

## **Dartford Gravesham and Swanley Mind**

### **Volunteering Policy**

#### **1. Introduction**

##### **1.1 Status of this Policy**

This Policy includes the aspirations and the appropriate updated detail of the previous policies and statements on Volunteers entitled "Policy on the Deployment of Volunteers", "Statement of Commitment", "Volunteer Selection Procedure" and "Volunteers Leaving Procedure" which are now superseded.

##### **1.2 Definition of a volunteer**

A DGS Mind Volunteer is someone who has been officially accepted as a volunteer. This means they have successfully been through the selection process, provided an acceptable Criminal Records Bureau Check and two references, have a clear volunteer task to undertake, and have participated or will soon participate on the 3 day training programme.

People who run peer-led activities, who are representatives for carers, tenants or other service-users, who do occasional practical tasks for us without charge or who are on work experience with us, are not registered as volunteers. Service-users who are on the DGS Mind Assisted Volunteering Scheme, if they have their volunteering placement within DGS Mind, go through the normal processes to become an official DGS Mind volunteer.

#### **2. Statement of Commitment**

DGS Mind subscribes to the Investing in Volunteers Standard:

##### **2.1 We have an expressed commitment to involving volunteers, and recognise this is a two-way process benefiting volunteers and the organisation.**

In practice this means that we recognise that most of the services we deliver are dependent on the input of volunteers, and that people do not volunteer without receiving some psychological (non-financial) benefits from the work, which is totally acceptable. We cover this in the Training Programme.

##### **2.2 We commit sufficient resources to working with volunteers.**

In practice this means that we budget sufficient funds for volunteer expenses and for paid staff time for volunteer admin issues; we budget sufficient funds and staff time for volunteer training, and ensure appropriate paid staff have time for their volunteer support duties.

**2.3 We wish to recruit volunteers who reflect the diversity of the local community.**

In practice this means we have clear policy of Equality and Diversity (Policy No 1); we monitor the diversity of our groups of volunteers and adjust recruitment processes where insufficient diversity is present.

**2.4 We develop appropriate roles for volunteers.**

In practice this means that we frequently review the volunteer roles that exist, and where there are gaps where volunteers could be deployed. We consider suggestions coming from volunteers about the work they might do for the organisation. We avoid asking them to undertake activities which should properly be carried out by paid staff in this or other organisations.

**2.5 We are committed to protecting volunteers, as far as is possible, from any physical, financial and emotional harm arising from volunteering.**

In practice this means we do not place volunteers in situations where we believe they may be vulnerable: we pay volunteers travel expenses and other costs; we ensure they have appropriate training to deal with difficult situations, we ensure they are covered on DGS Mindø Public Liability, and Employerø Liability insurance, we provide support and supervision appropriate to their level of operation; we have a 'Time out' system if they wish to move out of the volunteering role for a time; we have a Lone Working Policy and a tracking system for the protection of those working alone. We have a Grievance Policy (DGS Mind Policy No 7) in which they are trained.

**2.6 We use fair, efficient and consistent recruitment procedures for all potential volunteers.**

In practice this means that the volunteer recruitment process detailed in this policy is applied for all volunteers without exception.

**2.7 Our system of taking up references and official checks is equitable for all volunteers, and takes into account the nature of the work.**

In practice this means that we take up two references, and take up an enhanced Criminal records Bureau Check with all potential volunteers.

**2.8 We have a clear process to introduce new volunteers to the organisation and its work.**

In practice this means that the DGS Mind Training Programme is mandatory for all Volunteers, that we provide a volunteersøhandbook for all volunteers, and that paid staff who support named volunteers are aware of the particular needs of new recruits.

## **2.9. Everyone in the organisation is aware of the need to give volunteers recognition.**

In practice this means besides the day-to-day expression of thanks and feedback from paid staff, we include volunteers in consultation, further training at no cost, and in other events. In particular recognition of their role, we include a volunteers' section in the Newsletter, have an annual Volunteer of the Year Award, and arrange an annual volunteers' party or similar event.

