



INFORMATION FOR VOLUNTEERS

Many thanks indeed for showing an interest in volunteering with SASS. We are keen for volunteers to familiarise themselves with our community drop-ins before making a commitment. This information is provided to offer guidance in your first few days.

How can you help? Informal volunteering at drop-ins: Every member of our drop-in community – whether local or refugee – can help informally, by chatting to newcomers, bringing games; setting up for the drop-in, helping in the kitchen, cleaning and tidying up afterwards; offering friendship and support.

In addition, SASS needs volunteers to undertake **specific roles**. These can be occasional or regular volunteering activities and are available at all levels of the organisation.

Befriending	Venue upkeep
English Language Support	Fundraising
Kitchen Duties	Signposting
Children's Activities	Duty Manager/Door Person
Trusteeship	Volunteering with Share Tawe hosting project
Interpreting	ETC

We are committed to consulting with our membership on what would help SASS meet our aims more fully. This can lead to **additional volunteer roles,for example;**

- Organising more leisure and educational activities
- Providing practical information and support to asylum seekers
- Helping with fire drills and other health and safety procedures
- Organising outreach or fund raising
- Supporting asylum seekers and refugees outside drop-in time. For example, help with lifts in an emergency; accompanying people to MPs, solicitors, court appearances (where no solicitors) etc.
- Liaison with the wider community, or with other groups which support asylum seekers and refugees;
- Supporting people in detention and helping people to support their friends who have been detained.

VOLUNTEERS are people who, unpaid and of their own free will, contribute their time, energy and skills to the benefit of the community. It is different from paid work as there is no financial reward and no legal contract (**This distinction is particularly important for asylum seekers**).

Volunteering helps SASS be sustainable as we survive on small grants, being a volunteer led organisation we rely almost entirely on people who kindly give their free time. A strong, diverse volunteer base helps SASS develop new activities and services. Asylum seekers, refugees and “locals” foster understanding and friendship as they contribute together in our volunteer team, building on each other’s skills and confidence. Volunteering can provide evidence of someone’s skills and commitments. Our volunteer references are useful when seeking employment, or for Home Office character references.

What we aim to offer SASS volunteers

All new visitors to the drop-in, including potential volunteers, should receive a **warm welcome**.

Our Volunteer Development Worker (VDW) will have an initial conversation to begin to find out what each volunteer might be interested in doing. S/he will also explain some important guidelines that we all need to follow. S/he will aim to find something appropriate for them to do from the beginning, in the context of the drop-in and subject to observation. This could be a chance to observe an area of volunteering that they might be interested in.

S/he will also give the volunteer appropriate written material – e.g. our basic volunteer leaflet, so that they can see what we do and what we expect from the beginning.

When a volunteer has had time to think more about their involvement, the VDW will discuss **specific volunteer roles** with them, which might match their skills and interests. Each role will have a simple description so that volunteers will know what is expected.

It is important that when volunteers join us, they are introduced as soon as possible to our organisation – our aims, values, guidelines etc., and also to some of the challenges faced by asylum seekers.

This can be done by individual induction sessions with our VDW, and/or group sessions within the first one or two weeks of joining us. It is important to provide a consistent introduction to all volunteers. It is the responsibility of the VDW, in consultation with their manager and the trustees, to ensure that this happens.

Maintaining volunteer interest in the early weeks: Where the volunteer role requires references, DBS checks, or specific induction or training, this sometimes causes delay. It is important to find ways of helping new volunteers to find ways of being involved while they wait. For example some of the more straightforward tasks.

Development opportunities: The VDW will conduct review sessions from time to time, to discuss how each volunteer finds the volunteer experience, what new roles they might like to try, a chance to increase – or decrease – their commitment over time. We will also welcome comments on the organisation as a whole.

We do not have a big training budget but will consider appropriate external or online training if we can afford it. Informal in-house workshops or training are also important.

Out of pocket expenses, to reimburse what it has cost to do *an agreed voluntary role*, are available to all volunteers.

We are not able to pay expenses for people to simply attend a drop-in session, even if they might offer informal help while they are with us.

A safe environment: SASS has public liability insurance which covers accidents to anyone on the premises. The organisation does not insure the volunteer's personal possessions against loss or damage.

Everyone in SASS has a commitment to follow our **health and safety and food hygiene policies.**

Membership of SASS: We hope volunteers will enjoy being part of the SASS community and feel able to bring their ideas, feedback and enthusiasm. Anyone who is committed to our values and attends or helps regularly is encouraged to become a member of SASS. SASS trustees are automatically members.

References: In line with SASS' safeguarding policies and to ensure volunteers are willing and able to behave according to our values and follow our guidelines we will require two references. These could be two professional references or one professional reference and one character reference.

DBS Checks: We take up DBS checks for volunteers and staff working with children or vulnerable adults.

NO VOLUNTEER OR STAFF MEMBER WORKS ALONE WITH CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE OR VULNERABLE ADULTS.

If a volunteer has a complaint against the organisation or someone in it, we first ask them to talk with the VDW, informally at first. If this does not resolve the matter, they can approach the chair of trustees, in writing if possible. **Concerns regarding any form of abuse or aggression** must be brought to the attention of the VDW.

