

**North Kent Mind  
Volunteering Policy**

**1. Definition of a volunteer**

A North Kent Mind Volunteer is someone who has been officially accepted as a volunteer. This means they have successfully been through the screening process, provided as appropriate an acceptable Disclosure and Barring Service Check, provided us with two references, have a clear volunteer task to undertake, and have participated or will soon participate on the 3 day training programme.

Peer volunteers are individuals who have lived experience of a mental health problem and identify themselves as a peer volunteer they are required to undertake the same process as any other North Kent Mind volunteer.

**2. Statement of Commitment**

North Kent 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 North Kent Mind's Public Liability, and Employer's 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 (North Kent 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 a as appropriate, a Disclosure and Barring Service 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 North Kent Mind Training Programme is mandatory for all Volunteers, that we provide a volunteers' handbook 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, publically acknowledge volunteers who have given long service through the distribution of awards, and arrange volunteer events from time to time.

## **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 North Kent 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 North Kent Mind:

- Commitment to empowering (not "caring for") 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
- DBS 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 North Kent Mind.

d) That the person is likely to have a positive experience with North Kent 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 DBS Checks**

When received these are scrutinised to see if they are satisfactory. Events mentioned on a DBS 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. DBS checks will be resubmitted every 3 years.

### **3.4 Mandatory Training**

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

- North Kent 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 DBS check and participation in training:

- Volunteer Counsellors with a recent DBS check carried out by another agency are allowed to commence 1 to 1 work prior to North Kent Mind receiving results of their check, and prior to training.
- Other volunteers are allowed to commence volunteer work prior to DBS 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 DBS 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

North Kent Mind expects Volunteers to:

- Abide by all organisational policies and procedures, including Information Governance, Confidentiality and Health and Safety
- Adhere to the values of North Kent Mind, treating all service-users with respect, and working in a way which is empowering, and enhances their own coping skills. Be available consistently at the times and places where they have agreed to do volunteering work
- Undertake the North Kent 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 DBS checked once every 3 years, if they fit the criteria for this
- Alert us to any issues which they believe pose a danger to self or service-users or others
- Maintain appropriate boundaries in their work with service users
- For Volunteer Counsellors only, that where the volunteer has worked for more than 3 years, they will be prepared to 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 North Kent Policy No 3 Health and Safety

## **6. 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 – 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 North Kent 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, North Kent 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 which will be kept on a centrally held file.

### **6.4 Personal Development**

Where North Kent 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 – eg as “bank” work or sessional group facilitator or trainer – the organisation will actively consider if existing volunteers could additionally take on these pieces of work for financial reward.

### **6.5 Long Serving Volunteers**

Awards are given out at the AGM, to recognise volunteers who have served for 3,5 and 10 years

## **6.6 Time Out**

Where a volunteer wishes to have a break from their volunteering role, they may request to have "Time Out". 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 (North Kent 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 North Kent 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.

North Kent Mind is prepared to write job references for existing and previous volunteers, though in accordance with the Confidentiality Policy (North Kent 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.

## **8. Disciplinary Policy and Procedure for Volunteers**

Although North Kent Mind values and appreciates the contribution freely given by its volunteers, there are standards and values which must be upheld, and this Policy spells out the actions which may be taken when a volunteer fails to meet satisfactory standards with regard to conduct, reliability or implementation of policies laid down by the Board of Trustees. North Kent Mind will ensure it adequately covers this policy in training staff who will have a role in the supervision of volunteers.

### **8.1 This Part of the Policy and Procedure relates to volunteers who are not Trustees.**

#### **8.1.1 Informal Warnings**

When alerted to concerns regarding the volunteer's conduct, their immediate supervisor should arrange to meet with them as part of the process of establishing the relevant facts. The alert may have arisen through an informal or formal grievance or complaint, but may equally arise from longer-term concerns that the supervisor has had.

This meeting should explore with the volunteer how North Kent Mind might help them to reach the required standard. The following strategies may be suggested:

- Time out from volunteering
- Further discussion
- Extra support
- Training
- Alternative volunteering opportunities within North Kent Mind

If the Supervisor sees fit, they may also give a informal warning to improve conduct or performance. Such an informal warning is not part of any formal disciplinary procedure, and does not need to be recorded. In most cases, improvements resulting from the above strategies should resolve problems and make any formal disciplinary action unnecessary.

However, should formal action be necessary, the procedure will be as follows:

### **8.1.2 Formal Warnings/Disciplinary Procedures**

1. The volunteer's immediate supervisor must:

- (a) Establish the known facts relevant to the issue.
- (b) Inform the volunteer of the nature of the issue, invite them to attend a meeting with the immediate supervisor, and inform them they may if they wish be accompanied by a fellow volunteer or any other supporter of their choosing.
- (c) At the meeting, summarise the concerns and invite the volunteer to state their case from their perspective, discuss the issue and take account of any mitigating circumstances when considering action.

2. Where the facts of the case appear to call for action other than summary dismissal, the following procedure will be followed:

- (a) Consider the value of the supportive strategies outlined above.
- (b) Where appropriate, the volunteer will be informed by the immediate supervisor that their behaviour makes them liable for an oral warning and that this warning is part of the formal disciplinary process. They must also be informed of their right to appeal
- (c) The supervisor must confirm the oral warning in writing and tell the volunteer that a copy of the warning has been kept on file. The volunteer should be advised that three such oral warnings with written confirmation will lead to dismissal. These warnings may concern a single or a range of incidents.

