

THE
HARBOUR
PROJECT

Providing a safe space for refugees and asylum seekers in Swindon
Charity number 1171368

Volunteer Policy - The Harbour Project

Aim

The Harbour Project relies on volunteers to help deliver support through its Advice Centre and other Visitor activities, deliver classes, help at events to raise funds, and undertake administrative tasks for the charity.

This policy sets out the charity's approach to volunteers.

Contents

This policy incorporates the Harbour Project's approach to the following:

1. Introduction
2. Recruitment
3. DBS Checks
4. Equal Opportunity & Diversity
5. Induction & Training
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9. Attendance
10. Health and Safety
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Appendix 1: Sample Advice Centre Volunteer role description

Appendix 2: Advice Centre Volunteer Agreement and Volunteering Values

1. Introduction

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Harbour Project. They are a core and vital part of our Advice Centre, providing friendship and support to our Visitors. They deliver English language and other classes, help us with fundraising events and activities, and contribute to the charity in many other ways. Due to the nature of the work at Harbour, the vulnerability of our Visitors and the large volume of people that we see each week, we require all volunteers to be over the age of 18.

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We also recognise the value of this exchange to our volunteers, who tell us that they feel part of the Harbour family, and often form friendships with the Visitors, staff and other volunteers that they meet whilst volunteering. Whilst we want to avoid over regulating volunteer roles so that these organic relationships can develop, we also recognise our responsibility to manage and oversee volunteers and to provide a safe environment in which to work.

We expect our volunteers to behave in accordance with our values, and to seek help from our staff when they need it. We are committed to providing effective induction, training and support to our volunteers.

It is important to acknowledge the differences between the roles of volunteers and staff members at the Harbour Project. Volunteers are not engaged under a contract of employment. They give their time freely, and the Harbour Project welcomes and appreciates this contribution, within the parameters of its values, the volunteer role description and this policy.

2. Recruitment

Volunteers may be recruited through internal or external actions. All prospective volunteers are asked to apply through the on-line form accessible from the website. This form allows the application to feed directly into a database and thus ensures that all applications are consistently managed and a waiting list is maintained. The Operations Manager is responsible for all volunteer recruitment.

When a need for a volunteer is identified, the first step will be to review the waiting list for likely applicants. When a specific role is needed that is not met by the existing waiting list, the role may be advertised on (any or all of) the Harbour Project's website, social media, through its regular newsletter, through Swindon VAS weekly newsletter or on the Charity Job website.

For specific roles, the role description and advert will cover the following headings:

- 🕒 Title of role
- 🕒 Hours required
- 🕒 Commitment expected
- 📍 Location
- 🎯 Purpose

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- 🕒 Description of the role
- 🕒 Description of likely candidates
- 🕒 Desirable skills / qualifications
- 🕒 Information about the Harbour Project, including a copy of this Policy
- 🕒 How to apply

An example of a role description / job advert is at Appendix I. A generic role description is published on the website under 'Get Involved'.

As part of the on-line application process, prospective volunteers are required to confirm their acceptance of The Harbour Project Volunteer Agreement and Volunteering Values (appendix 2).

Candidates are also asked to provide two references, and ideally (and if available) one of which should be professional. If the skills/ experience of the applicant look appropriate to The Harbour, The Operations Manager will ask the candidate to come in for an informal interview. This conversation will include an overview of the Project, discussion around different volunteer roles, and an explanation of the type of work that people are likely to be involved in. Candidates will then be asked to complete a DBS check, and references will be sought.

All volunteers will need to have an Enhanced DBS in place before working one-on-one with Visitors. Due to the cost and administrative effort in managing this, volunteers are required to volunteer at the Harbour Project for 2 months before the DBS is initiated. Until the DBS is in place, volunteers will always work alongside a member of staff or other volunteer who is DBS cleared. Sometimes people may be added to the waiting list if there is no capacity for their skills and interests at that point in time.

Where there are concerns raised through the referencing process or the DBS check, the Operations Manager will contact the individual and, depending upon the outcome of this, notify the individual that their application to volunteer is not being taken forward.

3. DBS Checks

All volunteers are required to complete an enhanced DBS within 2 months of commencement of volunteering at The Harbour Project. This is completed on-line and the link to the application will be sent to the volunteer by the Business Manager. The DBS check will be refreshed every 3 years (if the person is still volunteering with The Harbour Project).

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4. Equal Opportunity & Diversity

The Harbour Project values and embraces equal opportunities and diversity. The charity is committed to ensuring fairness and recognises the importance of diversity and inclusion within its recruitment and management of volunteers.

