

VOLUNTARY ACTION SHETLAND - SHETLAND BEFRIENDING SCHEME

PERSONAL SAFETY AND RISK ASSESSMENT POLICY

In line with Voluntary Action Shetland's Safe Working Practise Guidelines and the Shetland Befriending Scheme's Lone Working Policy, The purpose of this policy is to provide reasonable measures and procedures to protect staff, volunteers and the service users from situations in which their personal safety could be at risk or their honesty and integrity questioned. Any work with people carries some level of risk and individual volunteers will be encouraged to develop an awareness of the situations in which they feel more vulnerable during the training programme.

Definitions and approach

Shetland Befriending Scheme defines violence and aggression as:

- Any behaviour towards the service users/employees/volunteers of the scheme that has a damaging physical or psychological effect upon them as a result of their involvement in the scheme

The scheme believes that:

- All violence to service users/employees/volunteers is unacceptable whatever form it takes and whatever reasons are cited for it
- The risks to service users/employees/volunteers of carrying out their work should be recognised and the organisation should take action to minimize these risks
- The effects of violence on individuals can be potentially damaging and stressful
- Dealing with or being subject to violent behaviour is not considered to be a failure on the part of the service user/employee/volunteer

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is a technique for identifying and controlling hazards associated with the schemes activities.

- A hazard is anything that has the potential to cause harm
- Risk is the likelihood of it causing harm and the degree of harm it could cause

The risk assessment process will be used for all activities which the service user and volunteer may be involved in during their meetings.

It will also be used as part of the referral process for the service user with a section in the referral/application form asking for information regarding potential risk.

Risk assessment involves identifying all hazards, assessing the risk and putting in places measures to control unacceptable risks. Assessing risk requires detailed knowledge of the activities and working practices normally undertaken by the people doing the work. Risk assessments have been undertaken for all the activities presently done by the befriending Scheme and these will be updated on an annual basis. Any new activities to be undertaken will have a risk assessment completed.

At the introductory meeting between the service user and scheme staff, a written agreement will be drawn up between them regarding the type of activities the service user wishes to do with their volunteer.

For activities with the service user, scheme staff will fully discuss the proposed activities with the young person's parents or carers or the 16+ adult and complete an activity risk assessment form.

Should the service user and volunteer decide that they wish to participate in any other activity in the future which is not stated in the original written agreement the volunteer will seek the approval from scheme staff. Volunteers will be given full guidance regarding the procedures for taking part in activities out with the original agreement.

Volunteers have a responsibility to observe scheme policy and guidance and not put themselves in situations where there is undue risk.

Guidance on Volunteers undertaking meetings in a Service Users Home

Most meetings between volunteers and the service user will take place outside the home and meetings will not occur in the volunteer's home, however there may be a time when a meeting may take place in the 16+ service users own household but only in exceptional circumstances. The guidance below is to ensure the personal safety of the scheme's volunteers:

- Before consent can be given the scheme staff will undertake a home visit to do an environmental risk assessment of the 16+ service user's property
- When home visits take place it will be to participate in a variety of activities that have been agreed with the scheme such as cooking, gardening, watching a DVD, chatting over a coffee, etc. These visits can take place during the day and early evening, i.e. 6pm to 9pm. Under no circumstances can the volunteer stay overnight

- If volunteers are in any way unsure about undertaking home visits with a service user, they have the right to refuse

Managing a Threatening, Violent or Aggressive Situation

Basic guidance that volunteers should observe includes the following points:

- Give the person as much personal space as possible
- Try to stay calm, be aware of your own voice, speak slowly and clearly
- Be aware of your body language. Avoid an aggressive stance or mimicking what the aggressor is doing
- Be aware of your own feelings and reactions and do not let these effect your approach to the situation
- Try to sit down, show that you do not want to fight or be aggressive towards them
- Do not respond aggressively

If you cannot diffuse the situation you must get away:

- Trust your instincts
- Prepare to get away – assess possible escape routes
- Try to keep your exit route clear
- Don't turn you back on the aggressor; move gradually backwards
- If the situation turns violent get away as fast as you can; aim towards a place where you know there will be people

If you cannot get away:

- Tell the person to stop what they are doing
- Shout out or scream; your voice is your best defense
- Give the command to call the police

If you have to protect yourself:

- Use self defense only as the last resort where de-escalation has failed and you are being attacked
- If you have to defend yourself do it quickly and this will provide an element of surprise
- Only use the level of restraint that is warranted by the attack. There are certain no go areas such as groin, breasts, eyes or forcing joints against their natural movement
- It is important that you show that you do not want to fight and disengage and leave the area as soon as it is safe to do so

Remember that avoiding high-risk situations is the best form of ensuring safety. Adhere to the policy and guidance of the scheme. Observe your boundaries. Do not put yourself at risk.