WHAT WE EXPECT FROM SASS VOLUNTEERS

- To work within SASS aims, values and guidelines.
- To treat everyone equally and with respect
- To avoid controlling or patronising behaviour and to respect the autonomy of each individual
- To respect confidentiality and privacy
- Not to ask intrusive questions – e.g. about an asylum seekers case or journey
- To avoid pushing our own religious or political views on others
- To be willing to co-operate with safeguarding and training needed for particular roles
- To offer support and signposting if trained to do so, but never advice - especially legal advice
- To comply with relevant policies and procedures
- To respect the work of the organisation and not bring it into disrepute
- To do what they have promised to do, or to let us know if they can't
- To give SASS constructive feedback and ideas for improvement

OUR VALUES IN INVOLVING VOLUNTEERS

- Equal opportunities in recruitment and support of volunteers
- Involving "local" and refugee volunteers on an equal footing
- Consulting our membership on new roles and activities for volunteers
- Clear expectations of volunteers – what we ask them to do, and the standards needed
- Two-way benefit: SASS should benefit from the help given by volunteers and volunteers themselves should benefit. (Volunteers are not paid for their work, but, for example can gain satisfaction from a good job done; gain new skills and experience and have references.

Confirming volunteer status: A confirmation of "volunteer status" will be made once required references and checks have been received, the volunteer has a clear role (which may be very informal), and has satisfied the VDW that they can act safely and within our values and guidelines. If the VDW has doubts about conferring this status s/he needs to discuss this with their line manager, who must consult the trustees (or a group of trustees delegated to make these decisions).

In the meantime

Please complete our **online volunteer form** -> www.sass.wales/volunteer

Please see our website to learn more about what we do -> www.sass.wales

Free online signpost training here -> www.sass.wales/signpost-training

Warning! Important Information for Asylum Seekers

THE HOME OFFICE DISTINCTION BETWEEN “VOLUNTEERING” AND “VOLUNTARY WORK”

We have copied below the distinction the Home Office makes between volunteering and voluntary work. It is a copy of pages 13 and 14 of a longer document, “Permission to Work and Volunteering, Version 7, accessed 29 March 2018.

Here is the link for the whole document, published 12 January 2017: www.goo.gl/ZXy8yq

To summarise:

- We stress that asylum seekers, and those who write references for them, should refer to their volunteering as ‘volunteering’ - not ‘voluntary work’
- In our policies, procedures and the way we organise volunteering, we avoid ‘work language’: terms such as “contracts” and “obligations” etc.
- Volunteers are under no obligation to do particular tasks for us or at particular times

Volunteering

Volunteers are those who give their time for free to charitable or public sector organisations without any contractual obligation or entitlement. They are not employees or workers as defined by various statutory provisions.

Volunteering can be undertaken at any stage of the asylum process but such activities must not interfere with scheduled events such as a substantive asylum interview, regular reporting event or re-documentation interview. These events will not be rescheduled to accommodate volunteering. Organisations offering such opportunities will need to allow some flexibility so that volunteers can attend interviews or appointments around their volunteering. Volunteering must also not undermine the effective removal of those who do not need protection and do not qualify to remain in the UK on any other basis.

Asylum seekers can volunteer whilst their claim is considered without being granted permission to work. It is Home Office policy to support asylum seekers volunteering for charities or public sector organisations. However, this must not amount to engagement as an ‘employee’ or a ‘worker’ and it is the responsibility of the individual and the organisation they are volunteering for to check that such activity does not mean they are working in breach of conditions. The organisation should also undertake all relevant safeguarding checks required. Any personal details provided by the claimant as part of the immigration process cannot be confirmed by the Home Office for use in any other context other than immigration matters.

Key elements in establishing whether someone is a volunteer rather than an employee or worker are whether there is an obligation on the individual to perform the work, and an obligation on the organisation to provide it; and whether the individual is rewarded for the work, through money or benefits in kind.

Volunteers may be reimbursed for expenses incurred whilst volunteering, for example, for travel and food but should not receive any other payment. If any other payment is received the role may be classed as an employee or worker.

Working or being employed by a charity or voluntary organisation is subject to the same restrictions as employment in other sectors. Genuine volunteering roles are not subject to these restrictions.

To summarise, the principal difference is that volunteering must not amount to unpaid work, or job substitution. In particular:

- there should be no payment, other than reasonable travel and meals expenditure actually incurred (not an allowance for the same)
- there should be no contractual obligations on the volunteer and they should not enjoy any contractual entitlement to any work or benefits
- the volunteer is helping a registered voluntary or charitable organisation, an organisation that raises funds for either of these, or a public sector organisation
- volunteering is not a substitute for employment, that is fulfilling a role that a salaried worker would normally fulfil

Organisations need to be clear about the legal status of volunteering roles they create before they recruit people to such roles. The guidance above is to help organisations understand the distinctions. However, if in doubt about whether a specific opportunity constitutes engagement as an employee or worker or volunteering, organisations should seek independent legal advice before taking on volunteers who are asylum seekers and who do not have permission to work.

Working for a charity

Asylum seekers or failed asylum seekers awaiting the outcome of an asylum claim or further submission cannot work as an employee or a worker, even for a voluntary organisation, unless they have been granted permission to work under Paragraph 360 of the Immigration Rules.

Further information is available on GOV.UK: Preventing Illegal Working.