volunteer with and they will begin the process by sending the forms to the Garda Central Vetting Unit.

If you have volunteered or worked overseas, the organisation may seek information about your time spent abroad. The organisation will be able to inform you of their specific requirements.

If you do have a criminal record and you are worried that this might affect the type of volunteering you will be able to do, then talk with a member of staff at the Volunteer Centre, in complete confidence, about this. As part of the services they provide to volunteer-involving organisations, Volunteer Centres provide Garda Vetting to local voluntary organisations. If you would like to know more about this service, please contact your local Volunteer Centre (contact details can be found on [www.volunteer.ie](http://www.volunteer.ie)).

## Commitment

It should be clear before you start to volunteer how much time you will be expected to give and the days on which you will volunteer. When you have agreed a schedule, both the organisation and the volunteer should ensure they give enough notice to the other of any possible changes. Of course, it is reasonable for you to take time off for holidays, medical appointments or special events, as long as you give the organisation as much notice as you can.

There may be times when you really can't do something you have promised - everyone occasionally has a crisis which stops them doing what they planned. However, you should get in touch with the organisation (before you were due to be there if possible, or as soon as possible afterwards) to explain what has happened. Most people will be sympathetic if you explain that there has been an emergency.

## To do what has been agreed

It is important that you stick to the tasks that you have agreed to do in your volunteering role. You should not take it upon yourself to involve yourself in tasks or activities that are not your responsibility or to do things in a different way without discussing this with someone in the organisation first. It may be that the organisation would be happy for you to take on more responsibilities, or move into different areas of its work, or take suggestions about how things could be done differently. But the people working around you need to know what is going on and to agree that they are happy with this.

## To respect confidentiality

If you are volunteering with an organisation that offers support or services to people, then it may be that you will hear or read details about people's private lives or health that is confidential. You should respect that such information is confidential and should not be passed on to or talked about with anyone outside of the organisation, however well-meaning your intentions. To do so would be to abuse the trust that a person has placed in the organisation. Many organisations have confidentiality agreements that they will ask you to sign before starting to volunteer. Confidentiality works both ways and you should expect a similar level of trust from the organisation regarding your details.

## And finally...

Enjoy your volunteering experience – it should be fun! If, at any time, you have any questions related to your volunteering role or experience any problems with it, you should talk to the organisation. Remember also that you can contact your local Volunteer Centre to talk things through with a member of staff. As well as finding you suitable voluntary work, they are there to offer you support if you need it.

**European Voluntary Service (EVS)** is an EU-funded programme offering young people aged between 18 and 30 the opportunity to volunteer for up to one year on projects run by approved organisations within Europe. For more information, contact Léargas, the national agency in Ireland for the management of national and international exchange and cooperation programmes in education, youth and community work, and vocational education and training.

Léargas,  
189 Parnell Street,  
Dublin 1.  
Tel: +353 1 873 1411  
[www.leargas.ie](http://www.leargas.ie)



# Volunteer Management Training

**Your local Volunteer Centre staff has been trained to deliver the VCI National Volunteer Management Training Programme. The programme, delivered in a hands-on participative style, is designed to give volunteer-involving organisations and their staff the tools to plan for involving volunteers and to recruit, train, manage and support volunteers effectively. In addition, organisations are encouraged to develop and implement a Volunteer Policy to help define why and how they involve volunteers and to establish guidelines for how volunteers will be treated in their organisation.**

**The programme is currently delivered over four half-day training sessions (designed as part of a continuum) that are offered at a small cost to the individuals attending. The topics covered in the programme include the following:**

## **Module I**

Planning for Volunteer Involvement; Developing Volunteer and Organisation Expectations; and Developing Volunteer Role Descriptions.

## **Module II**

Volunteer Recruitment and Selection; Advertising for Volunteers; Developing a Volunteer Application Form; Interviewing; Induction and Training.

## **Module III**

Volunteer Support and Supervision; Volunteer Motivation and Recognition.

## **Module IV:**

Designing and Implementing a Volunteer Policy.

Volunteer Management Training serves to increase the skills and confidence of individuals (paid or unpaid) who work with volunteers and, most importantly, improve the quality of the volunteer experience for both the organisation and volunteer. For further information on the VCI Volunteer Management Training Programme or to find out when your local Volunteer Centre is next providing training, go to [www.volunteer.ie](http://www.volunteer.ie).

