

Guidelines on the inclusion of volunteers in the residential care system and their training utilising the INCREASE curriculum

1. Introduction

These guidelines are developed as part of the training curriculum of the KA2 Erasmus+ project "INCREASE". They are based on the input provided by Volunteering Matters staff with considerable experience in managing volunteers who support children in residential and foster care. The goal of these guidelines is to provide residential youth care workers with an overview on how the inclusion of volunteers in the day-to-day operations of their care facility enhances the well-being of the residents. Just like paid professional staff, volunteers need to be adequately trained to work with vulnerable young people. This is especially the case when they do not have a professional background or training in the provision of care. Even if this would be the case, it pays off to take the time to discuss their role and how they fit in in the wider care framework.

When properly managed and integrated in the overarching care framework, volunteers' involvement will facilitate the development of young people and help them to boost their confidence. A good example of their inclusion can be found in Volunteering Matters' "Befriending project". For two hours a week/fortnight volunteers provide young people in care with a "timeout" where they can get away from their care setting and explore one of their passions. Depending on volunteer availability, this can be after school, in the evening or at weekends. This helps the young person to build up their confidence and resilience. Having a positive role model to spend time with outside of the care setting also helps them to nurture healthy personal relationships. In turn, this makes the care tasks of staff a lot easier.

Volunteers offer a gift of time and usually they will not be able to commit to an organisation like a full-time paid employee can. Therefore, it is best not to entrust them with core tasks upon which the day-to-day management of your care setting and the well-being of the young people in care depends. However, it is possible that they will be confronted with challenges in their role, including unexpected behaviour of the young person. In order to ensure that their actions do not aggravate the situation, it is important that they get:

- A proper induction in the care framework.
- Their place in it and the role they are expected to play.
- Relevant actors for them to contact and their contact details.

In an adapted format the INCREASE curriculum provide them with these insights. As volunteers are not expected to take up professional activities, detailed study of pedagogical theory and legislation is not required. Instead, volunteers benefit from practical insights and discussions on case studies.

Volunteer managers and care professionals have the responsibility of ensuring that volunteers engaged in providing support are able to fulfil their role. Therefore, it is best to look first at how the inclusion of volunteers in the youth care organisation's operation can best be managed and what steps need to be taken in their recruitment process. Lastly, the INCREASE curriculum and how it can best be used to train volunteers will be discussed.

2. Guidelines in managing and training volunteers in a youth care setting

2.1. General volunteer management:

- It is best to match volunteers on a 1:1 basis with the young persons in care, this way they can concentrate on amplifying the well-being of one young person and have the opportunity to build up a trust relationship with them.
- Volunteers should be able to commit a certain amount of time, at least three hours a week/fortnight, over an extended period of time, a year is recommended. This allows them to build up a trusting relationship with the young person they help caring for. While a volunteer does give the gift of time, it is important that they honour their commitment to avoid the development of trust issues with the young person.
- It is recommended that during holidays volunteers spend additional time with the young person, to compensate for the absence of educational support. However, this needs to be discussed with the volunteer.
- More frequent outings can be arranged, but this might not always be possible for the volunteer to arrange. It is important to note that it is vital in their role as a trusted person that they stick to their commitment. More outings also mean that volunteers have to commit more and might not be able to do so over prolonged periods of time.
- If possible, focus on the involvement of local volunteers, to ensure that they undertake their volunteering commitment.
- Volunteers might want to contact with the family of the young person they befriend. It is important that volunteers stick to their befriending role and do not get involved in interfamilial relationships.
- Befrienders should be neutral, non-authoritative figures.
- Set up clear communication guidelines for the volunteer to follow in case of a challenging situation. Stress that it is better to inquire for help when none was needed and to express concerns than to regret the mismanagement of a case later. As professional staff, be tolerant if a volunteer might inquire for help when none was needed.
- Follow up on how volunteers and young people get along and what the result is of the support the volunteer gives. Ask the volunteer to report regularly, e.g. once a fortnight on their activities and any challenges they might have encountered, the best format to do so is via face-to-face meetings. Take the time to conduct an interview with the volunteer a few weeks after their engagement has begun to inquire on their satisfaction with their engagement. Ask them if:
 - The placement is working out for them.
 - Inquire if there are any issues they would like to address including:
 - Do their tasks match those they expected to undertake when they started their engagement
 - How is their relationship with the care setting, young people and other people
 - Do they require additional support and/or supervision?
 - Is there any part of the training that would to need to repeated or explained in more detail?
- Likewise, inquire with the young people in care how they perceive the care arrangement. Ask them:

- How they feel about having a befriender looking after them
- Do they think they need a befriender in the future?
- What do they think of the befriender? What do they think is the befriender's opinion of them?
- How do they feel about leaving the house to go to school or participate in other activities?
- Is there anything they have done so far that they would not have done if the befriender was not supporting them? Is there anything that sticks out?
- What do they consider the most important achievement that they managed to reach with the help of the befriender?
- How does having a befriender helped them to feel about:
 - Themselves,
 - Their family?
 - Their friends?
 - Other people in the care setting?
- Was there anything about the activities with the befriender that you did not enjoy or felt uncomfortable with?
- What do you consider to be the most important things that a befriender should do or say? What kind of person should they be?
- Do you think your befriender meets those requirements?

Repeat this assessment process during every quarter that a volunteer engages for the well-being of the young people in your care and set up an action plan for improvement based on the assessment. As the match comes to an end it is vital to ensure a close follow-up of both the volunteer and the young person, and to ensure they have a proper debriefing of their experiences and a framework to stay in touch, if they desire to do so.

It is possible for volunteers who come from further afield to get involved as well, however this poses additional logistical challenges including the provision of housing, transport and their own well-being.

2.2. Recruitment process:

Before you open volunteer vacancies at your organisation it is best to reflect on the benefit you want to get out of their engagement with your trustees, stakeholders and employees. Take the following questions into account:

- What is the function of volunteers and what tasks would be suitable for them?
- What skills and experiences do we like them to have before they join us?
- How will we disseminate the opportunity?
- What steps will we take in the selection process?
- How can it be ensured that they remain with the organisation?
- Be conscious that your recruitment policy for volunteers takes into account the equal opportunities and diversity policies and be conscious about disability access

During the actual recruitment process itself, it is best to keep the following in mind:

- Volunteers engaging in supporting a young person in care should be at least 18 years old.
- It is likely that volunteers have no prior experience in youth care. While it is commendable that people want to give their gift of time, it is your duty to guarantee the well-being of the young people in care. Therefore, it is best to only allow a volunteer to participate in your operations if you are confident that their presence will have a beneficial effect. While a volunteer is not applying for a paid position, it does not mean that their recruitment process should not mirror that of employees who get in close contact with the young people in care. Try to draw up a complete as possible profile to assess the volunteers' competences. Do not hesitate to conduct an extensive interview on the volunteers' knowledge, skills, interests and a demonstrated resilience in crisis situations and inquire for references. However, do explain that you take these steps because you have the best interests of both the young people in care and the volunteer at heart.
- The care facility or the volunteering organisation contracted should ensure that all volunteers pass a disclosure check enabling them to get in close contact with minors.
- It is best not to let a volunteer start right away. It is best that their background is matched with the personality of a young person in care. Inform the volunteer that it may take some time before they can start and explain that this delay ensures for the best experience possible for volunteer and looked after minor.
- Provide volunteers with a volunteer contract. Outline in this contract:
 - The amount of time they will spend with the young people and the duration of their volunteering experience.
 - Reimbursements of costs incurred by the volunteer.
 - Any other entitlements for the volunteer, including holiday arrangements.
 - Public liability insurance

2.3. Matching process:

As previously discussed the volunteers' involvement should be focussed on improving the well-being of the young person in care and they will spend a considerable amount of time together. Therefore, it is vital to ensure that volunteers you have considered suitable to take up a role in your organisation also get along well with the person they will care for. Before completing the recruitment process, take the time to see if they get along well.