## **2.10 We take into account the varying support needs of volunteers.**

In practice this means that following assessment of the potential volunteer, we consider the best placement for them in regard to their own abilities and needs: volunteers working 1 to 1 in Counselling and Mentoring are specifically matched to the particular clients with whom we assess they will work best. The named staff supporter for any volunteer is charged with keeping abreast of their individual needs and within ensuring we meet these needs as far as we are able. Staff discuss progress of their volunteers within the Supervision system.

## **3. Recruitment and Selection**

The process is as follows:

### **3.1 Application Form**

Contact details, notice of any convictions, and names of two referees are given together with a short statement on skills and interests, and in what service the person might like to volunteer. Ethnicity, Age and Gender details are sent to us separately and anonymously.

### **3.2 Screening**

2 staff will meet informally with the prospective volunteer to check out:

a) That the person appears to have the competencies needed to fill the role:

- Able to communicate clearly
- Basic written and numeracy skills
- Able to relate to the whole range of DGS Mind clients
- For Volunteer Counsellors only: are in at least their second year of accredited counselling training

b) That the person shares the values of DGS Mind:

- Commitment to empowering (not öcaring forö) service users
- Understanding/empathy with mental health service users
- Non-racist/sexist/ageist/homophobic perspectives
- Non-judgemental

c) That the person knows what they are letting themselves in for:

- Commitment to reliability needed

- CRB check
- Attending volunteer training
- Attending support/supervision sessions
- For Volunteer Counsellors only: able to commit to the current levels of work in terms of number of clients, number of weeks available in a year, and able to work out of a venue as specified by DGS Mind.

d) That the person is likely to have a positive experience with DGS Mind:

- They are not overloaded with other mental health issues (self/caring role)
- They are not expecting this as a lead-in to paid work with us
- They are not hoping for promotion of their own agenda (professional work/faith etc)
- Their skills are likely to be able to be used by us: they will add value to the organisation

The staff engaged in this process have the authority to dissuade, divert or reject applicants who do not fulfil the competencies, values or expectations embodied in the above.

Occasionally, they may register some doubts, but refer to the training process to make the final decision.

### **3.3 Results of References and CRB Checks**

When received these are scrutinised to see if they are satisfactory. Events mentioned on a CRB check do not automatically disqualify a candidate, but will be assessed by senior management, together with the candidate, within the same process as recorded in the Employment Policy. CRB checks will be resubmitted every 3 years.

### **3.4 Mandatory Training**

All volunteers have to participate on this course, which covers:

- DGS Mind, its services, values, structure, policies
- Helping Skills
- Mental Health Issues
- Dealing with Difficult Situations

For candidates who have not been given an unequivocal acceptance from the screening process, participation on this course will enable the trainers to make a final decision on their acceptability.

## **4. Starting Volunteering**

Certain volunteering roles, following successful screening and references, can be started before the receipt of CRB check and participation in training:

- Volunteer Counsellors with a recent CRB check carried out by another agency are allowed to commence 1 to 1 work prior to DGS Mind receiving results of their check, and prior to training.

- Other volunteers are allowed to commence volunteer work prior to CRB check results and prior to training only where this work is in a group or office situation.
- Other than counsellors, no volunteer is allowed to engage in 1 to 1 work prior to CRB check and training.
- All volunteers are expected to complete the 3 day course within 6 months of starting their voluntary work.

