



# **Volunteer Handbook**

## **Sligo Social Services Volunteer Charter**

Sligo Social Services is rooted in a tradition of volunteerism. The organisation values the volunteer's role and is committed to its further development within the organisation. In keeping with improving standards in volunteering, Sligo Social Services has developed a charter which underpins the role of the volunteers within the organisation. This charter recognises the two way nature of the volunteering relationship.

### **What volunteers can expect from Sligo Social Services**

- Know if, and how, they are being selected
- To be given meaningful work to do
- To know what is expected from them
- To be offered appropriate training
- To be appreciated and have their voluntary contribution recognized
- To receive supervision and support
- To benefit from their contribution
- To know who to go to if they have a concern
- To learn from their experience
- To be made aware of policies and procedures relevant to their role
- To be treated fairly and not to experience discrimination
- To have safe working conditions, including insurance cover
- To be informed about and be given the opportunity to play an active part in the organisation as a whole
- To be able to say no and to leave their voluntary role without feeling guilty.

### **What Sligo Social Services asks of volunteers**

- To respect the values and aims of the organisation
- To be committed to these values and aims, and to their role in the organisation
- To be reliable and give the organisation sufficient notice if unable to turn up
- To be punctual
- To attend essential training and support sessions
- To undertake to work to a high standard
- To be honest if they are experiencing problems
- To respect confidentiality of service users and Sligo Social Services
- To treat people with respect and dignity.

# Standards, guiding principles, policies and procedures

## Policy Statement

Sligo Social Service Council was founded with the aim of responding to the emerging and unmet needs of the people of Sligo. From small beginnings, the organisation has grown over the years and now provides personal and community based services to a wide range of people. The organisation seeks to address these needs respectfully by empowerment, support and encouragement and where appropriate, direct assistance by caring, competent and professional individuals, deployed on a full-time, part-time or voluntary basis.

We recognise that in order to achieve our goals we need to involve volunteers in our own work too. It is also essential that we present a model of good practice in volunteer management.

We regard volunteers as a valuable resource and encourage them to get involved at all levels of the organisation and within all appropriate activities. We aim to train, support and supervise our volunteers to the best of our abilities, and to act quickly and fairly if difficulties arise

## Procedural Guidelines

### Purpose of Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to provide guidance on all aspects of volunteering within Sligo Social Services. It does not constitute a binding contract. It supplements other Sligo Social Services policies and procedures, as well as our definition of volunteering, our mission statement and our value base.

These procedures apply to all non-elected volunteers who undertake tasks on behalf and at the direction of the organisation.

### Responsibility

Line Managers/Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that the policy and the procedures in this document are implemented efficiently and effectively. All other staff and volunteers (including voluntary Board members) are expected to facilitate this process. Sligo Social Services is committed to providing consistent quality services within the organisation. In order to achieve this we ask that all staff and volunteers operate within standards of best practice. These standards are based on both legal requirements and best practice standards. You will find direction to these Sligo Social Service policies and procedures in your volunteer handbook.

To achieve these standards consistently throughout the organisation, Sligo Social Services has policies and procedures manuals. These manuals outline in detail the policies and procedures for all areas of service delivery. Your volunteer support person will familiarise you with the policies and procedures relevant to your role.

The Sligo Social Services policies and procedures manuals include the following general categories:

- Services Policies and Procedures
- Personnel Policy and Procedures
- Health and Safety Statement

- Finance and Administration Policies and Procedures
- Information Technology Policies and Procedures.

## Role Description

Sligo Social Services welcomes volunteers from all walks of life and backgrounds. Volunteers are not required to have any previous experience in volunteering. To become a volunteer in the organisation candidates are required to be over the age of eighteen years of age. Sligo Social Services is committed to ensuring that every volunteer is involved in meaningful activity while volunteering for the organisation. In order to achieve this it is important that each volunteer is clear about their role and what is expected of them. Therefore every volunteer will be given a role description at induction stage.

