

# The Merthyr Tydfil Compact

## Volunteering Code of Practice

### Introduction - The Compact

The Merthyr Tydfil Compact is a partnership agreement which supports strategic working relations between the third sector and the public sector as represented by the local authority and the Health Board in Merthyr Tydfil.

It is written in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding and provides a framework for developing shared aims and objectives to improve the quality of life of people in the local community and to provide them with effective support.

The Compact Implementation Plan sets out objectives that support continuous improvement and development relating to the Compact themes. This is one of the Codes of Practice that has been produced by the Merthyr Tydfil Compact Board.

### The Code of Practice

The Code of Practice aims to raise the profile of volunteering and the value of volunteers in the delivery of service provision across the County Borough. It provides a practical guide for public and third sector organisations that wish to recruit, train, manage and support their volunteers effectively.

It sets out principles of good practice and undertakings for both sectors on how to work together to promote volunteering and support voluntary action by removing unnecessary barriers to volunteering, involving more volunteers in their activities and encouraging people, including employees, to volunteer.



## Definition of Volunteering

Volunteers commit time and energy for the benefit of others in the community and for themselves through personal choice and without financial reward. A volunteer can be defined "as a person who is freely engaged in any activity which involves spending time, unpaid (except for travelling and other approved out-of-pocket expenses), doing something which aims to benefit some third party other than or in addition to a close relative".

The role of the volunteer is complementary to that of paid staff. Volunteering may be viewed as either formal or informal:

**Formal Volunteering** refers to activities undertaken through an organisation, be it a small community group consisting partly or entirely of volunteers or through major organisations such as Health Boards or national organisations e.g. fundraising, befriending, administrative work.

**Informal Volunteering** may be defined as a wide range of different kinds of mutual help and co-operation between individuals within communities, for example babysitting for a friend or checking on an elderly neighbour.

The best practice guidelines proposed in this Code apply only to formal volunteering.

### Help and Support

The Code also provides contact details for organisations and individuals who would like further help and support.

# Principles of Good Practice

## Recruiting and Managing Volunteers

*Volunteers are not paid but neither are they cost-free. Staff/management time needs to be dedicated to recruiting, training and supporting volunteers.*

Any organisation involving volunteers should ensure that individual services have in place:

1. A written volunteer policy stating why volunteers are involved, the roles they play and how these differ from those of paid staff; information on how volunteers will be recruited, supported and protected and a reference to the policies and procedures relevant to volunteers
2. A volunteer agreement to ensure a common understanding about the volunteer role and to formalise the relationship with the volunteer
3. Volunteer policies; although there is no legal requirement to have formal policies in place, it is good practice to adopt them to ensure that volunteers are managed as effectively as staff; especially where similar policies exist for staff, e.g. health & safety, complaints, equal opportunities, confidentiality, disciplinary, equal opportunities
4. Volunteer role description/s
5. Guidance on health & safety issues, adequate protection from risk and insurance arrangements
6. An awareness of roles and work situations deemed inappropriate for volunteers
7. A selection process that considers the needs of the organisation, the potential volunteer and their suitability for the role. Interviews should normally be held to allow both parties to find out about each other
8. A safeguarding process; when volunteers work with vulnerable groups, the organisation should request references, Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks and ISA registration check. It should be noted that these checks alone do not guarantee a suitable candidate and should be viewed as part only of the assessment and risk management process
9. A start date without unnecessary delay
10. An induction or trial period to provide information about the organisation and the volunteer role, introduction to other volunteers, staff and clients, appropriate training, followed by an (informal) review meeting
11. Confidential treatment of personal information, whilst ensuring that important and relevant information about volunteers is maintained (e.g. medication, health issues) in accordance with data protection legislation

## Overcoming Barriers to Volunteering

*Be flexible, supportive, understanding, considerate and willing to adapt:*

1. Be proactive in promoting volunteering; talking to people will reveal barriers and possible solutions
2. Offer a sympathetic recruitment process; talk and listen to identify strengths and difficulties without assumptions
3. Ensure that adequate and individual support is available; train and raise awareness amongst staff of the different needs of volunteers
4. Ensure that opportunities to volunteer are available and open to everyone regardless of race, age, language, material wealth, disability, gender, sexual orientation or religion; be flexible enough to take a specific approach to a specific need
5. Be prepared to offer support and recognise the unexpected benefits of working with a diverse range of people
6. Be prepared to do things differently; for example, investigate alternative ways of volunteering - adapted roles, home volunteering, out of hours volunteering
7. Carry out a risk assessment of volunteer placement and, when appropriate, of client circumstances for a good match
8. Be flexible regarding time available (when possible), transport links and building accessibility
9. Be prepared and informed to highlight an alternative opportunity within or outside the organisation if this is more beneficial to the volunteer using the Volunteer Centre for support when required
10. Acknowledge the limitations of the organisation in the amount of volunteers it can properly manage