The Harbour Project commits to making reasonable adjustments to ensure that all volunteers are recruited fairly and can participate fully.

Bullying or harassment of volunteers will not be tolerated.

5. Induction & Training

Upon appointment, a start date will be agreed. On their first day, a member of staff will provide an induction and a copy of the Volunteer Information Pack.

The induction will include (some of which may have been covered in the initial meeting between the Operations Manager and new volunteer):

- 🕒 Aims of organisation
- 🕒 Why volunteers are involved
- 🕒 Tour of the building
- 🕒 Meeting staff and volunteers
- 🕒 Role description, including training
- 🕒 Health and Safety awareness
- 🕒 Safeguarding
- 🕒 Understanding Equal Opportunities
- 🕒 Fire Procedures
- 🕒 First Aid/Accident Book
- 🕒 Importance of confidentiality
- 🕒 Record keeping (paper & electronic) and access rights
- 🕒 Any other appropriate policies and their location
- 🕒 How to complain

In the case of Advice Centre volunteers, the Advice Coordinator will also brief the volunteer on processes (paper-based and electronic), forms and sources of information

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and also provide other general information and advice. The volunteer will then shadow an existing volunteer for the first two to three sessions until they are confident in the role.

Volunteers are offered regular training on the asylum and refugee processes. Advice Centre Volunteers are encouraged to liaise closely with the Advice Centre staff, and to ask questions or seek advice whenever needed.

All fundraising volunteers must undergo training with the Business Manager on the standards set by the Fundraising Regulator. Fundraising volunteers will not be allowed to begin fundraising until they have attended the training, as this is a legal requirement for the charity.

6. Supervision & Management

The Harbour Project is committed to supporting volunteers effectively and providing them with any help and guidance they need to feel confident and competent during their time with us.

At the start of each day volunteers will receive a quick briefing from the Advice Co-ordinator. After the centre closes, volunteers will be able to access advice and support from a member of the staff team if required.

The Harbour Project understands that a volunteer's personal situation may change, or the volunteer may no longer feel able to manage the challenges of supporting the Harbour Project's Visitors. Volunteers are encouraged to talk to any member of staff about any concerns or barriers that may limit their ability to continue to volunteer with us.

We ask that volunteers inform a member of staff if they are no longer able to continue to volunteer with us, so that plans can be put in place to manage any backfill, if required.

7. Removal Procedures

In exceptional circumstances, volunteers may be removed from their role at the Harbour Project. Volunteers are not covered by the staff grievance and disciplinary procedures, due to their different status as volunteers. In such cases, the following procedures will be followed.

- Initial concerns about a volunteer are likely to be identified by a member of the staff team, and should be addressed immediately and in accordance with usual practices. Very often, such concerns can be resolved with a simple conversation

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and may well arise as a result of misunderstandings relating to Harbour's work, role or boundaries.

- Minor concerns about any volunteer should be reported to the Operations Manager by any staff member, Trustee, volunteer, Visitor, or other person. The Operations Manager will initially discuss these concerns with the Advice Coordinator to see if he/she is able to manage and resolve the problem directly with the volunteer.
- If the issue cannot be resolved in this way, the Operations Manager and the Advice Coordinator will meet with the volunteer to discuss the situation and seek to resolve it. This may involve, for example, reminding the volunteer about the Harbour Project's procedures and values, or supporting the volunteer in developing their skills in a particular area. If, for example, the volunteer has not been attending agreed Advice Centre times, the discussion may focus on how the volunteer could contribute to the Harbour Project in ways other than during specific time periods.
- If the situation cannot be resolved at this meeting, the Operations Manager will inform the volunteer that they will no longer be able to act as a volunteer for the charity.
- In the case of a major concern, such as abusive or threatening behaviour to a staff member, Visitor or other volunteer, suspected theft, significant breach of health and safety or safeguarding policies, or other similar behaviour, the volunteer will be asked to leave the premises immediately, by any staff member present, but ideally by the Operations Manager if present. The CEO will be informed immediately, and they will carry out an investigation to determine what happened. The CEO will make a decision as to whether the volunteer should be removed from their position, and will ask the volunteer to meet with them to explain the reasons behind this. Where possible, the Chair of Trustees (or another Trustee) will also attend this meeting.
- Where the behaviour constitutes a significant incident for the charity, the CEO will report the matter to the Charity Commission and/or the police.

8. Expenses

Volunteers are entitled to out of pocket expenses only. These expenses must be agreed in advance with the Harbour Project but may include, for example, public transport costs to reach the Harbour Project, and expenses for refreshments for volunteering activities that last for 6 hours or more.