This document will also outline the activities they will be involved in and the specific tasks entailed in the activities. Where appropriate the role description may also include the times and locations of the activity. The organisation aims to ensure that the volunteer's specific skills, expertise and interests are utilized and matched to the work of the organisation. As the work of the organization develops, volunteers may be asked to become involved in new activities. Volunteers may also identify activities/ programmes that they would like to become involved in as their knowledge and insight into the organisation grows. Changes in a person's role description will be agreed by both the volunteer and the volunteer support person.

### Eligibility

Sligo Social Services will consider involving anyone as a volunteer. Individuals must, however, be able to demonstrate a commitment to the aims of the organisation and may only be placed if their needs as volunteers match the needs of the organisation. No person who has a conflict of interest with any aspect of the organisation will be accepted as a volunteer.

### Applications

Volunteers are recruited on a pro-active basis by the organisation using publicity avenues that are suitable for the roles that need to be filled. Potential volunteers may also apply speculatively. Volunteers are recruited in accordance with the organisations equal opportunities policy. All volunteers are required to complete an application form.

### Interviews

If necessary, applications are short listed and suitable candidates are invited to attend an informal chat with the service line manager/supervisor, to ascertain their interest in and suitability for the role. Written records of all interviews are kept. All unsuccessful candidates are thanked for applying and encouraged to reapply for other volunteering opportunities, either current or in the future.

### Checks for suitability

References (2) and Police vetting are always taken up. Other checks may also be completed (for example, ascertaining professional qualifications). Volunteers are always warned in advance of the intention to make these checks. If they refuse permission and cannot provide an acceptable reason, they will not be placed.

## **Appointment**

Formal appointments are made only after the role description has been agreed and all necessary checks have proved acceptable. No placements are made unless the requirements of the volunteer and the volunteer's supervisor can be met.

## **Probation**

All placements are subject to an initial trial period of one month. At the end of this period, the line manager meets with the volunteer to discuss the volunteer's suitability for their role. At this point, volunteers may continue in their current role, be reassigned to a more suitable role, or be asked to leave.

## **Relationship with paid staff**

Volunteers are appointed to enhance the capacity of paid staff (including Community Employment workers), not as a substitute for them. The organisation only accepts the services of its paid staff as volunteers within areas where they are not employed. Clear roles are established within each area of the organisation to differentiate between paid staff and volunteers to foster mutually beneficial and complementary relationships.

## **Working conditions**

Volunteers are treated as full members of the team. They are treated as equally and fairly as paid staff and are included in the organisations functions and decision-making processes wherever practical. Volunteers are provided with appropriate work sites and have access to the space, equipment and facilities necessary to volunteer effectively and comfortably.

## **Working times**

Working times are negotiated between the service line manager/supervisor and the volunteer and are as flexible as the tasks allow. Voluntary time commitment is never expected to match that of full-time paid staff, but unscheduled absences can create organisational problems. When expecting to be absent, volunteers should inform their supervisor as soon as possible, so that alternative arrangements can be made.

## **Appropriate behaviour**

Volunteers are expected to work within the policies and procedures of the organisation and adhere to its ethos. As representatives of the organisation, they are responsible for presenting a positive image of Sligo Social Services to the outside world.

## **Representation of Sligo Social Services**

Volunteers must seek prior approval from the Director/ Service Line Manager/supervisor before undertaking anything that might affect the organisation. This includes, but is not limited to, statements to the press, joint initiatives with other bodies, and agreements involving contractual or financial obligations.

## **Records**

A system of records is maintained by individual services on volunteers in their area, including dates and times of service, duties performed, evaluation of work, etc. Volunteer records are accorded the same confidentiality as staff records.

#### **Service at the discretion of Sligo Social Services.**

Any voluntary service is at the discretion of Sligo Social Services. The organisation may, at any time, and for whatever reason, decide to terminate volunteers relationships with the organisation. Similarly, volunteers may at any time, and for whatever reason, decide to terminate their relationships with Sligo Social Services. Notice of such decisions should be communicated at the earliest opportunity, preferably in writing.