- To build up a trust relationship, it is important to assess a volunteer's passions, interest and personality and match it with the personality, interests and needs of the young person in care. When matching it is also important to take into account the severity of the care needs of the young person and the volunteer's resilience in overcoming challenging situations.
- Take into account the background of every volunteer who you have interviewed and every young person in care and only go ahead with the matching process if you consider it likely that the volunteer and the young person will get along well and the volunteer will be dedicated to their volunteer engagement.
- Give the volunteer and the young person the opportunity to get acquainted with each other and monitor their interaction. Repeat the process if you are not quite sure if the match would work or not.

- If the match does not work out, it is best to discontinue the matching process, even if it disappoints the volunteer. The young person's health, safety and well-being comes first.

2.4. Volunteer training:

If a volunteer and a young person seem to get along well their involvement in your organisation can begin. Before finalising the recruitment process some hours need to be foreseen to give the volunteers a basic training on their role, what to do in case of crisis, the wider care framework and to discuss administrative matters.

- Volunteers will probably not have an education background in youth care, so it is important they have a proper induction of around 20h in several sessions. The care facility or the volunteering organisation contracted should ensure that all volunteers have been provided with the necessary initial training before coming into contact with the young persons. We suggest at least the following framework for their induction.
- Follow up closely by volunteers and young people on their placement and repeat or expand on the topics included based on their experiences.
 - Session 1:
 - An induction to the youth care setting.
 - Their role as a volunteer.
 - An overview of what is expected from them.
 - Session 2:
 - Training on the situation where the young person finds themselves.
 - Role of the family in provision of care.
 - Overcoming difficult/challenging/crisis situations:
 - Understanding that there is a "good reason" for challenging behaviour.
 - Self-awareness and communication in a crisis.
 - Include the provision of a clear contact and contact information.
 - Session 3:
 - The bigger care framework helps to understand volunteers the role they play.
 - Safeguarding and confidential information.
 - Session 4:
 - Discussing the practical side of the volunteering engagement and restating what is expected from the volunteer.
 - Finalising the administration by giving volunteers their volunteering contract.
 - Certify the learning process.
 - Signing of confidentiality agreement.

2.5. The use of the INCREASE curriculum:

Using this curriculum for volunteer training will require a different pedagogical approach than the one used with residential youth care workers. Activities and methods need to be adapted by the facilitator to make them tailored for volunteers with no experience and education in working with young people in care. It is recommended:

- To change the majority of the discussions based on partners' experiences to presentations or testimonies provided by experienced residential youth care workers.
- Moreover, those activities currently marked for distance learning will need to be adapted for use in a face-to face setting.
- Working with case studies should be the core of the training with volunteers. This allows for practical insights on how a normal care situation can evolve rapidly in a crisis situation and they give an insight in the dilemmas that residential youth care workers face. Discuss them in the presence of an experienced youth care worker using learning conversations (e.g. with the use of the Socrates method¹) to guide them towards the pros and cons of tackling a crisis situation and discuss what are the pros and cons of the course of action they have decided to take.
- When hosting discussions, it is important to acknowledge that volunteers may not have previous experience in overcoming these crisis situations. Therefore, it is important to stress that they are in a safe discussion space and that it is ok to make mistakes in the learning process.

2.6. INCREASE curriculum activities suitable for volunteers:

Below you can find reflections on the suitability of the activities of the INCREASE curriculum for volunteers. In this curriculum, many activities were incorporated that tackled a certain issue from different angles. It might not be possible to utilise all of the activities in the INCREASE curriculum. Therefore we have made an overview of those most suitable for them and suggestions on how they can be adapted. Bear in mind that not all activities need to be used and that their use depends on your existing training, volunteer's background and the role you envision them to play.

Module 0:

- Activity 0.1.1: This activity is a great way to start training session 1. It gives volunteers an idea of the challenges they might need to overcome and helps them to realise why a proper induction is important. It is best to use case studies, as participants will not be able to provide insights in youth care of their own.