# Give It A Swirl, the national day of volunteering

[www.giveitaswirl.ie](http://www.giveitaswirl.ie)

*Give It A Swirl* is Ireland's national day of volunteering that takes place on one Friday every Autumn, usually towards the end of September. *Give It A Swirl* is effectively a call to arms: individuals, groups and organisations are encouraged to either get involved in or provide once-off hands-on volunteering opportunities to show that volunteering can make a difference and be a lot of fun. *Give It A Swirl* is a unique event because it concentrates on hands-on volunteering (rather than, for example, fundraising) and because it is open to anyone who wants to, to get involved. Whether through volunteering projects that community group or organisations have specifically designed for the day, or random acts of kindness that take place at a personal or local level, *Give It A Swirl* generates an immediate sense of achievement. What is more, everyone – individuals, community and the wider society – benefits. If people want to get involved in volunteering on a more long-term basis as a result of *Give It A Swirl*, then that can't be a bad thing either!

For *Give It A Swirl*, Volunteer Centres Ireland, in conjunction with the network of local Volunteer Centres, encourage not-for-profit organisations to develop once-off volunteering projects to take place either on or around a specific day and which individuals and groups can then register to take part in. However, individuals are also encouraged to come up with their own projects, either alone or with family, colleagues, friends. The idea of *Give It A Swirl* is to give it a go. The only limitation is the imagination: whatever project, event or action an individual or group can think of that will have a positive impact on an individual, group or community is what it's all about. Whether you're a lifelong volunteer or have never volunteered before, *Give It A Swirl* is for you!

*Give It A Swirl* has a dedicated website, [www.giveitaswirl.ie](http://www.giveitaswirl.ie), from which you can download helpful tips on how to set up your own *Give It A Swirl* activity, get inspired by what others have done in the past or to register your volunteering project for *Give It A Swirl*.

**Get informed! Get inspired! Get involved!  
It is time to act – let's get moving!**

# Volunteer Centres

**Volunteer Centres are local agencies that exist to improve the extent, range and quality of volunteering. They do this by providing guidance and support to anyone wishing to volunteer and to any not-for-profit organisation that involves volunteers in their work. While each Volunteer Centre in Ireland is different, they all offer support and advice to potential volunteers and support, advice and training to volunteer-involving organisations on best practice in involving volunteers.**

## what you can expect

The main function of a Volunteer Centre is to match people interested in volunteering with appropriate volunteering opportunities in their local area. Volunteer Centres hold information on a comprehensive range of local opportunities and these are available to view online or you can drop in or arrange to visit your local Centre and go through this list with staff. Opportunities are divided into categories according to the type of activity (for example, befriending, information provider, virtual volunteering) or the kind of organisation (for example, the arts, elder people, sport). You can register to volunteer online, from your own computer. On the other hand, if you'd rather have a chat about your interests and find out more about what is involved, you can phone, drop in or arrange to visit your local Volunteer Centre and complete a registration form with staff. Either way, once you've chosen a few roles that interest you, the Volunteer Centre will put you and the organisations you have chosen in touch with each other. If you are unable to find an opportunity that suits you, talk to staff in the Volunteer Centre. They may know of an organisation that is looking for the someone with your skills or interests. As the list of opportunities Volunteer Centres hold are always being updated, remember to re-check them regularly.

## some things you should know

- Finding the right opportunity can sometimes take a little bit of time. However, it's worth waiting for an opportunity that's right for you.
- Some roles require training and this can delay the process a little too.
- Even if you have been Garda Vetted previously, you will be required to go through the process again if it is in a new organisation or for a new role.
- Don't let age stop you! If you're under 16, you are still able to volunteer, you'll just need the consent of a parent or guardian and there may be a more limited range of opportunities available to you.
- If you're not happy with your volunteering role, do discuss this with the organisation you are volunteering with. Alternatively, talk to your local Volunteer Centre.



## International Volunteers

This guide is specifically aimed at individuals interested in volunteering in Ireland. Many volunteers, of course, are interested in volunteering outside Ireland too. Comhámh, the Irish Association of Development Workers, is an organisation committed to social justice, human rights and global development issues. It is also a support agency for returned development workers (RDWs) and provides information, support and advice to individuals interested in volunteering overseas in a developing country.

