

# ***VOLUNTEERS***

## ***Model Policy Series***

***No 7***

***November 2005***



**Wales Council for  
Voluntary Action**

*Supporting charities, volunteers and communities*

**Cyngor Gweithredu  
Gwirfoddol Cymru**

*Yn cefnogi elusenau, gwirfoddolwyr a chymunedau*

## ***A guide to writing a model policy for involving volunteers with mental ill health***

### ***Recruitment and Retention***

- Recruitment – ensure your organisation has an equal opportunities policy **that includes people with mental health problems**. Ensure your recruitment practices for recruiting volunteers allows equal access to volunteering opportunities.
- Positively welcome volunteers with experience of mental health problems and ensure that policies, procedure and practices support their inclusion in the organisation.
- Happiness in the volunteering role will lead to volunteer retention. Ensure volunteers are well supported, recognised and thanked for the work they do.
- The volunteers themselves are the best judge of their own capabilities and whether they can volunteer, where they can volunteer and how much they can take on. Mental health professionals and volunteer managers must appreciate this.

### ***Challenges faced by people with mental health problems***

- Be aware that volunteers with mental health problems may be taking medication and this could make somebody drowsy in the morning, nauseous or unable to concentrate for long periods at a time. Volunteers are often aware of the side effects of their medication so don't be afraid to ask and discuss their needs.
- Benefits arrangements – some volunteers will be in receipt of incapacity benefit, some in receipt of income support while others will be in receipt of jobseekers allowance. Know the difference and the implications that they have for voluntary work, if any.
- Assumptions - don't make assumptions about people's abilities. This is particularly important for volunteers with direct experience of mental health problems.
- Encourage acceptance of individuality that might sometimes include behaviour that others find unusual for example facial tics or slurring speech often caused by medication or signs or nervousness.
- Respect confidentiality of volunteers' personal circumstances. The burden of confidentiality is placed on both the volunteer manager and volunteer.
- Consult with volunteers to find out what works well and what makes them feel stressed.

- Consult with volunteers mental health problems on the quality of the support they receive in their work environment and practices.
- Allow the volunteer to work at an individual pace and maybe take a break when necessary.
- Control over one's work – allow volunteers to have some control over their work and flexibility in working styles
- Extra time off when needed – volunteers appreciate having their role kept open on return when taking time off for illness

## **Positive mental health in the workplace**

- Display and promote information that encourages volunteers to look after their mental well-being.
- Arrange mental health awareness training for all staff and volunteers
- Consider making adaptations in the workplace e.g. seating arrangements, chill out spaces to make the work environment as congenial as possible and based on individual needs.
- Carry out a stress audit throughout the organisation
- Smoking – many people with mental health problems are often regular smokers and would like a space for smoking and time out to do so.
- Ensure that you have sufficient grievance and disciplinary procedures in place for volunteers.
- Provide training to volunteer managers to enable to supervise and support volunteers with mental health problems.
- Ensure that volunteers feel part of a group and that they are not isolated.

**Always remember volunteers with mental health problems are the experts in their own needs. If ever in doubt, ask!**

These guidelines have been created for volunteer managers to assist with the development of a mental health policy for involving volunteers with mental health problems. **The policy produced should be in addition to a mainstream volunteering policy (see WCVA Model Policy Series No 5 – A Model Policy on Volunteering).**

Produced by Teresa Lewis, volunteer on the Valuing Volunteers DEEP Project, as part of her research report *'The Scope of the Volunteering that People with Mental health problems do'* into aspects of discrimination experienced by people with mental health issues, April 2005 available from [www.wcva.org.uk/volunteering](http://www.wcva.org.uk/volunteering)

**November 2005**

**© WCVA**

### Registered Office - Head Office

Baltic House, Mount Stuart Square  
Cardiff CF10 5FH  
☎ 029 2043 1700 📠 029 2043 1701  
✉ [enquiries@wcva.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wcva.org.uk)  
minicom 029 2043 1702 (use announcer)  
Swyddfa Gofrestredig - Prif Swyddfa

Tŷ Baltig, Sgwâr Mount Stuart  
Caerdydd CF10 5FH  
☎ 029 2043 1700 📠 029 2043 1701  
✉ [ymholiadau@wcva.org.uk](mailto:yhmholiadau@wcva.org.uk)  
minicom 029 2043 1702 (defnyddiwch y cyhoeddwr)

### North Wales Office

13 Wynnstay Road  
Colwyn Bay  
Conwy LL29 8NB  
☎ 01492 539800 📠 01492 539801  
✉ [enquiries@wcva.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wcva.org.uk)  
Swyddfa Gogledd Cymru

13 Ffordd Wynnstay  
Bae Colwyn  
Conwy LL29 8NB  
☎ 01492 539800 📠 01492 539801  
✉ [ymholiadau@wcva.org.uk](mailto:yhmholiadau@wcva.org.uk)

### Mid Wales Office

Ladywell House  
Newtown  
Powys SY16 1JB  
☎ 01686 611050 📠 01686 627863  
✉ [enquiries@wcva.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@wcva.org.uk)  
Swyddfa Canolbarth Cymru

Tŷ Ladywell  
Y Drenewydd  
Powys SY16 1JB  
☎ 01686 611050 📠 01686 627863  
✉ [ymholiadau@wcva.org.uk](mailto:yhmholiadau@wcva.org.uk)