Module 1:

- Activities 1.1.3 to 1.1.5: These fun activities can be used as openers for training days and help volunteers to realise the importance of group collaboration and communication. Best used during the session 2 and 3 when crisis situations are being discussed.
- Activities 1.2.2 to 1.2.8: the activities in this unit are important when their role is discussed in the first session. Volunteers need to realise that they need to react

¹ Facing History and Ourselves, *Socratic Seminar*, 2016.
<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/socratic-seminar>.

assertively when a crisis situation comes. While not going too much in detail, it is also important to give them an insight in explaining that their information will be used in the wider care framework. Stress to the volunteers that clear communication is important to gain and retain the trust of the young person.

- Activity 1.2.12, it is particularly important to discuss in detail how a volunteer should deal with confidential information, ideally during the third session. Provide volunteers with a clear framework on how to deal with confidential information disclosed to them by the young person in their care and how to deal with it without compromising their status as a mentor/trust person. Discuss a couple of case studies with the volunteer to give them practical insights in good do's and don'ts.
- Activity 1.3.2 to 1.3.12: While volunteers should not be expected to deal with crisis situations, it is good that they have an insight in the way it needs to be reported and how the information is processed. Discuss with them how and when confidential information needs to be disclosed and how this can impact their role as a mentor for the young person. Ensure you induct the volunteer properly in the confidential information procedure in your residential youth care home. Best used in session 3, but do not dwell to long on the documents, a simple introduction suffices. Module 2:
- Activity 2.3.1 to 2.3.2: During the second session, it is especially important that volunteers understand the differences between normal puberty behaviour and behaviour indicating a care crisis. Therefore, it important that they understand the reasons behind the sometimes challenging behaviour of young people in care. Despite the challenging behaviours, volunteers need to realise that they need to retain their composure in order to continue their role as a mentor for the young person. Use the case studies and discuss the puberty behaviour of participants and how this differs from the behaviour outlined in the case studies.

Module 3:

- Activities 3.1.1 to 3.1.3: During the third session, is crucial that volunteers understand that they are part of a much wider care framework and that they understand that any information they provide on the behaviour of a young person will be passed on to other actors. It is not needed to enter in detail, but it is good to know how the care arrangement fits in relationship with other services and in the legislative framework.
- Activities 3.2.2 to 3.2.4: These activities will help volunteers to understand why a wider care framework is important. Best used in session 3.

Module 4:

- Activities 4.1.1 to 4.1.4: It is very important that volunteers understand the role of parents in the provision of care as it is likely they will meet with the parents at one point. Experience has taught us that parents might try to win a volunteer's sympathy to press their case in the care arrangements. It is important that the volunteer takes a neutral attitude towards the parents and concentrates on their volunteering assignment and the well-being of the young person. The activities also help to give volunteers a better idea on how broken family relationships and the placement in a care setting

outside of the nuclear family might affect the behaviour of the young person. Best used in session 2.

- Activity 4.3.2: This is a very good activity to help volunteers realise that there is a good reason behind challenging behaviour. Provide a short overview of attachment disorders and let participants discuss how they would deal with a crisis situation, based on the examples provided and the lessons learned in earlier learning activities. This is a good activity to end session 2 with.

It is important that volunteers feel well-supported. After all, the induction outlined above gives them a minimum insight into what is required in their role. It is not possible to utilise all these activities in a 20h timeframe, and it is not necessary to do so. Follow up closely with your volunteer the difficulties they encounter. Foresee an additional learning moment every quarter to address the challenges identified by either re-using the activities or by using some of the activities you might not have had the time to use. Based on the needs you identify and the desires of the volunteer focus these trainings on improving volunteer' understanding of:

- Normal adolescent behaviour and crisis behaviour.
- The wider care framework and the role of members of staff in it.
- The role of parents and how they can best be involved in the provision of care.

Let your volunteers discuss together difficulties they have encountered and exchange opinions on how a case could have been better tackled. Let your first line staff join these discussions as well. They will get more of an insight in the behaviour of the young person and can contribute to the discussion with their professional insights. Do however, bear in mind that it is needed to have a safe place for volunteers to explore options, so do not let the professionals dominate the problem solving process. If done correctly, volunteers will grow in their role which will improve their well-being and that of the young people in care.