



the Balsam Centre



# VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



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## Welcome to the Balsam Centre

WELCOME !

Thank you for becoming a volunteer at the Balsam Centre.

The volunteering project has been running here since April 2001, during which time over 200 volunteers have been given placements either locally or in the Centre itself. Some volunteers have spent just a few weeks or months here, while others have volunteered for a number of years and some since the very start of the project.

We hear frequently from volunteers that by sharing their skills and time with others they feel a sense of purpose and involvement with the Centre and the wider community. Some volunteers have previously used and benefited from the services of the Centre and welcome this opportunity to 'give something back' while for others it can be a way of gaining new skills or valuable first hand experience of work as a path to employment.

We welcome volunteers of all ages and immensely value all that you bring to the role. Whatever your reason for volunteering we hope that your time with us will be both satisfying and rewarding.

### Mission Statement

"The Balsam Centre exists to improve the health and quality of life of the people of Wincanton and the surrounding area. It will encourage social inclusion and provide opportunity for positive lifelong change"

## **Becoming a Volunteer**

### **Application Procedure**

If you decide that you would like to become a volunteer at the Balsam Centre we have a simple application procedure. The first step is to complete an application form, designed to provide us with essential information such as contact details and also providing us with background information to allow us to identify relevant volunteer opportunities.

We will ask you to provide details for two character references which we are required to take up. Once your application form has been received you will be invited for an informal interview. This is to ensure that your skills and interests are matched to an appropriate placement. Once a suitable placement has been found you will be contacted by the volunteer coordinator.

Your volunteer placement will begin with an induction to the centre and the project you will be working on. We will inform you of relevant policies and procedures at the Centre. A risk assessment for the placement you are undertaking will have been undertaken and we will advise you of any risks that have been identified and how these risks will be managed.

Appropriate training and support will be given to enable you to gain the most from your placement. If at any time you have concerns or queries the volunteer coordinator or project leader will be happy to discuss these with you. The volunteer coordinator will invite you to regular (3-6 monthly) reviews. These are not compulsory, however, do offer a good opportunity to discuss both the positive and negative aspects of your volunteer placement and allow continued improvement of experiences for both volunteers and clients.

What you should expect from us .....

We value all our volunteers and will aim to ensure that you feel your efforts have real purpose and contribute to the organisations mission. To help achieve this we will keep you up to date with centre news and give feedback and evaluation on the work you perform. We will treat you as an equal partner in the organisation and will provide you with the necessary training and supervision to undertake your designated task. We will ensure your work is undertaken in a healthy and safe environment, including being given health and safety information about your volunteering role.

What we ask from you .....

- Wherever possible meet time commitments or to provide notice so alternative arrangements can be made.
- To perform the tasks assigned to you to the best of your ability.
- To provide input on ways your tasks might be better performed
- To follow organisational policies and procedures.
- To respect those confidences entrusted to you.
- To be open-minded and respectful towards opinions shared with you.
- To comply with the equal opportunities policy of the organisation.
- To represent the organisation accurately and positively to other organisations and individuals.

## **Policies and Procedures**

All volunteers are covered by and asked to adhere to the policies and procedures in place at the Balsam Centre. Key policies are summarised below. Full copies of all policies and procedures can be requested at reception.

### **Volunteers Policy**

The Balsam Centre sees all its volunteers as valuable members of the organisation. Every volunteer has the right to expect induction and receive ongoing support and guidance. The Centre is always interested in hearing of new ideas that will enable volunteers to develop the role they undertake.

### **Equal Opportunities Policy**

The Balsam Centre is committed to making equal opportunities a reality in employment of staff, recruitment of volunteers and within service delivery. We aim to ensure that no potential or actual employee, or user of the centre's services receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of race, ethnic or national origins, colour, gender, disability, caring responsibilities, marital status, sexual orientation, age, religion or geographical area.

### **Confidentiality**

The Balsam Centre has a strict confidentiality policy that as a volunteer you will be covered by and we will ask you to respect. Your role within the Centre may involve you being privy to sensitive information about individuals. The general rule is that no information obtained in your voluntary work about individuals should be imparted to anyone outside the Balsam Centre staff.

As a good deal of our work depends on trust and confidence breaking of the confidentiality rule can be very damaging. If you ever find yourself in a dilemma about confidentiality, please consult with the volunteer coordinator or centre manager.

The Centre respects the confidentiality of volunteers and information will not be divulged to outside parties without first obtaining permission from the volunteer. In exceptional situations, such as when there is risk of harm to yourself or others or when directed to do so in the court of law, we reserve the right to disclose information without prior consent.

### Health and Safety

The Balsam Centre treats volunteers in the same way as employees for the purposes of health and safety and as such the policy is guided by the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974.

The Centre will take all reasonable and practicable steps to pay attention to the provision and maintenance of:

- Equipment, systems of work and plant that are safe and without risks.
- Arrangements for ensuring safe use, handling, storage and transport of articles and substances, which are potentially dangerous.
- Sufficient information, instruction, training and supervision to enable volunteers to avoid hazards and contribute positively to their safety and health at work.
- A safe place of work and safe access and egress.
- A healthy working environment.
- Adequate facilities for welfare at work.
- Protective clothing and equipment as necessary.

### Grievance Procedure

If a volunteer has a grievance they should inform the volunteer coordinator or project leader, either in writing or orally. Following appropriate investigations the volunteer will be interviewed. If the Centre is satisfied that there is a case then appropriate steps will be taken to remedy the situation. If it is considered there is not a case the volunteer will be advised. If the volunteer is dissatisfied

with the outcome they may request a further hearing.

### Disciplinary Procedure

Breaches of rules and procedures could make a volunteer liable for disciplinary action. Gross misconduct may result in immediate suspension from the Centre. Examples which could constitute gross misconduct include:

- Deliberate discrimination, victimisation, bullying, harassment or assault of another person.
- Theft or vandalism of property.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Can I volunteer if I'm on state benefits?

As a general rule you are allowed to volunteer if claiming state benefits, including means-tested benefits such as Job Seekers' Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Income Support. However, there are some guidelines and rules of which claimants should be aware. Advice from the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus state that it is compulsory to inform your benefits advisor that you are volunteering. Rules associated with benefits and volunteering are subject to interpretation by staff at the Job Centre. If you think that your case has not been dealt with fairly or you have problems with your benefits, please speak to the volunteer coordinator.

Am I insured?

All volunteers at the Balsam Centre are covered by our employees liability insurance and public liability insurance. Task descriptions should be provided to all volunteers during their induction, only tasks listed on the description should be performed. If a task is performed which is not listed you may not be covered by our insurance. If you are ever in doubt as to whether you are covered by our insurance please contact the volunteer coordinator.

Will I receive training?

Yes, informal training will be given for all tasks allocated and wherever appropriate and feasible volunteers will be supported in attending in house or external training courses. Training requirements and opportunities will be discussed with you at your initial interview and during subsequent reviews.

Will I require a Disclosure & Barring Service form?

If your volunteering position involves working with children or vulnerable adults we will ask you to complete a Disclosure & Barring

Service form. Revelation of past convictions will not automatically prevent someone from volunteering and all information disclosed will remain confidential. Information will not be shared with third parties unless consent is given by the volunteer.

## Contact Information

Volunteer coordinator: Annette Yoosefinejad

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