- (d) In the event of three warnings, the volunteer must be informed by the supervisor in writing that North Kent Mind is no longer able to use their services, giving the reason for this decision. These reasons must have been made clear to the volunteer throughout the disciplinary process and written records of all conversations and correspondence kept by the supervisor.
- (e) All such Meetings, whether resulting in a formal warning or not, must be reported to the CEO.

**3. Volunteers may be summarily dismissed where one or more of the following offences is committed:**

- Grossly indecent or immoral behaviour, abuse, deliberate acts of unlawful discrimination or serious acts of harassment
- Dangerous behaviour, fighting or physical assault
- Incapacity at work or poor performance caused by intoxicants or drugs
- Possession, supply or use of illicit drugs
- Deliberate falsification of expense claims
- Undertaking private work on the premises without express permission
- Taking part in activities which result in adverse publicity to North Kent Mind, or lead to a loss of confidence in the integrity of the volunteer
- Theft of property belonging to North Kent Mind, another volunteer, paid staff member or service-user
- Acts of violence towards a member of staff, paid or voluntary, or against a member of the public.
- Malicious damage to property belonging to the charity, its service users or its staff, paid or voluntary.
- Deliberate falsification of income received by North Kent Mind
- Disclosure of confidential information relating to North Kent Mind or its clients.
- Convictions of a criminal offence that undermine a volunteer's suitability for deployment by North Kent Mind
- The provision of false personal information, or failure to disclose information relevant to her/his deployment as a volunteer.
- Sexual, racial, or any other form of harassment.

- Refusal to be DBS checked

Summary dismissal can only be decided by the CEO or by the appointed Deputy in their absence. While the case is being investigated, the volunteer may be suspended. The volunteer will have the right to put her/his case to the CEO/Appointed Deputy and to be accompanied by a friend or advocate. The volunteer will be informed in writing of the results of the investigation within one month of suspension.

#### **8.1.4 Appeals**

All volunteers have the right to appeal against any disciplinary action brought against them by their immediate supervisor. In the case of a formal warning an appeal is made to the CEO. The appeal must be made in writing within seven days of receipt of the written confirmation of the oral warning. The CEO will interview both the supervisor and the volunteer. The volunteer may be accompanied by a friend or advocate of their own choice.

The Manager's decision shall be conveyed, in writing, to both the supervisor and volunteer within seven days of the interview.

In the case of dismissal, the volunteer will have the right of appeal to the Chair of the Board of Trustees. Notice of the appeal must be given within two weeks of receipt of the written decision. The Chair will independently gather the necessary information and evidence and after interviews with the volunteer, the volunteer's supervisor and the CEO will make a binding decision. The volunteer will be informed of the outcome within one month of making the appeal. The Chair's decision is final.

### **8.2 This Part of the Policy relates to volunteers who are Trustees.**

#### **8.2.1 Trustees as Frontline Volunteers**

It is not appropriate for the chair to also function as a frontline volunteer in other parts of the organisation. Other Trustees who do work as volunteers in specific parts of the organisation will be subject, for this work only, to the same supervisory and supportive arrangements as any other volunteer working in that branch of the service. Issues which give rise to informal warnings will be dealt with by the supervisor for that part of the service, as detailed above.

Where the supervisor sees a potential need for a formal warning however, the matter will be passed to the Chair who will then undertake the role of immediate supervisor for the purposes of investigation and decision as to whether a formal warning should be given.

Appeal will be to the Board, whose decision is final. No dismissal of a Trustee can be made by the Chair, but must likewise be referred to the Board for majority vote.

### **8.2.2 Trustees in their role as Members of the Board**

Where there are concerns about the conduct of a Trustee in their role as a Member of the Board, this is dealt with as follows:

The Board of Trustees should take action where a fellow Trustee fails to meet satisfactory standards with regard to conduct, reliability, confidentiality or implementation of policies laid down by the Board, or is found to be behaving in a disruptive manner.

#### **Step 1 Informal**

Should a complaint be made against an individual Trustee, the Chair, or deputy chair of the organisation, who should lead on these cases, must as a first step talk to the Trustees involved to see if the problem can be resolved informally. The Chair should be accompanied by a note taker. The individual Trustee has the right to be accompanied by a friend or advocate.

#### **Step 2 Formal**

Should the problem not be resolved at step 1, a panel of at least 3 trustees should be chosen by the board to meet with the Trustee in question to ascertain if the problem can be solved. The individual Trustee has the right to be accompanied by a friend or advocate. Minutes of this meeting should be taken, and the decision of this panel must be relayed in writing to the individual trustee, within 1 week.

#### **Step 3 Formal**

Should the problem not be resolved at step 2, a meeting of the full Board should be arranged to decide the outcome of the problem. The meeting must be minuted and the decision of the full Board relayed to the individual Trustee within 1 week.

The Board have the power to exclude a trustee from the Board by a vote of no confidence, should the problem not be resolved and it is felt that the presence of the Trustee would work against the organisation, At least 2 thirds of the Trustees present must vote for exclusion. The decision made by the Board is final.

# NORTH KENT MIND

## VOLUNTEER-REPRESENTATIVES-CHAMPIONS STRUCTURE