## **5. Expectations on Volunteers**

DGS Mind expects Volunteers to:

- Abide by all organisational policies and procedures.
- Adhere to the values of DGS Mind, treating all service-users with respect, and working in a way which is empowering, and enhances their own coping skills. DGS Mind subscribes to the values codified in the Codes of Practice for Social Care Workers published by the General Social Care Council
- Be available consistently at the times and places where they have agreed to do volunteering work
- Undertake the DGS Mind training course prior to, or within 6 months of becoming a volunteer
- Attend support sessions as arranged
- Give prior notice if unavailable for the volunteering task or support meetings
- Ensure they are aware of fire evacuation procedures in whichever venue they are working
- Be CRB checked once every 3 years
- Alert us to any issues which they believe pose a danger to yourself or service users or others
- Maintain appropriate boundaries in your work with service users
- For Volunteer Counsellors only, that where the volunteer has worked for more than 3 years, they will spend at least 6 months working out of a venue other than the Dartford Offices.
- For Lone Working Volunteers only, that they use the LookOut Call system designed to provide a safer working environment, and detailed in DGS Policy No 12 on Lone Working.

There is a Disciplinary Policy for Volunteers ( DGS Mind Policy No 8) which may be implemented if these expectations are breached, or if other inappropriate behaviour is identified.

## **Supporting Volunteers**

### **6.1 Support and Supervision Sessions**

All volunteers have a named member of staff who is charged with arranging periodic support sessions with them. For some groups of volunteers ó eg counsellors, mentors - group support and supervision sessions will also be arranged. Counsellors receive professional supervision within British Association of Psychology and Counselling (BACP) guidelines.

### **6.2 Volunteering Expenses and Concessions**

We reimburse travel expenses for volunteers, including travel from home to place of work, to a maximum agreed by the Finance and Personnel Committee. Where a volunteer is working for a continuous period of 5 hours or more, a sandwich allowance is claimable. Where, at a drop-in session, a light snack is provided by DGS Mind, this is free to session volunteers. Reasonable meal expenses will be provided for Conference/Training courses attended by volunteers. Where a mobile phone is needed for volunteers working 1 to 1, the organisation will provide one if the volunteer requires. Where volunteers require counselling or use of fee-paying services in their own right, DGS Mind would waive normal charges.

### **6.3 Communication**

All volunteers will receive newsletters as they are published, and a volunteers handbook on starting their role, and whenever this is revised. Volunteer Counsellors in addition receive a Counselling Handbook. All Volunteers will be issued with a clear statement of their volunteering task, in the form of a Volunteer Task Description.

### **6.4 Personal Development**

Where DGS Mind is arranging training for staff or others, it shall endeavour where appropriate to include volunteers in this at little or no cost to the volunteer. Where there are opportunities and budgets for casual or paid work ó eg as ðbankö work or sessional group facilitator or trainer ó the organisation will actively consider if existing volunteers could additionally take on these pieces of work for financial reward. However, no one can be a paid worker and a volunteer within the same speciality.

### **6.5 Dorothy Fox Award**

Volunteers may be nominated by Staff for the annual Dorothy Fox Award, which results in a £50 voucher to be spent on personal development, £50 to spend as they see fit within DGS Mind, and a certificate. The final decision is made by the Finance and Personnel Committee.

### **6.6 Time Out**

Where a volunteer wishes to have a break from their volunteering role, they may request to have ðTime Outö. This is granted for a period of up to 12 months, at the end of which period the volunteer is able to resume their role without being subject to the selection and recruitment procedure.

## **6.7 Grievances**

Volunteers are able to make use of the grievance procedures (DGS Mind Policy No 7) as any paid member of staff may.

## **7. Ending the Volunteering Role**

All volunteers who leave the service will be sent a Volunteer Leaving Feedback Form, (and a stamped addressed envelope and letter of thanks) to gather their opinions of the volunteering experience at DGS Mind, and their reasons for leaving. These will be discussed at the Senior Management Team, to inform and develop our service. It is good practice where possible, for the named staff supporter of the volunteer to arrange a final support session with the volunteer to personally give thanks on behalf of the organisation.

DGS Mind is prepared to write job references for existing and previous volunteers, though in accordance with the Confidentiality Policy (DGS Mind Policy No 9), personal records of the volunteer will be destroyed after 2 years of leaving the service, after which time a reference might not be achievable.