## **Volunteer support, training and development**

Volunteers are not paid for their involvement with Sligo Social Services but the organisation is committed to providing support and development opportunities for all volunteers. In order to provide volunteers with the support that you may require Sligo Social Services have identified the role of a volunteer support person. Their role is to provide you with one to one support during your time as a volunteer. This nominated volunteer support person may be a staff member or a manager.

Sligo Social Services will provide opportunities to receive training during your time with the organisation. Some of the training will be mandatory, including induction training, while other additional training opportunities will be optional.

#### **Induction training**

Every volunteer will be provided with induction training. Induction training will provide you with an opportunity to learn more about the organisation and familiarise you with your volunteer role.

Induction training will include:-

- History and Structure of Sligo Social Service
- General Health and Safety
- Introduction to Sligo Social Services policies and procedures

During induction training you will have the opportunity to meet fellow volunteers and staff.

#### **Role specific training**

During your time volunteering with Sligo Social Services, you may be asked to participate in training relevant to your role, some of which may be mandatory e.g. child protection, fire safety, manual handling and lifting. Mandatory training will relate to the specific work a volunteer agrees to carry out. Role specific training will be outlined by your volunteer support person.

#### **Optional training**

Opportunities for optional training may also be provided during your time as a volunteer. These training opportunities may be provided for volunteers only or in conjunction with staff. As well as being applicable to your volunteer role, this training may be beneficial to other roles in your life e.g. work, education etc.

## **Lines of communication**

Lines of communication should operate in both directions and should exist formally and informally. Volunteers must have access to all appropriate information, memos, materials and meetings relevant to their assignments. Volunteers must be consulted on all decisions that would substantially affect their volunteering conditions.

## **Supervisors**

Each volunteer must have a clearly identified supervisor who is responsible for the day-to-day management of that volunteer. The line manager/supervisor normally takes on the supervisor's role, but all staff members receive training and guidance on how to involve volunteers effectively in the work of the organisation.

## **One-to-one support**

Support will be provided to a volunteer at least once in the first six weeks of starting thereafter. One-to-one support sessions will be facilitated by a nominated support person at the request of the volunteer.

## **Supervision**

### **Supervision sessions**

Where volunteers are working directly with service users they will receive one: one supervision on a regular basis. Supervision sessions take place at least once a month between the volunteer and his or her supervisor.

Depending on the nature of the role all volunteers will receive regular one: one supervision or they will be invited to meet with the line manager as part of the team on a regular basis. One: one supervision will review the performance of the volunteer, suggest any changes in work style, review and support the volunteer in their direct work with clients. Both one: one sessions and team meetings will seek suggestions from the volunteer on means of enhancing the volunteer's relationship with the organisation, convey appreciation to the volunteer and ascertain the continued interest of the volunteer in serving in his or her role. The sessions also serve as an opportunity to plan future tasks.

### **Corrective action**

If appropriate, corrective action may be taken following evaluation sessions. Examples include the organisation of training for an identified training need, the reassignment of a volunteer, or asked to leave the organisation.

### **Asking a Volunteer to Leave**

Volunteers who do not adhere to the organisations rules or who fail to perform their volunteer assignments satisfactorily may be asked to leave. No volunteer's involvement will be terminated in writing until the volunteer has had an opportunity to discuss the reasons for being asked to leave with their supervisor. Reasons for asking a volunteer to leave may include, but are not limited to, the following: gross misconduct, being under the influence of drugs (including alcohol), theft, misuse of equipment and materials, abuse of clients and co-workers, breaches of confidentiality, failure to abide by Sligo Social Services policies and procedures and failure to complete duties to a satisfactory standard.

## **Concerns and grievances**

If volunteers are not satisfied that issues relating to their volunteering are being handled appropriately, they are entitled to have their concerns reviewed by the Team Leader/Director. The Team Leader/Director will discuss the issue as soon as practical after receiving a written complaint, and take appropriate action.

### **Exit interviews**

Where possible, informal exit interviews are held with any volunteers who are leaving the organisation, either because they have reached the end of their project, or are leaving for some other reason. Interviews are usually conducted with the volunteers ex-supervisor and written records are kept. The session should ascertain why the volunteer is leaving, how they found the volunteering experience and what suggestions they offer to improve the way the organisation operates. The offer of a personal reference for future employment etc. is made to each volunteer.