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Volunteers should contact the Business Manager if they have expenses to claim, and must provide all appropriate receipts in order to seek reimbursement.

9. Attendance

For volunteers working in the Advice Centre, people are asked to add their name to a rota, managed online through Airtable. In the event that someone is not able to attend, we also ask that they inform a member of staff as soon as practicable. To allow people to stay connected to The Harbour and the fast moving environment of asylum and refugee issues, we expect volunteers to attend at least 2 Drop-in sessions per month.

Volunteers who lead on, or take part in other groups or activities are also asked to make a minimum commitment of 2 sessions per month and to advise the Operations Manager if they are not able to attend.

Volunteer teachers are coordinated by the Lead English Coordinator, who also runs a rota of classes, along with an outline of topics to be covered.

10. Health and Safety

All volunteers will be expected to follow the organisation's health and safety policies.

11. Confidentiality and Safeguarding

All volunteers are expected to abide by the Harbour Project's data protection policies and procedures and its safeguarding policies.

Volunteers are reminded that they are not permitted to use or disclose any confidential information they have access to during the period of volunteering either during that period or afterwards.

12. Complaints

Where a volunteer wishes to make a complaint about any aspect of their experience, this should be managed in accordance with the Complaints Policy.

13. Intellectual Property

Ordinarily, the intellectual property of anything created by a volunteer remains with the volunteer. Volunteering at The Harbour explicitly includes a transfer of these rights to the Harbour Project, so that any work such as photographs, posters, or other written materials, are vested in the Harbour Project.

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14. Data Protection

Volunteers are reminded to abide by the provisions of the Harbour Project's Data Protection policy, and to keep confidential any personal information they discover from Visitors.

Volunteers' own personal information will also be managed in accordance with the Data Protection policy, and in accordance with their consent.

15. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by trustees, with input from staff and volunteers.

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Appendix One: Example Role Description and Advert

TITLE:	Volunteer Advisor and Befriender
RESPONSIBLE TO:	Advice Co-ordinator
HOURS:	3.5 hrs per session (including informal meeting beforehand and cleaning up afterwards)
COMMITMENT EXPECTED:	2 sessions per month
LOCATION:	The Harbour Project Swindon

PURPOSE: To provide a warm welcome to all Visitors, basic advice and signposting and help with the general running and upkeep of the project.

PRINCIPAL EXPECTATIONS

SESSION ACTIVITY

- 🕒 To ensure that all Visitors are welcomed to the Centre
- 🕒 To provide general help and support for Visitors to the Centre
- 🕒 To provide general help and support to other Harbour volunteers
- 🕒 To implement Harbour policy & practice, in accordance with agreed guidelines
- 🕒 To maintain Advice Centre record-keeping systems
- 🕒 To liaise as required/necessary with other Harbour staff and volunteers
- 🕒 To supervise fairly the use of Harbour facilities and equipment

PREMISES

- 🕒 To ensure that both the interior and exterior of the Advice Centre are kept clean, safe and tidy
- 🕒 To ensure that the facilities and equipment are clean and safe to use for Visitors

OTHER

- 🕒 To help to organise trips and events provided by the Harbour in conjunction with staff and trustees
- 🕒 To help to provide activities which promote the health and mental wellbeing, employability and integration of the Visitors

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This list of expectations will be kept under regular review

DESCRIPTION OF LIKELY CANDIDATES

Are you...?

- Interested in the aims and activities of The Harbour Project
- Reliable
- A self-starter
- Friendly

Do you...?

- Consider yourself to have excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- Understand the importance of confidentiality – when it's important not to share information – and when it is
- Understand that Equal Opportunities is not just a policy on a piece of paper

DESIRABLE SKILLS/QUALIFICATIONS/EXPERIENCE

- Working in a drop-in centre, befriending people and/or giving advice
- Advocating on behalf of others
- Working in the voluntary sector and/or with refugees and asylum seekers
- I.T. skills, particularly Google or equivalent
- Specialist skills which work towards the aims and objectives of the Harbour Project

Please note that you do not have to have all the skills outlined above. The most important thing is that you care about our Visitors, learn about them and their needs and are willing to share your time and talents however you think best, in conjunction with Harbour staff and volunteer team.

ATTENDANCE

For those working in the Advice Centre, we ask that volunteers attend at least 2 sessions per month. This allows people to stay connected to The Harbour and the fast moving environment of asylum and refugee issues. People are asked to add their name to a rota, via a link that will be emailed to the volunteer by the Advice Co-ordinator. In the event that

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someone is not able to attend, we also ask that they inform a member of staff as soon as practicable.

