

Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire

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VOLUNTEERING IN NORTH LANARKSHIRE

Have you ever thought about becoming a volunteer but don't really know where to start? Or, maybe you are just curious about finding out more about volunteering in your local area? If so, this introductory guide provides comprehensive information on the benefits of volunteering and how to get involved.

Remember that you can gain more detailed information on any of the information highlighted in this guide by contacting your local Volunteer Centre or Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire's office in Wishaw.

What is Volunteering?

Volunteering is often described as the art of giving your time and efforts for little or no reward. The reality of volunteering is, however, far from it; the personal and developmental benefits and opportunities that can be gained through volunteering cannot be emphasised enough.

The beauty of volunteering is that it can be what you want it to be. You don't have to give up large chunks of your spare time, or make huge commitments – it may be that you have one or two hours per week that you want to offer. Or it may be you feel ready to give more time than that. Volunteering is a commitment, but ultimately can fit around your needs.

Recent statistics estimated that some 21 million people in the UK give some time at some point in the year to volunteer – many of them without even knowing it – making a huge contribution to the economy in Great Britain.

Who Volunteers?

The answer, really, is anyone who wants to and feels they have time to offer to a worthwhile cause in their community.

Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire has successfully helped hundreds of people of ranging circumstances find one or more volunteering placement that suits their

own individual requirements in terms of skills, employment and other pending needs or wants.

People that Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire have helped into volunteering include young people, students, and school children, amongst other people. In fact, recent statistics show that volunteering is more popular amongst young people than any other age group.

And of course, you can too!

What Can You Do?

There is a wide and diverse range of volunteering opportunities available across Lanarkshire

These include advice giving, caring, helping adults read and write, volunteer driving, administration, environmental and conservation work, working with children and young people, helping people with physical and learning disabilities, volunteer mentoring and befriending, and many more general and specific opportunities. Volunteering opportunities also exist within schools and colleges across the local area.

The opportunities available are provided by local volunteer-engaging organisations and charities that recruit new helpers by contacting Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire.

For further information about the types of volunteering you can do, you can view a national database of volunteering opportunities online by visiting Volunteer Scotland at www.volunteerscotland.org.uk.

Why Do People Volunteer?

People volunteer for all kinds of reasons, both to help themselves and other people, In fact, most people who do volunteer achieve both of these things at the same time with great success.

Examples of why people volunteer include things like to use their spare time well, to help other people, to meet new people and to get involved in helping their community or simply just to gain another interest.

Some have more specific goals like to gain a new skill, to improve chances to gaining employment or entry into further education, while others volunteer because it is part of their values or beliefs.

Whatever the reason for first starting to volunteer, most who do volunteer soon find an added motivation to keep volunteering – the great enjoyment they gain from being involved and giving their time.

Particular Benefits of Volunteering for People

Teen volunteers say they get a lot from getting involved in community and youth work. And, it's not just about the 'feel good' factor of helping other people. Here are just some of the benefits:

- meeting new people and making friends
- feeling part of something worthwhile
- working as part of a team
- getting valuable work experience
- learning about yourself – what you want to get out of life, and what you're prepared to put into it
- learning new skills – from 'soft' skills like teamwork to practical job-related skills
- doing something you enjoy – and having some fun
- having something really positive to add to your CV.

Where Can You Volunteer?

In North Lanarkshire, literally hundreds of volunteering opportunities are available across all the towns and communities of the region.

The scene of your volunteering might be within a local group in a community centre in your local area, or in within a retail shop in the town centre, or outdoors in a community park, in your school, or something totally different. There is great diversity in surroundings that your volunteering might take place in.

How Do You Get Involved?

A good first step, one which you may already have made, is to contact Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire if you wish to volunteer in your local area.

By doing this, you will have the chance to discuss the type of volunteering work you might be interested in, what is available in your local area, and ask any

questions about becoming involved in volunteering work, with a Volunteer Development Adviser. Remember that all Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire staff are employed on the principle that they believe in the values of volunteering and that they will help you as much as they can.

From there your adviser can help you find a suitable volunteering placement in your local area that involves the kind of things you are interested in. You can also drop in and have a chat with one of our advisers at Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire's South Office in Wishaw.

You can also visit the Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire website at www.voluntaryactionnorthlanarkshire.org.uk for more information.

Key Information for Volunteers

Volunteering and Benefits

One common myth about participating in a voluntary activity is that it might affect any Social Security or Disability benefits you receive.

One chain of thought is that people who receive sickness or disability benefits cannot participate in volunteer work because it then proves they are fit enough either to take part in full employment or are clearly fit enough not to be receiving sickness or disability benefits.

The fact is that volunteering is generally viewed as a less-stressful activity, clearly different from a normal paid employment setting, and is in most instances viewed as “therapeutic” to long term sick or disabled persons receiving benefits.

Volunteering should not affect anyone's benefits as a result. If any individual has any issues or queries surrounding volunteering and their benefits, please contact Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire for advice and assistance.

Out of Pocket Expenses

Most good volunteer-involving organisations will offer out-of-pocket expenses to their volunteers.

It may be expenses incurred in travelling to and from your volunteering placement from home, either by bus or car. Once you start a volunteering placement, it is a good idea to ask your volunteer supervisor about expenses.

The provision of out-of-pocket expenses is entirely up to the particular volunteer group though – it might be the case that there is not enough funds to offer volunteers expenses or that you want to donate any expenses back to the organisation.

Starting in a Placement

Once a possibly suitable placement has been identified for a volunteer by Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire, the next step will usually involve either your adviser or the volunteer themselves arranging a suitable time to go down and chat with the person recruiting new volunteers.