## **Support and recognition**

### **Support**

Sligo Social Services endeavours to provide the support necessary to encourage and empower volunteers to make a meaningful contribution and gain significant benefits from their voluntary work. Support forms part of the regular supervision sessions and meetings and gives volunteers a safe setting in which to express themselves, let off steam and discuss how they feel about volunteering. The line manager/supervisor will always try to be available to volunteers who require support in other areas that are affecting their performance.

### **Recognition**

Volunteers provide a unique service to Sligo Social Services the benefits of which are difficult to quantify. It is essential that their efforts are recognised and rewarded. Sligo Social Services staff are responsible for thanking all volunteers informally on a regular basis for the valuable contribution that they make to the organisation. The line manager/supervisor is responsible for ensuring that more formalised recognition takes place at key times.

## **General Information**

### **Health and safety**

According to health and safety legislation, Sligo Social services has a duty of care to its volunteers by ensuring a safe and healthy working environment. All volunteers have an individual responsibility to protect their own health and safety, as well as that of their colleagues and service users. Detailed information on aspects of health and safety are outlined in Sligo Social Services Health and Safety Statement. Specific health and safety statements have been developed for each Sligo Social Services work place. Your volunteer support person will familiarise you with the health and safety issues relevant to your role.

### **Accidents/Incidents**

All accidents or incidents that occur in the course of your volunteering must be reported to the service manager/volunteer support person immediately, and an accident /incident form filled in. These can be obtained from your volunteer support person or manager.



## **Confidentiality**

During the course of your volunteering you may have access to confidential information regarding Sligo Social Services and its service users. This information must not be disclosed to third parties during or after volunteering for the organisation. Any breach of confidentiality will be considered gross misconduct and may result in you being asked to discontinue volunteering.

## **Concern for service users**

If you have any cause for concern regarding the welfare of a person you are supporting, you must report it to the service manager or volunteer support person. This concern may be based on a person's comments or behaviours, an observation or on information you have received from a third party. Sligo Social Services aim is to support the person in difficulty, as well as the staff and volunteer working with this person. Reporting your concerns to a manager provides the organisation with the opportunity for appropriate support to be put in place.

## **Mobile Phones**

Volunteers who have access to a mobile phone are requested to limit making and receiving personal calls to break times.

## **Smoking**

Smoking is prohibited in all Sligo Social Services premises and vehicles. Smoking is allowed only in approved external locations, during approved rest periods or breaks.

## **Alcohol**

Volunteers must adhere to Sligo Social Services policy in regard to the consumption of alcohol.

## **Appropriate behaviour**

Volunteers are expected to work within the policies and procedures of the organisation and adhere to its ethos. As representatives of the organisation, they are responsible for presenting a positive image of Sligo Social Services to the outside world.

## **Retaining personal records**

Sligo Social Services retains information on all service users, volunteers and staff. The information retained relating to volunteers is as follows; your application form, information relating to your application, references, Garda clearance, record of training you have undertaken including induction training, and any other information relevant to your volunteering with Sligo Social Services. You are entitled to view any information retained and to ask for amendments to be made where it is inaccurate. All information retained by Sligo Social Services is done in accordance with Data Protection legislation. It is important that you notify your volunteer support person of any changes in personal address or contact details. Your file will be accorded the same confidentiality as staff files.

## **Appropriate use of equipment**

Volunteers are expected to use equipment in an appropriate and responsible manner, which will benefit the organization and its service users. Use of IT equipment may be necessary for certain roles. The accessing, viewing and downloading of pornography is strictly prohibited and unlawful.

## **Illegal drugs**

The consumption of illegal drugs by volunteers during volunteering hours is STRICTLY prohibited. Any breach of this policy will result in a volunteer's immediate dismissal and notification to the appropriate authorities.

## **Sexual harassment**

Sligo Social Services strongly disapproves of and will not tolerate acts of bullying and sexual harassment. All staff and volunteers have a responsibility to ensure that bullying/ harassment does not occur at any level or in any service of Sligo Social Services. Sligo Social Services have outlined in the Policies and Procedures manuals, guidelines for any individual who feels that they have been harassed. Your volunteer support person or manager will bring this manual to your attention.