## Valuing the Role of the Volunteer: Support and Recognition

*Acknowledge, include, inform, involve, protect, support, thank:*

1. Set time aside for staff to manage the volunteering role and offer individual support, mentoring or supervision
2. Consult with volunteers on decision-making and organisational changes which may impact on their contribution
3. Be prepared to do things differently; review opportunities and adapt to individuals' needs
4. Involve longer term volunteers by using them in peer support, training and induction
5. Support volunteers through social events, meetings or telephone calls
6. Protect volunteers by reassuring paid staff who may feel threatened in their own roles; make volunteering distinct – it should never be a substitute for paid work
7. Set clear boundaries
8. Be aware of legal responsibilities
9. Carry out CRB checks, follow up references, undertake risk assessments
10. Provide references, offer training and support to progress and move on
11. Provide reimbursement of appropriate out-of-pocket expenses e.g. travel, car parking, food allowance if volunteering for more than 4 hours at a time.
12. Thank short term and one-off volunteers by recognising their input and appreciating their efforts
13. Tell volunteers how their contribution has benefited the organisation or the group/ individual they are volunteering for
14. Recognise and appreciate:
  - **formally** by making publicly visible the value of volunteering e.g. volunteering awards, certificate presentations, recognition schemes etc
  - **informally** for example telephone calls, cards, getting volunteers together socially, just saying “thank you”
15. Celebrate volunteering by supporting national events e.g. Volunteers' Week

## Joint Undertakings

*The partners in the Merthyr Tydfil Compact make a commitment to support the Principles of Good Practice set out in this Code.*

All partners will:

1. Ensure that appropriate policies and conditions are in place to underpin and support volunteering in their organisation
2. Recognise that recruiting and managing volunteers effectively is an important role which requires appropriate resources and support:
  - this includes identifying and training a named staff member with authority to liaise across the organisation to champion volunteering and to manage and support volunteers
  - in addition, sufficient resources should be budgeted and allocated in order that volunteers are properly trained, managed and supported in accordance with the Code of Good Practice such as training, CRB checks, payment of expenses
3. Take positive steps to identify perceived barriers to volunteering and, wherever practicable, put in place measures to tackle these obstacles
4. Ensure that, wherever possible, volunteers reflect the wider community of Merthyr Tydfil by working together to attract volunteers from groups who may be under-represented
5. Work together to promote volunteering in Merthyr Tydfil, using internal and external communication channels (such as websites, intranet, annual reports, other publications) to recognise the extent and value of volunteers' contributions and to make information about volunteering easily accessible
6. Periodically review the volunteer opportunities available within their organisation and seek to increase and promote those opportunities
7. Give full consideration to the use of volunteers in the design and commissioning of services
8. Encourage and enable employees to volunteer through recognition and support
9. Develop partnerships with other organisations to share resources, such as volunteer training, jointly-run recruitment campaigns/events and to raise the local profile of volunteering e.g. to secure greater media coverage during Volunteers' Week
10. Ensure that the principles and the undertakings set out in the Code are reflected in all service provision agreements between the partners such as contracts, protocols and service level agreements where volunteering is an integral part of the agreement
11. Ensure that volunteers receive recognition and are valued, receive expenses in a timely fashion and are offered opportunities to enhance their skills.

## Implementation and Monitoring

1. This Code of Practice will be circulated to all partnerships in Merthyr Tydfil and referenced by them as appropriate e.g. in any partnership terms of reference
2. The Compact Board and the Local Service Board will promote the Code and make reference to it as appropriate
3. Its implementation will be monitored and reviewed by the Compact Board as part of the Compact Implementation Plan. Any issues arising from the Code that are considered through the Compact Mediation and Disputes Resolution Process will also be monitored by the Compact Board.

## Supporting Documents

- The Merthyr Tydfil Compact (2008)
- Code of Practice on Funding, Procurement and Commissioning (in development)
- Code of Practice on Consultation and Public Engagement (to be developed)
- Code of Practice on Partnership Working
- Code of Practice on Third Sector Governance (to be developed)
- Mediation and Disputes Resolution Process

## Further Information

Your local Volunteer Centre is available for information and support, whether you are looking to involve volunteers in your organisation, need help with putting together policies or are thinking of volunteering yourself.

Their role is to promote volunteering and to work with groups and organisations to increase the number of volunteering opportunities available and to work in partnership with other organisations to overcome barriers to ensure that those people who are willing and able to volunteer can do so.

**The Volunteer Centre, Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil, 89-90 Pontmorlais, High Street, Merthyr Tydfil CF47 8UH**

Tel: 01685 353900 Website: [www.vamt.net](http://www.vamt.net)  
**Volunteering Wales website: [www.volunteering-wales.net](http://www.volunteering-wales.net)**