

VOLUNTEERING IN AGED CARE SETTINGS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA: GOOD PRACTICE DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

GUIDE FOR ONSITE VOLUNTEER SUPERVISORS AND COORDINATORS

Important: this is a generic guide based on data collected from volunteers and volunteer managers in a range of organisations. It is important that you check with your superior or your organisations' volunteer manager if you have questions about any of the contents.

This guide is designed to inform staff who are frontline managers of volunteers at their facility. It is hoped this will assist with better understanding the role and contribution of volunteers.

Your role as a frontline manager or supervisor of volunteers on your site, responsibility for managing or supervising volunteers on particular sites may be allocated to a staff member whose primary role is not designated volunteer manager.

Examples include: an occupational therapist or other staff member who organises various social activities for residents, the site manager, lifestyle coordinator or social worker or an administrative officer on reception. It is important that this management role is recognised in your job description or duty statement and that you work closely with the volunteer manager and other volunteer-providing organisations who have volunteers on your site. While the organisations' volunteer manager will undertake recruitment, placement and training of volunteers, once they are in place on site, it is the role of the frontline supervisor or co-ordinator to supervise their visits and activities and to support enjoyment of their volunteering experience.

Key COVID-19 Takeaways for Onsite Supervisors

- Volunteering is a major contributor to person-centred care
- You are the first point of contact for volunteers on your site
- Volunteers need to know how to reach YOU and the Volunteer Manager easily
- Volunteers need to know WHO to contact at different sites
- Volunteers need to know how they will be kept informed and where to find information
- Encourage volunteers to get in touch – let them know how you want to hear from them
- Volunteers were largely concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their clients
- COVID-19 added more compliance measures to volunteer management
- Volunteers may volunteer in multiple places and roles
- Vulnerable clients were sometimes left more vulnerable by the withdrawal of volunteers
- Some volunteers are also vulnerable
- Staff-volunteer relationships need to be nurtured
- You play an important role in keeping volunteers engaged



About Volunteers: A Volunteer is someone who gives their time freely to contribute to the wellbeing of aged care clients. They may visit clients on a regular basis – once a week or a fortnight, both in residential care and in client's own homes; assist staff and allied professionals with recreation activities like arts and craft, music and art therapy; help with day centre/elder care centre activities; they may drive a bus to take clients on outings; assist with church services or pastoral care visits; or drive clients to and from medical appointments; help clients to write letters to family and friends or to write their life history. Some may speak the first language of a client and share memories in their own language; they may help residents to learn how to use computers or tablets so they can talk to family who may live too far away to visit regularly; or help them to listen to music or watch movies. Volunteers may (by arrangement) bring their dog or other pet (perhaps chickens!) into your workplace



to spend time with residents; or they may play an instrument for resident singalongs.

Volunteers are not paid: they undertake to visit on a regular basis that suits the client, their own lifestyle and the needs of the organisation or program. Depending on the organisation they volunteer for, they will have received appropriate training on induction on what they can and cannot do as volunteers. CVS volunteers, for example, have to agree to and sign a memorandum of understanding before being accepted as volunteer visitors. Volunteers recruited directly to your organisation are individually interviewed by the volunteer manager as part of the volunteer program, are expected to undertake training and are carefully matched with a client or an activity.

Complementary roles: Above all, volunteers are there to offer social support, offer clients some company or a service, like driving, or individual attention for a short time each week or so. Theirs is not a paid care role and should not conflict with paid roles but complement them and add to the level of care or service provided.

Volunteers also benefit: Volunteers choose to volunteer and enjoy giving their time to helping others in an aged care setting. They may also enjoy the benefits of volunteering in the form of regular social connection or undertaking useful activities to occupy their time and enjoy being part of a community. The personal benefits of volunteering are often as great as the assistance offered.

Supported volunteering: Some volunteers may be supported in their volunteering by their own support workers. Volunteers with a disability may have some other physical requirements to enable their volunteering in your aged care setting. This may be organised by the volunteer manager in consultation with you and specific tasks may be allocated for these volunteers

Employability: Volunteering can be a pathway to employment and you should encourage volunteers who are seeking experience for employment to be clear about their intentions. That way you can point them to organisational policies about referee reports, skills acquisition and applying for jobs in your organisation. This includes students who are seeking to supplement their resume for post-graduation employment.

Importantly, however, **they are not 'just' volunteers** as they play an important role in supporting your organisation's person-centred care model. They can make a big difference to individual clients through social interaction which can help to reduce the sense of isolation that many clients in aged care settings experience.

NB – Vaccinations: As per the government regulations, volunteers who visit aged care settings must have a current vaccination profile as per health directives.* This is part of the compliance reporting managed by your organisations' Volunteer Manager.