## **Insurance**

Sligo Social Services volunteers are covered by the organizations insurance while engaged in activities sanctioned by the organisation. People using their own cars to provide transport for work purposes may in some instances have to come to an arrangement with their own car insurance company. A certificate of insurance and letter indemnifying Sligo Social Services should be provided to Sligo Social Services staff before using a privately owned car in the course of volunteering work.

## **Equal Opportunities**

Sligo Social Services works to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities, staff, volunteers and the general public. Everyone will be treated equally regardless of; gender, race, age, religion, martial /family status, traveller community, sexual orientation or disability.

# **Code of Conduct**

Sligo Social Services is committed to ensuring that a person's involvement with the organisation is a positive and pleasant experience. This applies to service users, volunteers and staff. Sligo Social Services therefore asks all volunteers to commit to a Code of Conduct that promotes a positive environment. Where volunteers operate outside this Code of Conduct, they may be asked to discontinue volunteering for the association.

The following behaviours are considered to be in breach of the Code of Conduct:

- Theft
- Corruption
- Misuse of telephone, email, internet and other facilities
- Viewing or downloading of pornography
- Criminal conduct
- Breach of confidentiality
- Assault, verbal abuse or threatening behaviour of service users, fellow volunteers, staff or the general public
- Abuse of alcohol and drugs
- Non adherence to health, safety and hygiene standards
- All forms of bullying, sexual abuse and/or harassment and discrimination

- Lack of respect for service users, fellow volunteers, staff and the general public
- Non adherence to good practice in regard to reliability and commitment
- Gross negligence.

## **Moving on - ending the volunteer involvement**

Sligo Social Services never wants to lose a volunteer but understands that circumstances change and people move on. The two way nature of volunteering means that either the volunteer or the organisation may decide to end the volunteering relationship. A volunteer may decide to discontinue volunteering for any number of reasons including a change in family/work/education commitments. Equally the volunteer may feel that they have contributed all they can to the work of Sligo Social Services.

If you feel that you can no longer volunteer for Sligo Social Services, then we would ask that you inform your volunteer support person at the earliest opportunity. While recognising that it is not always possible, Sligo Social Services would ask you to continue in your volunteer role until alternative arrangements are made to fill this role. Once you have been a volunteer for a period of time, Sligo Social Services will provide you with a written reference of your participation with the organisation. Before you finish up Sligo Social Services would appreciate it if you would provide some feedback on your experience with the organisation.

If you have enjoyed your experience please tell others. And of course if you would like to return to Sligo Social Services then get back in touch and we would be delighted to talk with you.

## **Grievance and disciplinary procedures**

Sligo Social Services wants you to enjoy volunteering with the organisation. However, if problems arise in the interest of fairness Sligo Social Services operates a grievance and disciplinary procedure. This procedure allows for the fair and speedy resolution of difficulties that may arise during a volunteer's involvement with the organisation.

If Sligo Social Services considers that a volunteer is unsuitable for their volunteer role based on their performance, conduct or non adherence to Sligo Social Services policy and procedures, it retains the right to ask the person to discontinue volunteering.

Details of Sligo Social Services grievance and disciplinary policy and procedures are available from the manager.

Sligo Social Services thanks you for deciding to become a volunteer and we look forward to your participation in the Organisation.

## Declaration

It is each volunteer's responsibility to adhere to the standards, guiding principles, and Policies and Procedures as outlined in the Volunteer Handbook. We ask volunteers to sign the following declaration that they will abide by these and the Code of Conduct during their time as a volunteer with Sligo Social Services.

I hereby declare that I have read, understand and agree to abide by the standards, guiding principles and Policies and Procedures outlined in the Sligo Social Services Volunteer Handbook.

.....  
Name (please print)

.....  
Address

.....  
Name of volunteer support person

Date of joining Sligo Social Services                      ..... / ..... / .....

Signed Dated  
..... / ..... / .....