**Comhlámh**  
**Ballast House**  
**2nd floor, Aston Quay**  
**Dublin 2**  
**Ireland**  
**Tel: +353 (01) 4783490**  
**Email: [info@comhlahm.org](mailto:info@comhlahm.org)**



The Support Services team in Comhámh deliver a comprehensive range of supports for development workers before, during and after a period of volunteering overseas. Resources include the two guides Coming Home and What Next?

Email [rdw@comhlahm.org](mailto:rdw@comhlahm.org) for copies of these resources, further support services or information regarding the wider work of Comhámh, including development education and campaigning.

Comhámh also manages an international volunteer project called Volunteering Options that aims to promote informed decision making by potential volunteers and to develop good practice standards among volunteer sending organisations. In so doing, Comhámh hopes to ensure that overseas volunteering has a positive impact for the volunteer, the sending organisation and the host organisation and community. For further information, see [www.volunteeringoptions.org](http://www.volunteeringoptions.org) or email [info@volunteeringoptions.org](mailto:info@volunteeringoptions.org).

In addition, Comhámh produce a book for potential volunteers; run training workshops; provide information to the public; undertake research, including into the impact of volunteering on host organisations; have developed a Volunteer Charter for volunteers and a Code of Good Practice for volunteer sending organisations, which they can sign up to.

If you are thinking of volunteering overseas in a developing country or wondering how that volunteering experience might fit in with the 'bigger picture', then Comhlámh can help to guide you.

## Volunteer Centres Ireland (VCI)

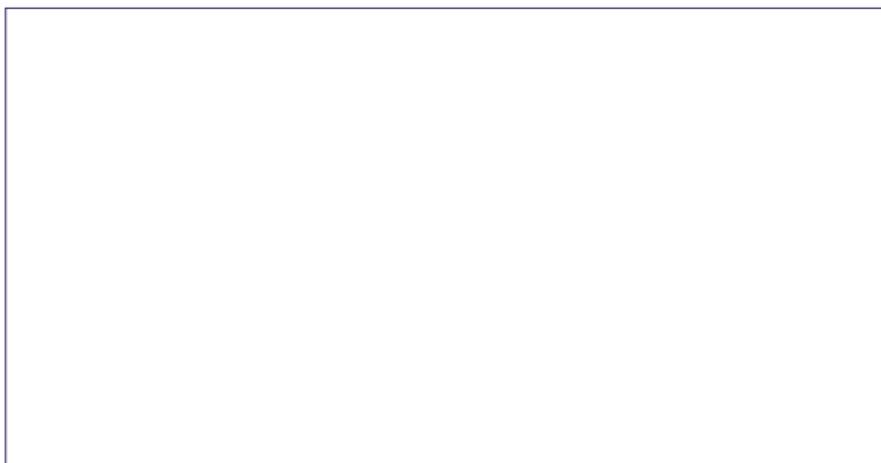
is a representative body, support agency and membership organisation for a growing number of local Volunteer Centres in Ireland. Our vision is for an Irish society in which everyone who wants to, has access to volunteering opportunities that are fulfilling and engaging, which contribute to the development of community and the betterment of society, and where volunteers are respected for the time and effort they contribute. Our mission is to develop and support a national volunteering infrastructure in Ireland with a national network of local Volunteer Centres at its heart; to ensure best practice in volunteering in Ireland; and to inform and influence policy on volunteering.

### Volunteer Centres Ireland (VCI):

- Facilitates the coming together of the network of Volunteer Centres to discuss and agree best practice within Volunteer Centres and volunteering generally
- Promotes the national network of Volunteer Centres and the work they do
- Manages the only national database of volunteers and volunteering opportunities in Ireland
- Manages [www.volunteer.ie](http://www.volunteer.ie) as a conduit for volunteering in Ireland
- Co-ordinates Give It A Swirl, the national day of volunteering
- Gathers and disseminates information on volunteering as it occurs through Volunteer Centres
- Oversees the monitoring and evaluation of Volunteer Centres on behalf of our public funders

Volunteer Centres Ireland receives funding from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

VCI would like to acknowledge the work of Clodagh Gorman and Tricia Nolan of the South Dublin County Volunteer Centre in the production of this Guide.



[www.volunteer.ie](http://www.volunteer.ie)



volunteer centres

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