

Rights of Women - Volunteers Policy

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rights of Women

Founded in 1975, Rights of Women is a not-for-profit organisation committed to informing, educating and empowering women concerning the law and their legal rights. We run a free, confidential Advice Line for women by women which provides specialist legal advice, predominately in the area of family law. We are a membership organisation. Our activities include producing publications, organising conferences and training, and policy work. Rights of Women is an Industrial and Provident Society

1.2 Statement of Intent

Rights of Women believes that volunteers contribute significantly to the work of the organisation and that the achievement of the goals of the organisation is best served by the active participation of volunteers. We are committed to creating meaningful and productive roles for volunteers.

1.3 Volunteer Involvement

Rights of Women recruits volunteers for its Advice Line and for office administration. Qualified solicitors and barristers are recruited as Advisors for the helpline. In addition, placements may be offered to women with LPC/BVC qualifications to be volunteer Trainee Advisors under supervision.

1.4 Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities

Volunteers are a valuable resource to Rights of Women, its staff and its service users. Volunteers have the right to be given meaningful roles, the right to effective supervision and to recognition for work done. In return, volunteers will agree to fulfil their role to the best of their abilities and to remain loyal to the organisation's values, goals and procedures.

1.5 Purpose of the Volunteer Policy

The purpose of the policy is to provide overall guidance and direction to the management committee, staff and volunteers engaged in volunteer activity. The policy is intended for internal guidance only, and does not constitute, either implicitly or explicitly, a binding contractual or personnel agreement.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

2.1 Description of Role

Prior to any volunteer recruitment drive, a clear description of the role will be developed for the volunteer post(s). This will form part of the Volunteer Agreement and will be given to each volunteer and used in any subsequent management and evaluation of the placement. The description of role will include details of roles and responsibilities and a list of required qualities and qualifications. Volunteers will not be asked to replace paid staff.

2.2 Volunteer Agreement

The Volunteer Agreement will be sent to all interested applicants and will be signed by each volunteer following the offer of a placement. A copy of the signed Agreement will be

kept in the volunteer's personnel file. The Agreement includes a description of role and details of volunteer benefits, induction/training and evaluation/support. The Agreement will be binding in honour only and may be cancelled at any time at the discretion of either party. It is not intended to be, nor should it be inferred that it is, a legally binding contract between Rights of Women and the volunteer.

2.3 Recruitment

Volunteers will be recruited by Rights of Women on a proactive basis with the intention of broadening and expanding the organisation's volunteer base. The advertising of volunteers will be wide ranging, employing varied media and methods. Each recruitment drive will seek to reach as wide and as diverse an audience as possible. The recruitment of volunteers will comply with our Equal Opportunities Policy and will not discriminate. The sole qualification for a volunteer placement will be suitability to perform a task on behalf of the organisation.

2.4 Application

Following an enquiry about volunteering at Rights of Women, all prospective volunteers will receive copies of the Volunteers Policy, Equal Opportunities Statement, application form, equal opportunities monitoring form, Volunteer Agreement and information about the organisation. This information will be sent out within five working days of the initial enquiry. All volunteers will be invited to complete and return the application form. If the applicant has met all of the required qualities, she will be contacted and an interview will be arranged with the Legal Officer/staff member appointed to this task or the Director. The interview will address the applicant's work background and qualifications, their commitment to fulfil the placement and should answer any questions the volunteer has about the placement. The interview will concentrate on matching the skills, abilities, and aspirations of the volunteer to the needs of the organisation; it will be an exploratory, informal process.

2.5 Selection

Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their interview within three working days. Subject to satisfactory interview the applicant's referees should be contacted at this stage. All returned references are in the strictest confidence and will be securely stored. Subject to satisfactory references, the Volunteer Agreement should be explained and signed by both parties. It will be clearly explained that this Agreement does not form a contract of employment.

2.6 Induction / Training

All volunteers will receive an induction which will familiarise them with the requirements of their role, ease the process of starting a new placement and provide a framework within which they can develop a full understanding of the values and work of the organisation and their role within it. This will include an introduction to relevant organisational policies, office procedures and the use of office equipment. In addition, all Advisors (including Trainees) will receive training on basic Advice Line skills and the helpline's policies and procedures. Trainee Advisors will also receive specialist training on legal issues pertinent to the Advice Line. Current volunteers will be invited to participate in the delivery of training to new volunteers.

2.7 Probationary Period

All volunteers will be subject to a probationary period. The Legal Officer appointed to this task will contact probationary volunteers within their first six months to discuss their progress and to ensure there are no problems.

3. VOLUNTEER TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Continuing Education

Rights of Women is committed to the ongoing education of its staff as well as its volunteers. Training needs will be identified and reviewed with each evaluation session.

3.2 Volunteer's Commitment

Volunteer Advisors are expected to, as far as possible, keep up to date with the law as it applies to matters raised by callers to the Advice Line of Rights of Women.

3.3 Rights of Women Training and Events

Volunteer Advisors will be actively encouraged to attend Rights of Women's external CPD accredited courses as well its conferences and workshops. The organisation will aim, wherever possible, to make free places available to all volunteers at these events.

4. VOLUNTEER EVALUATION, SUPPORT AND MONITORING

4.1 Role of Supervisor

Each volunteer will have a clearly identified supervisor who is responsible for the management and guidance of that volunteer, and shall be available to the volunteer for ongoing consultation and assistance.

