

Volunteering Charter

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New Forest Mencap
Volunteer Development
The Nedderman Centre
Marryat Road
New Milton
Hants
BH25 5NY

T 01425 621893

E office@newforestmencap.org

Registered Charity No. 1038962

A company limited by guarantee and registered in England No. 2376432

www.newforestmencap.org.uk

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Introduction

Who we are and what we do

New Forest Mencap has been running since 1969 and exists to support adults with learning difficulties. The charity works to improve the quality of life of people affected by their disability in the New Forest area.

There are over 2,300 people with a learning difficulty or disability in Hampshire¹.

New Forest Mencap is a membership organisation. Many of our members have personal experience of learning disability as carers, health professionals or people with a learning disability themselves, and their experiences help to inform our work.

At the very heart of what we do are our volunteers. Volunteers contribute to our local activities by helping at our social clubs, by assisting in our charity shop, by fundraising, speaking to the media and helping behind the scenes in activities such as administration.

The Society is governed by the Board of Trustees, themselves a group of experienced and dedicated volunteers, who delegate day to day accountability to a small team of staff. Volunteers carry out their activities within this structure.

Volunteers are vital. They increase the Society's capacity to meet the needs of people with a learning disability, and those who care for them in the New Forest area. They keep the Society in touch with people in need and provide a wide range of relevant skills and perspectives. Volunteers can offer a fresh approach adding real value to what we do. Volunteering is a special activity, highly respected by the Society and by the people we help each year.

This charter and accompanying policy, sets out how the Society intends to support its volunteers, highlights some reasonable expectations and confirms the importance of volunteering in all we do.

Who is a volunteer?

There is no legal definition of the term volunteer, but it is widely recognised in the voluntary and community sector that volunteering is:

‘An activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives’.

New Forest Mencap volunteer may be occasional, helping a few times a year, or regular, helping more frequently. This may be on a long term or short term basis. We are grateful for whatever time commitment a volunteer is able to make, and will arrive at a mutually beneficial arrangement, ensuring that at all times the volunteer is valued and respected.

Volunteering charter and policy: who is it for?

This charter and policy sets out important principles, commitments and expectation. It demonstrates that volunteering is valued and supported by New Forest Mencap. The staff team has endorsed it and our Board of Trustees has approved it.

All volunteers should be aware of and committed to the charter and policy. A copy should be given to and discussed with all new volunteers joining the Society, normally as part of their induction. All staff who work with, recruit, manage and/or support volunteers should be aware of this policy and be committed to it.

The policy will be reviewed by the trustees on an annual basis to ensure it remains relevant and up to date. It will always be available on the Society’s website, as well as provided locally to volunteers and staff.

Principles

- Volunteers, including trustees, and staff agree to follow this charter and policy, putting into it into practice at local level
- All volunteers will be provided with a clear written role description.
- All role descriptions will have an indication of the time commitment involved.
- Volunteers will be offered induction, information and ongoing support appropriate to their role.
- Volunteer roles are not guaranteed, nor is any volunteer role contractual in nature. However, the Society will strive to provide volunteering activities that are satisfying and appropriate to the interest of the individual.
- Volunteers and staff will work together within the Society’s rules, policies and procedures and in accordance with appropriate legislation.
- Volunteers will treat each other and staff with respect and courtesy, and in line with Society values and principles and its code of conduct.

- New Forest Mencap is committed to equality of opportunity and respects the diversity of the local community. Volunteers and staff commit to treat everyone, regardless of race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or age with respect, and without judgement or bias.
- It is recognised that volunteers make a valuable and important contribution to local communities. New Forest Mencap is committed to involving volunteers as extensively as possible. However, it is an important principle that the Society will not seek to replace paid staff with volunteers.

Our Values

- We are Inclusive. People with a learning disability are at the heart of everything we do
- We are Trustworthy. When we promise something, we don't let people down
- We are Caring. We treat everyone with respect and kindness
- We Challenge. When we see things that aren't fair we will campaign until we see real change
- We are Positive. We never stop believing in a better future and we celebrate what we are proud of now

Our Mission

Mencap's mission is to transform society's attitudes to learning disability and improve the quality of life of people with a learning disability and their families. Our big plan is divided into five priorities. These are areas of life we want to have the biggest impact on, the areas where there is the most need to see change for the better.

- Raising awareness and changing attitudes
- Making a difference to the lives of people with a learning disability here and now
- Supporting friendships and relationships
- Improving health for people with a learning disability
- Giving children the best start in life

Our Vision

Our vision is a world where people with a learning disability are valued equally, listened to and included. Our challenge alongside people with a learning disability and their families is to make this world a reality.

Right now people with a learning disability face inequalities in every area of life. We need to tackle the issues head on through tireless campaigning and the delivery of high quality support and services to the people who need us.

What you can expect from us

- To give you a written role description and to agree the tasks and expectations from it.
- To be flexible in relation to your personal circumstances and for you to feel valued and respected in all you do.
- To offer you opportunities for personal development within your volunteer role or to assist you in exploring new opportunities.
- To provide you with an open, accessible and fair process for raising any concerns.
- To keep you informed about the activities of the Society.
- To pay your approved expenses in relation to your volunteer role.
- To provide public and employer liability insurance and professional indemnity where needed
- To inform you about health and safety matters and to make efforts to ensure you have a safe volunteering environment.
- To support you if you wish to say 'no' to additional tasks or responsibilities, or if you wish to leave
- To implement the Society's inclusion and diversity policy.

What we can expect from you

- To carry out your volunteering role to the best of your ability.
- To attend induction, information, training and support sessions as appropriate.
- To work within the aims and objectives of the Society and to follow the Society's rules, including health and safety procedures, inclusion and diversity policy and data protection policy.
- To let your team leader/volunteer supporter or other named contact know as early as possible if you are unable to carry out your volunteering duties.
- To refer concerns or issues to your named contact.
- To seek guidance if you feel that there may be a conflict of interest between your volunteering role and other commitments (conflict of interest isn't always obvious, so it is important to check this if you are in any doubt).
- To undertake your role in line with the Society's code of conduct.
- To act at all times in the best interests of the Society, for the benefit of those we help.

ⁱ Learning disability strategy for Hampshire