* Check Government Directions for exemptions and requirements

COMMUNICATION WITH VOLUNTEERS

Your organisation will have set down rules for you to follow as a frontline manager of volunteers. The following may inform your own practice.

- Do you have a clear sign-in/out process for volunteers visiting your site? Does your sign-in process include a quick reminder about infection control like using hand sanitiser, face masks, wearing relevant PPE is appropriate?
- Make sure your volunteer sign-in and sign-out processes are separate to those for visitors (and remind volunteers not to bring visiting volunteers who are not on the volunteer list).
- Remind volunteers to sign out too at the end of their visit and please make sure they know which exits to use and any specific door codes – so they can exit easily.
- Does the sign out process include an opportunity for volunteers to write/report brief comments about their visit for staff to access as a contribution to ongoing planning of resident's care programs/reporting to family members etc?
- While they are not employees, they do enjoy being greeted in a friendly fashion and made to feel welcome! Perhaps a quick chat might be good to find out who they are visiting or if they have queries. This helps them to feel included and helps you to know why they are there (for example, for security reasons or to advise any issues regarding visiting a client on that day).
- Other staff on site need to be able to recognise that volunteers are meant to be on site, and be familiar with what they are volunteering to do. Are there badges or uniforms to help?
- New volunteers need to be welcomed, oriented and introduced to the facility or site. Will they be arriving at a time where you or someone else will be available?
- Do you have a process for letting volunteers know if their client will not be available before they turn up for a visit?
- Volunteers understand that there are confidentiality clauses and protections in place that mean they cannot know details about a client's health and personal business. This is important. Sometimes, volunteers may be upset if they have turned up for a regular visit to find their client has become too sick to see them or may have passed away or been transferred. Do you have someone they can talk to when this happens, a counsellor or the volunteer manager? Do you have a process in place for notifying volunteer visitors prior to their visit that their client/activity may not be available for a visit that day?
- Volunteers may sometimes be hesitant to ask questions or feel uncomfortable if they are not sure what to do in a particular situation. Offering a friendly and welcoming face and encouraging your staff to do the same will make the experience a good one for all concerned.
- Do you have ways of keeping volunteers on your site informed about your organisation so they can maintain connections, especially at times when they are unable to visit?
- Do volunteers know how to contact you and your organisation when they need to?

Regular meetings or a reporting process with your organisation's volunteer manager can help with sharing information and to provide support for all site staff that supervise or work alongside volunteers. This can be done as part of the regular therapy /care staff meetings. 'Volunteers' is a great regular item on therapy/allied health professional meeting agendas, even if the volunteer manager is not present because it keeps them front of mind for communication and support.

Diversity and inclusion

Not everyone will understand the different perspectives of volunteers, staff or clients from different backgrounds and experiences. Ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion for all people is a key tenet of person-centred care. It is especially important to pay attention to diverse needs in aged care settings including identifying and providing appropriate volunteers to visit and support individual clients and groups. For instance, options for volunteers with a disability, those who need wheelchairs or other support should be explored and encouraged. Volunteers and staff also come from diverse backgrounds and empathy, equity and inclusion are vital to provide optimum whole person-centred care in aged care settings.

Vulnerable clients

Volunteers receive training about 'boundaries' when they begin their role. They are advised as part of their training what they can and cannot do – no lifting clients or feeding, for instance. There are often different guidelines in different organisations. If you notice a volunteer making a mistake or doing the wrong thing, please approach them and reinforce the boundaries in a friendly manner. Advise the volunteer manager if you have more serious concerns about a particular volunteer or if other staff raise concerns with you.

Advocacy: Volunteers may come to consider themselves as a neutral friend for clients. In most cases they are not official advocates for their clients and they should report any misgivings to their volunteer manager for clarification/further investigation that the Manager deems necessary, rather than approaching staff direct. They need to know who to go to with any concerns.

BE CLEAR - who IS responsible for volunteers at sites (including out of business hours) - and who needs to know this information including staff who work alongside volunteers.

During COVID lockdowns:

During the COVID restriction period, new forms of volunteering developed including sending letters to residents, phone calls, visiting through windows and using computers and tablets to converse or play games. The assistance of onsite staff was key to the success of these activities and was much appreciated by both clients and volunteers. Future lockdowns may benefit from people being reminded about these opportunities.

Do you have newsletters or online activities in place to keep the volunteers in touch with your particular part of the organisation or site? Many volunteers reported missing their regular volunteering opportunities during COVID restrictions and particularly, their connection to residents/clients. They also expressed concern about clients during this stressful time.



This resource can be downloaded from www.volunteeringwa.org.au/agedcare