4.2 Lines of Communication

Volunteers are entitled to all necessary information that may relate to the performance of their role. Volunteers will be included in all relevant mailouts by Rights of Women. Up to date information, including legal information, will be made available to volunteers.

4.3 Volunteers Records

The volunteer's supervisor will keep all records relating to the volunteer's placement in a personnel file. Volunteer personnel files will be confidential and will kept in a secure, locked storage. Only staff authorised by the Director will have access to volunteer personnel files. A volunteer may have access to her file at any time.

4.4 Evaluation Sessions

Volunteers will attend evaluation sessions with their supervisor. The regularity of evaluation sessions will depend on the volunteer's level of experience and expertise but will be held at least once a year. Evaluation sessions will include a review of progress and will identify any training and development needs. Sessions will be recorded and kept in each volunteer's confidential personnel file.

4.5 Informal Support

Volunteer Advisors will be encouraged to provide each other with peer support and will also be invited to speak to the Legal Officer/member of staff appointed to this task following an Advice Line session as a means of debriefing. All debriefing will take place within the boundaries of the confidentiality policy. In addition, volunteer Advisors will be encouraged to use the Advisors' message book as a means of keeping ongoing lines of communication with their supervisor and Rights of Women.

4.6 Feedback

The Legal Officer/member of staff appointed to this task will from time to time seek feedback from volunteers on their experience of volunteering and, where appropriate, on any significant developments in volunteering roles / the Advice Line service. This may be done via postal/phone questionnaire or may form part of an evaluation session.

Volunteers' feedback will be used to directly inform Rights of Women's volunteer programme and, where appropriate, service provision.

4.7 Ongoing Monitoring

It is essential that Rights of Women monitors the advice that is being given to callers on the Advice Line. This is to ensure not only that correct advice is being given, but also that the aims and objectives of the organisation are being met. The Legal Officer appointed to this task will monitor all advice forms and, where recurrent problems with completion are identified, these will be raised with the Advisor. The Legal Officer appointed to this task will occasionally listen into calls taken by Advisors and will give constructive and supportive feedback.

4.8 Absences

Volunteers are expected to perform their duties on a regular, scheduled and punctual basis. Where the volunteer is expecting to be unavailable for a scheduled duty, they must give Rights of Women as much notice as possible so that alternative arrangements can be made. This is critical in the case of Advice Line sessions. Continual absenteeism will result in a review of the volunteer's work or placement.

4.9 End of Placement

Volunteers who do not adhere to the rules and procedures of the organisation or who fail satisfactorily to perform their role may have their placement terminated. Volunteers may resign from their volunteer service with the organisation at any time. It is requested that volunteers who intend to resign provide advance notice of their departure and a reason for their decision.

4.10 Exit Interviews

Exit interviews, where possible, should be conducted with volunteers who are leaving their placements. The interview should ascertain why the volunteer is leaving, suggestions the volunteer may have for improving the placement and the possibility of involving the volunteer in some other capacity with the organisation in the future.

5. VOLUNTEER INSURANCE AND EXPENSES

5.1 Insurance

Rights of Women will provide adequate professional indemnity insurance for volunteer Advisors whilst undertaking voluntary work approached and authorised by us. For these purposes, volunteers must supply Rights of Women with up to date practising certificates and any other additional information which may be required.

5.2 Expenses

Subject to funding and the provision of receipts, Rights of Women will repay the following expenses incurred by volunteers: travel to and from home to Rights of Women, up to £5.00 subsistence for each session/meeting attended and up to £15 dependent care for each session / meeting attended.

6. VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

6.1 Informal Recognition

All staff responsible for volunteer supervision are encouraged to undertake methods of recognition of volunteer service on a regular basis throughout the year. These methods of informal recognition should range from a simple 'thank you' to a concerted effort to include volunteers in the work of the organisation.

6.2 Volunteer Socials

Rights of Women should aim to hold regular socials for volunteers as an additional means of valuing volunteers' contribution and so as to provide a forum in which volunteers can meet each other.

7. RIGHTS OF WOMEN'S POLICIES AND VOLUNTEERING

7.1 Equal Opportunities

Rights of Women is committed to preventing discrimination in its own employment and service delivery and to taking active steps to promote equality of opportunity. Rights of Women's Equal Opportunities Policy and Statement is applicable to all staff and volunteers. Please refer to the organisation's statement included in the Advice Line Handbook.

7.2 Health & Safety

Rights of Women will provide adequate training to volunteers in our health and safety policy. Please refer to the organisation's policy included in the Advice Line Handbook.

7.3 Problems and Grievance Procedure

Rights of Women will try to resolve fairly any problems or difficulties experienced by volunteers. In the event of a problem/difficulty, the volunteer should approach the Legal Officer/member of staff appointed to this task. If the volunteer is unable to discuss the matter with this person, she may raise the matter with the Director. In addition, Rights of Women has a formal procedure designed for volunteers with a view to achieving resolution of any grievance connected with volunteering at Rights of Women. Please refer to the organisation's procedure included in the Advice Line Handbook.

7.4 Complaints Procedure

Rights of Women is committed to ensuring that its services are accountable to the organisation's users. The Complaints Procedure sets out the steps Rights of Women will take when we receive a complaint from users of any of our services. Please refer to the organisation's procedure included in the Advice Line Handbook.

7.5 Confidentiality

Rights of Women is committed to providing a confidential advice service to all users and the organisation is committed to principles of confidentiality across all aspects of service, employment, volunteering and management. Please refer to the organisation's statement included in the Advice Line Handbook.

Date of Volunteers Policy Latest Review: 08/06/04