Unlike a paid employment situation, very rarely will a volunteer have to go for an "interview" to get involved in a placement. It is more likely that a time will be arranged to have an informal chat with the supervisor and other volunteers or staff at the identified placement.

On the other hand, like a paid employment situation, it is up to the discretion of the supervisor whether you would be a suitable volunteer for that particular opportunity. There may be specific requirements such as training, particular time commitments, police checks, trial periods, inductions, etc that you may be required to go through.

However, don't be put off by those procedures - generally volunteer-engaging groups and volunteer supervisors are delighted to have people willing to give their time to help their cause and expectations of volunteers are not too high, which is usually why volunteering is such an enjoyable and refreshing experience for most who participate.

Police Checks for Volunteers

Because many of the volunteering opportunities available in North Lanarkshire involve volunteers coming into contact or working with children, young people or vulnerable adults, some volunteer-engaging organisations may request that you agree to a police check before you can start volunteering with them.

It is very rare that this will present a problem in allowing you to start in your volunteering placement; the only inconvenience may be it may take a few weeks for the check to be processed before you can start.

The important thing to remember is that the onus is on the volunteer-engaging organisation you are involved with to ask you about Police Checks and process the check for you.

You do not have to agree to a Police Check being run on you and the organisation cannot run a check on you without your permission, but you may not be accepted into your volunteering placement if you do not allow a check to be run. The results of the check should be treated with the utmost confidentiality and if procedures are followed correctly will only be known by one member of the volunteer-engaging group requesting the check to be processed. If you are worried about this it is a

good idea to ask your volunteer supervisor what policy they have in dealing with police checks for volunteers.

If you have a previous conviction that you are concerned might affect your volunteering placement, it is best to discuss this privately with your volunteer supervisor or your Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire adviser on first contact. Having past convictions does not mean you cannot become involved in volunteering in the present.

In many instances, mostly where volunteers are not commonly dealing with young people or members of the public, a Police Check will not be required. Some volunteer-engaging organisations may request references from you similar to an employment situation.

Training and Inductions

Some volunteering opportunities will require you to have specific skills or knowledge to perform your volunteering. For example, volunteers who work in serving or advising the public should have good customer care and listening skills, and be able to deal with difficult customers, or volunteers who befriend elderly people should be understanding and sympathetic to the needs of elderly people.

Many of these skills can be learned through working with staff and other volunteers over a period of time, but some volunteering organisations who require their volunteers to carry out specific tasks might induct their volunteers by putting them through a training course, possibly along with other new volunteers.

One good example is the Advisers Training Course provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau, training volunteers to be able to advise the public in specific issues such as benefit advice, legal matters, debt, etc.

Time Commitments

The time that you commit to your volunteering placement should be discussed with your volunteer supervisor.

Some placements might request that you commit a certain number of hours per week, or month. If this proves to be quite difficult for you to meet it is a good idea to discuss what days or hours might suit you better and work out an alternative.

Naturally, you can be relatively flexible because you are effectively doing someone a favour by volunteering your time, and it is only right that you are respected for doing this and given leeway with timing.

Generally, a suitable schedule can be worked out by having a chat with your volunteer supervisor or co-ordinator.

Respecting Confidentiality

Some volunteer opportunities involve dealing with personal or sensitive issues, particularly when volunteering in an advice giving, befriending, caring or disability setting.

One thing that volunteer-engaging organisations who work with vulnerable clients will stress is that you respect the confidentiality of those you are helping with your volunteering work. Certain groups or organisations may ask you to sign a document verifying that you will maintain client confidentiality.

Higher Support Needs Volunteering

One of the great things about volunteering is that because there are less pressures and expectations involved than there would be in a paid employment setting, there are tremendous opportunities for people who have higher than average support needs to get involved and make a difference in their community.

When Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire is sourcing a placement for any individual, utmost in our consideration is any support need (this can range from learning or physical disabilities to particular illnesses or diseases) that the individual has. So, the message is don't be put off, reluctant or discouraged if you think your support need will affect your volunteering - there is a suitable volunteering placement in North Lanarkshire for everyone.

Getting Registered With Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire

When you first contact Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire about volunteering, you may hear the Volunteer Adviser you speak to ask you about "registering" with the organisation.

This simply refers to you being logged as a Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire client and allows the Volunteer Adviser to complete a registration form, which will help us find you a suitable volunteering placement. By registering, you will have the chance to ask question and gain information about volunteering locally.

When you are registered your details are added to Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire's database. This means if any suitable local volunteering placements arise in the future that would be suited to your interests, skills or needs, a Volunteer Adviser can contact you with information about that placement.

Want more information?

For further information about any aspect of volunteering, please contact:

Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire

South Office

84 Main Street

Wishaw

ML2 7AB

Tel: 01698 358866

Fax: 01698 358878

E-mail: dutyofficer@vanl.co.uk

www.voluntaryactionnorthlanarkshire.org.uk

Some other useful contacts

- Volunteer Centre Network Scotland - <http://www.volunteerscotland.org.uk/>
- Volunteer Development Scotland - <http://www.vds.org.uk/>
- MV Volunteering Passport - <http://www.mvvolunteeringpassport.org.uk/>
- Project Scotland - <http://www.projectscotland.co.uk/>
- Princes Trust - http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/support_us/volunteer.aspx
- Do-it (Volunteering for under 16s) - <http://www.do-it.org.uk/wanttovolunteer/aboutvolunteering/volunteeringforunder16s>
- G-Nation - <http://www.g-nation.co.uk/>