Reporting of incidents

In the event of an incident occurring in which a volunteer felt threatened or had to deal with an aggressive situation during a meeting this should be reported immediately to the scheme staff. In the event that a staff member is unavailable or it is out-of-hours, volunteers can use their out-of-hours contacts. Volunteers will be provided with relevant contact numbers for out-of-hours support at their Keeping Children and Adults Safe initial training session.

An incident form should be completed and placed on the volunteer's personal file and logged in the office incident/accident file. All incidents that have been reported by a volunteer will be subject to a review by scheme staff who will then sanction appropriate action should this be necessary. It will also be notified to the Executive Officer of VAS, and to the police. The scheme staff will provide immediate support to the volunteer/service user involved.

Change in Befriending Relationship

If any volunteer feels the situation has changed in the befriending relationship and there are new/increased feelings of threat or danger (for whatever reason), this must be discussed at once with scheme staff. Shetland Befriending Scheme does not encourage a culture of bravado! If a volunteer feels uncomfortable, that is good enough reason to review the match.

Aftercare

Volunteers will be offered the opportunity of support to discuss any accidents or incidents that have occurred with scheme staff. One of the aims of providing aftercare is to discuss any action that could be taken to avoid a similar situation arising in the future. The option to take some time out from the scheme will be available to the volunteer if he/she felt the need.

Support will also be provided to the service user to discuss and explore the reasons for the aggressive/inappropriate behaviour. The aim will be to provide an opportunity to the service user to reflect on the circumstances that led to the behaviour. The service user's responsibilities will be reiterated and scheme staff will assess whether it is appropriate for the match to continue. In the event that the match does continue the situation will be monitored closely.

Young Person under 16 years running Away From Volunteer during Meetings

Should a young person run away from a volunteer when they are out on a meeting, the volunteer will have to carefully assess risk. In all cases the most appropriate procedure to take would be to follow them and see where they go. If the volunteer manages to catch up with the young person, attempts should be made by the volunteer to determine what is going on and make attempts to resolve it. At no stage should the volunteer restrain the young person.

Should it be the case that the volunteer loses the young person, the volunteer should return to the young person's home, if they are in the vicinity, and report it to their parents/carers. If they are not, the parents/carers should be contacted by phone.

Guidance is to be provided initially by the parents/carers, for example, *"it's okay he will come home on the 5pm bus"* if the young person has absconded in the afternoon. In this situation an agreement is to be made with the family that the volunteer will phone the young person's home at the expected time of arrival to ensure he/she returned safe and well.

Depending upon the mood of the young person it may be appropriate for the Police to be contacted. Certain variables will need to be considered, i.e. the time of day the young person ran away, the weather conditions, what has upset them, how they were emotionally and if a volunteer has increased concern for the young person's safety for any significant reason.

Any type of incident like this must be reported to the scheme staff and an incident form completed.

16+ Adult chooses to leave the meeting or fails to abide by Scheme Boundaries

A 16+adult due to their age can make the decision to end the meeting at any stage.

A volunteer should respect this right and not attempt to argue with the 16+adult. Only where the 16+ adult is in a very distressed state should the volunteer try to ascertain what the issues might be and support them. In this situation it may be appropriate to contact the Police if the volunteer feels that the 16+adult is in danger of seriously harming himself or herself.

In the event that a 16+adult refuses to adhere to the schemes boundaries and safety requirements the volunteer should ask the 16+adult, in a calm and collected manner, to alter their behaviour. The volunteer should not confront them and if the behaviour does not alter just quietly inform the 16+adult that they are leaving and will contact them to arrange another meeting.

Incidents like this should be recorded in the volunteers monitoring sheets and reported to scheme staff.

In terms of 16+adults with additional support needs the protocol for the UNDER 16 YEARS should be adopted.

Other Risks

It is unwise for volunteers to give their home address/telephone number to the service user at the beginning of their relationship unless they feel comfortable to do so. Shetland Befriending Scheme will never disclose the home address/telephone number of volunteers to service users but will relay messages and redirect mail.

If volunteers are taking the service user on an outing which involves using their car, volunteers must tell their car insurers that they are using your car in this way – it may incur an extra admin charge, but it is worth doing for volunteers own peace of mind. If premiums are affected volunteers are asked to contact scheme staff.

Volunteers should be wary of accepting gifts from service users.

Volunteers must not be responsible for any service user's money, ATM cards or card pin numbers whilst out with the person or as any part of the befriending match. Should there be a request for a volunteer to take care of any wallets, purses, cards, etc. from either the service user or parent/carer, the volunteer must refuse and leave such belongings in the care of the service user.

Volunteers should take care not to put themselves in positions where they could come under suspicion or take part in activities or behaviour that could be misinterpreted.

Adverse weather conditions – In the event that a volunteer feels that the weather conditions are too poor to progress with the arranged meeting with the service user, they should notify the service user (or parent/guardian/legal representative, if appropriate) as soon as possible.