

JSAL7

# Volunteering while on benefits helps other people and can help you



SOCIAL  
SECURITY  
AGENCY





## **Volunteering - The advantages work both ways**

Voluntary activity can be anything from being a good neighbour, to working with charities or other non-profit-making organisations such as the Social Services Department. Applying for jobs can take a lot of time and effort, which you can balance by volunteering to do something that you enjoy. Employers see volunteering as having something to offer, and making a positive contribution is a great way to boost your self-confidence. Volunteering gives you the chance to explore your interests.

It can help you use and improve your skills. It can also give you the chance to try out jobs that you may not have thought about before. Volunteering can keep you familiar with the workplace, giving you knowledge and confidence at job interviews. Volunteers may be able to claim back travel and any other expenses.

## Other ways that voluntary activity may help you is by:

- giving you the chance to pass on skills and experience;
- improving your confidence;
- Letting employers know that you are able to show commitment;
- providing a talking point for you and employers at job interviews;
- learning new ideas from others;
- providing a network of new contacts with information on different job opportunities;
- keeping you in touch with the daily routine of being out and meeting people; and
- giving you the opportunity to help your community.

## Volunteering opportunities

Volunteer Bureaus and Volunteer Development Agencies have information on organisations who need volunteers. You can find out where your nearest Volunteer Bureau or Volunteer Development Agency is by contacting the number on page 10 of this leaflet. You can go in for an informal chat or set up an in-depth interview with one of the staff to talk about what you want to do. Finding the right opportunity may not be easy, or you may not be sure what type of help you want to give. Calling in for a chat may open up possibilities that you had not thought of.

If you know which organisation you want to work for, you can contact them direct. The major organisations have a Volunteer Co-ordinator who will appreciate your enthusiasm. Talking to somebody closely involved can help you to make the best use of your abilities.

### Other ways to find out about what you can do are to:

- look in your local library;
- log on to the internet (most libraries now provide a free Internet service);
- check your community centre noticeboards;
- read your local newspapers;
- listen to your local radio; and
- ask friends and family.

## How voluntary activity affects benefits

### **We recognise that volunteering can improve your prospects of finding paid employment.**

It is important that you tell an adviser in the Social Security or Jobs & Benefits office about any voluntary activity that you do. This helps the adviser dealing with you to take account of your voluntary activity and make sure that all the details are recorded.

If you are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, you can take part in voluntary activity during the hours that you have agreed to be available on your Jobseeker's Agreement. You must be able to rearrange the hours you do the voluntary activity to go to a job interview (after being given 48 hours' notice or, in the case of a parent, after being given seven days' notice) and you must be able to start paid employment at one week's notice or, in the case of a parent, within 28 days.

## **You should tell the adviser in the Social Security or Jobs & Benefits office or JobCentre if:**

- you do any voluntary activity;
- you receive any payments, including payments in kind, for example meal vouchers, as these may affect your entitlement to benefits; and
- your volunteering involves spending a day or more away from home so that we can contact you about jobs.

## **Remember that you must:**

- Look for paid employment as well as doing your voluntary activity;
- be willing and able to go to a job interview at 48 hours' notice; and
- be willing and able to start a job at one weeks' notice.

In the case of a parent, you must;

- be willing and able to go to a job interview at seven days' notice; and
- be willing and able to start a job within 28 days of being offered a job.

You can do as much voluntary work as you like without it affecting your benefit, as long as you do not receive any payments or reward other than expenses. When you declare your voluntary activity, you will be asked to fill in form Voluntary Work 1.

If you want to know more about how volunteering affects your benefit, ask an adviser in the Social Security or Jobs & Benefits office, or JobCentre.

## Case studies

**Here are a few examples of people who were unemployed and now have jobs thanks to their involvement in volunteering.**

With little work experience, **Emma** wanted to improve her CV. After seeing a poster for her local volunteer bureau, she helped out one day a week at a small local charity, doing administration work. The experience, and a good reference, helped her find permanent paid work.