ABOUT THE HARBOUR PROJECT

We offer a safe place for refugees and asylum seekers new to Swindon and (often) the UK. Swindon is a 'dispersal town' for asylum seekers, meaning that the Home Office has assigned properties here in Swindon specifically for people claiming asylum.

Our visitors come from all over the world, from war-torn countries, or places of ongoing internal conflict, such as Eritrea, Iran and Afghanistan. They are usually far from friends and family with very little understanding of life in the UK. The Harbour seeks to fill that need by giving friendly, informal and, above all, practical support.

Since gaining charitable status in 2003, our numbers have increased significantly year on year. In the past 12 months, we have welcomed over 1500 people through our doors from more than 60+ different countries.

Whilst our work chiefly revolves around the weekday Advice Centre, offering free advice, guidance and English classes Monday to Friday from 10am to 3pm, we are open to increasing our activities in line with what our Visitors ask for, and as capacity permits. The more that volunteers come aboard and share their skills and talents, the more we can help meet the need.

One of the things that makes the Harbour so special is that despite the disparate – and often desperate – situations from which people have come, there is a willingness to put past difficulties aside and a desire to make a fresh start in a new country

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Appendix two: Volunteer Agreement

Volunteer Agreement

In applying to become a volunteer at The Harbour Project, we ask you to agree to abide by our volunteering principles and values set, both in spirit and letter.

This is not a legally-binding contract, but is intended to underline the mutual commitment between The Harbour Project and each volunteer.

We (The Harbour Project) agree:

- 🕒 To provide support, information and, as practicable, training, to enable you to perform an effective and fulfilling role within The Harbour Project.
- 🕒 To reimburse you for travel if need be; and other expenses (if agreed in advance) for any activities undertaken in The Harbour Project's name.
- 🕒 To treat you as a member of The Harbour Project team, jointly responsible for achieving its aims.
- 🕒 To keep you up to date about what's going on at the Harbour.
- 🕒 To provide a daily brief at the start of each session as well as an opportunity to share any issues, concerns or feedback with a member of staff at the end of each session.
- 🕒 To provide a safe place to work.
- 🕒 To provide a reference for you if requested.

You agree:

- 🕒 To adhere to The Harbour Project's values – especially concerning confidentiality (please see overleaf).
- 🕒 To perform tasks agreed with staff/ other volunteers to the best of your ability.
- 🕒 To meet time and attendance commitments, except in exceptional circumstances, or provide adequate notice so that alternative arrangements can be made.
- 🕒 To attend training whenever reasonably practicable and do your best to keep up to date with Harbour processes and policies, especially those that keep you, our staff and Visitors safe.
- 🕒 To recognise that you represent the organisation when advocating for a Harbour Visitor with the prior agreement of staff, but at other times, do so in a personal capacity.
- 🕒 To give notice in writing when no longer able to continue volunteering.

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Our Volunteering Values

We are committed to:

🕒 **Preserving a 'safe space' for refugees and asylum seekers**

Respecting our Visitors' privacy means not asking too many questions and letting Visitors decide when they are ready to talk about the situation from which they have come or any other personal matters.

🕒 **Impartiality**

Staff and volunteers should be working towards the inclusion of all who may benefit from The Harbour Project, irrespective of ethnic origin, language, culture, gender, religion or belief, age, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, physical or mental health. In short, be nice to everyone.

🕒 **User involvement**

We cannot assume we know what our Visitors need or want; we must ask and listen. We encourage our Visitors to volunteer with us and seek their feedback in all we do.

🕒 **Encouraging independence**

Although providing new arrivals with essential help, ultimately we need to encourage Visitors to become independent of us. Our Visitors are making decisions about their own lives – we're here to help them to understand their choices. Volunteers should consider how this works in practice, case by case.

🕒 **Confidentiality**

Information is shared on a 'need to know' basis. We seek Visitors' signed consent when liaising with other agencies. Visitors also decide whether they want to be photographed at the Harbour or while participating in any trips or events. We ask that you do not take photographs without the consent of the Visitor(s).

🕒 **Boundaries and influence**

Inclusion and integration develop through friendships – and part of what we do at the Harbour is to befriend our Visitors. Volunteers need to establish their own boundaries in the extent to which they share personal details and contact information. We also ask our volunteers to recognise that the balance of influence and dependency between individuals in different relationships (especially when this is a volunteer and a Visitor) is not always equal.

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Teamwork

Working as a team needs good communication. This involves checking the notice board and emails regularly, updating records and Airtable, and attending volunteers' training when possible. It also means giving your feedback and letting the staff hear your ideas about how we can collectively improve life at The Harbour.