

Volunteering

What is volunteering

A volunteer is someone who offers to work for free for someone other than a close relative. Volunteers do not get paid, except for out-of-pocket expenses. These are intended to make sure that they are not worse off financially by being a volunteer. They may get training needed to do, or to improve, their voluntary work.

Examples of out-of-pocket expenses include:

- travel
- phone calls made from home whilst volunteering
- meals
- childcare or care of other dependants.

Voluntary work is often done for charities and not-for-profit organisations.

It does not count as voluntary work if you could be paid for your work, but have chosen not to be.

Examples of voluntary work include:

- helping residents in a homeless hostel
- visiting hospital patients
- helping to clean up a local conservation area
- giving advice in a Citizens Advice Bureau.

Unpaid volunteers do not have a contract of employment with the organisation they volunteer for. This means that you cannot be sued by the organisation if you fail to do your work.

There is no limit on the number of hours a week you can be a volunteer. This also applies to most people who are getting benefits. However, if you are getting certain benefits, there may be conditions that you have to meet in order to continue getting benefit whilst you are a volunteer.

Volunteering and benefits

If you are getting some benefits, such as State Retirement Pension or Pension Credit, you do not need to tell anyone when you take up voluntary work. However, if you are getting other benefits, you may be expected to tell your local Jobcentre Plus office.

Volunteering and Jobseeker's Allowance

If you are unemployed and getting Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), there is no limit to the number of hours you can volunteer. It must be reasonable for the person or organisation you're volunteering with not to pay you and you must meet the following conditions. You must:

- tell your local Jobcentre Plus office that you are volunteering
- not get paid, except for out-of-pocket expenses, which do not count towards the JSA earnings disregard
- continue to actively look for work (volunteering may count towards this, if it improves your chances of finding a job)
- continue to be available for work for up to 40 hours a week
- be able to be contacted if a job opportunity becomes available
- be available to attend an interview within 48 hours and take up work within one week
- tell your local Jobcentre Plus office about any payments you get, including any expenses you are claiming back. You may have to show the Jobcentre Plus office receipts for these payments, so you should make sure you hold onto them.

Volunteering and sickness benefits

If you are unable to work because you are sick or disabled and are claiming one of the following benefits, volunteering should not affect your benefit:

- Employment and Support Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment.

You must receive no payment for your work, other than out-of-pocket expenses.

Before starting voluntary work, you should tell your local Jobcentre Plus office what you are intending to do.

If you are getting Incapacity Benefit, you must be available to go to work-focussed interviews. You must tell your local Jobcentre Plus office about any payments that you get.

Volunteering and Income Support

Volunteering should not affect your Income Support as long as you are only being paid out-of-pocket expenses.

You must let your local Jobcentre Plus office know when you start volunteering, and tell them about any payments you get. You must be able to go to work-focussed interviews.

Volunteering and Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction

If you are getting Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction, you must tell your local council when you start volunteering. You should also tell them about any payments you get.

Volunteering and Carer's Allowance

If you are caring for someone who is severely disabled and you are getting Carer's Allowance, your benefit will not be affected by volunteering unless it prevents you from providing care for at least 35 hours each week. You must not be working for a close relative, and must receive no payment for your work, other than out-of-pocket expenses. You should tell your local Jobcentre Plus office before you start voluntary work.

Volunteering if you are a lone parent on Income Support

If you are a lone parent getting Income Support, there is no limit to the number of hours a week you can volunteer. You must not be working for a close relative, and must receive no payment for your work, other than out-of-pocket expenses. You should tell your local Jobcentre Plus office before you start your voluntary work.

Further help

Community Service Volunteers (CSV)

CSV is an organisation which promotes volunteering. Their website is www.csv.org.uk

GOV.UK

The GOV.UK website has information about volunteering in England and Wales at www.gov.uk. This includes a tool that allows you to search for volunteering opportunities in your neighbourhood. In Scotland, check what opportunities are available at www.volunteerscotland.org.uk.

Citizens Advice

The Citizens Advice service helps people solve their legal, consumer and other problems by providing free advice, and by influencing policymakers. To find out more about volunteering opportunities for Citizens Advice, in England and Wales, go to: www.citizensadvice.org. For volunteering opportunities in Scotland, see www.cas.org.uk.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

The DWP has produced a Guide to Volunteering While on Benefits. You can view the guide on the DWP's website at: www.dwp.gov.uk.

This fact sheet is produced by [Citizens Advice](#), an operating name of The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. It is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as a full statement of the law. The information applies to England, Wales and Scotland.

This fact sheet was last updated on 12 April 2013 and is reviewed regularly. If it is some time since you obtained this fact sheet, please contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau to check if it is still correct. Or visit our website - www.adviceguide.org.uk - where you can download an up-to-date copy.