It was important for **Noam** to feel that he was doing something useful with his time. When a friend suggested volunteering, he contacted his local mental-health care centre, which found him a role as a helper. The experience he gained made him want to train as a counsellor, and this is now his full-time job.

To boost her confidence, **Angela** began to volunteer as a receptionist at an animal rescue centre, something she had never considered before in her working life. Being in a work environment encouraged her to apply for jobs, and she found employment as a receptionist at her local health centre where she could also work towards an NVQ.

**Bobby** began volunteering, initially to pass the time. He volunteered two days a week in the local hospice's charity shop. Although the work was completely different to his previous career in a car plant, he really enjoyed the interaction with customers and now manages the shop.

## Getting started

If you would like more information about helping as a volunteer and about organisations in your area which involve volunteers, contact your local Volunteer Bureau.

### **Armagh Volunteer Centre**

3 College Street

Armagh

BT61 9BT

**Phone:** 02837 518415

### **Down District Volunteer Bureau**

31a St Patrick's Avenue

Downpatrick

BT30 6DW

**Phone:** 02844 619122

### **Causeway Volunteer Bureau**

14 Killowen Court

Killowen Street

Coleraine

BT51 3TP

**Phone:** 02870 358285

### **Dungannon Volunteer Centre**

Unit 4 The Buttermarket

Feeney's Lane

Dungannon

BT71 1TX

**Phone:** 02887 729690

### **Cookstown Volunteer Centre**

Office 1A Loy Buildings

16-24 Loy Street

Cookstown

BT80 8PE

**Phone:** 02886 761122

### **Fermanagh Volunteer Bureau**

Fermanagh House

Broadmeadow Place

Enniskillen

BT74 7HR

**Phone:** 02866 050000

### **Craigavon and Banbridge Volunteer Bureau**

Office 2, First Floor

Legahory Centre

Craigavon

BT65 5BE

**Phone:** 02838 342741

### **Larne Volunteer Centre**

Units 11-13

Ledcom Industrial Estate

100 Bank Road

Larne

BT40 3AW

**Phone:** 02828 260460

**Limavady Volunteer Bureau**

Limavady Community  
Development Initiative  
Roe Valley Hospital  
24d Benevenagh Drive  
Limavady  
BT49 0AQ  
**Phone:** 02877 765438

**Loughside Volunteer Centre**

10d High Street  
Antrim  
BT41 4AN  
**Phone:** 02894 466644

**Newry and Mourne  
Volunteer Bureau**

Ballybot House  
28 Cornmarket  
Newry  
BT35 8BG  
**Phone:** 02830 262037

**North Down  
Volunteer Bureau**

91 High Street  
Bangor  
BT20 5BD  
**Phone:** 02891 270486

**North West Volunteer Centre**

22 Bishop Street  
Londonderry  
BT48 6PP  
**Phone:** 02871 271017

**Omagh Volunteer Centre**

2nd Floor, Community House  
2 Drumragh Avenue  
Omagh  
BT78 1DP  
**Phone:** 02882 240772

**Voluntary Service  
Belfast and Castlereagh**

34 Shaftesbury Square  
Belfast  
BT2 7DB  
**Phone:** 02890 200850

**Voluntary Service  
Lisburn**

52a Batchelor's Walk  
Lisburn  
BT28 1XN  
**Phone:** 02892 668740

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For general questions about volunteering, contact:

**The NI Volunteering Development Agency**  
129 Ormeau Road  
Belfast BT7 1SH  
**Phone:** 028 90 236100

[www.dsdni.gov.uk](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk)

Remember this leaflet is only a general guide and not a full statement of the law. We have made every effort to make sure that the information in this leaflet is correct at the date shown below. However, changes in the law make the leaflet become gradually less accurate. For up-to-date information please contact your local Social Security or Jobs & Benefits office.

This leaflet is available in large print, in Braille and on audio tape. Contact your local Social Security or Jobs & Benefits office for more details.

