

## **Guide to referees for volunteers**

### **Why ask for referees?**

Obtaining references does give you, and the people you work with, added security. References can add to your picture of a volunteer, helping you to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and occasionally alerting you to serious problems.

The introduction of the Disclosure and Barring Service which means that checks can only be applied for if the volunteering opportunity falls within the statutory definition of 'regulated activity' means that asking for, and taking up, references are even more important.

A reference can also help to confirm the volunteer is who they say they are.

### **Who is a suitable referee?**

A lot of potential volunteers may not have been employed, or may have been out of employment for some time. In order to avoid creating barriers you will need to be flexible about who you will accept a reference from. As well as previous employers you could think about suggesting social workers, probation officers, religious ministers, tutors, people working in day centres or other services that the volunteer attends or anyone else that they have an official relationship with.

Some organisations actually decide that they want at least one reference to be a personal reference from a friend because these are the people who know the volunteer best.

### **Other conditions for a referee**

- decide the length of time you want the referee to have known the volunteer, if you ask for too long a period of time you will again be creating barriers for many people.
- bear in mind that if you have never had to provide a reference before it can be quite scary and seem very formal and off-putting. Explain why you take references, what you ask and what you do with them on the application form. Be clear that you will be contacting the referee for information about the volunteer.
- Occasionally someone will want to volunteer for you who is completely unable to provide a reference (i.e. an asylum seeker who has not been in the country very long). You will need to make a balanced assessment of the risks involved and decide whether there is a safe way of involving them. You may be able to adapt some of your



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procedures. For example, involving them only in group activities for the first few month while you get to know them better. If you do this you will have to explain to the volunteer why they are being treated differently so that they do not feel singled out.