
Working together to promote volunteering

Volunteer Centres and Jobcentre Plus



The logo for Jobcentre Plus, consisting of a green rounded rectangle with the text "jobcentreplus" in white, lowercase, sans-serif font, where "job" is in white and "centreplus" is in yellow.

Department for
Work and Pensions

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“On behalf of Volunteering England, I am very pleased to have signed an agreement to work together with Jobcentre Plus to promote understanding and improve communications about the opportunities of volunteering. We believe that organisations which rely on volunteers will benefit from a wider and more diverse pool of people prepared to give their time, as will the communities in which they are based.”

Mike Locke,
Director of Public Affairs, Volunteering England

Introduction

In April 2010, Volunteering England and Jobcentre Plus signed an agreement to promote the value of volunteering to jobseekers in England and tackle any barriers they might face to volunteering.



At the heart of the agreement is a commitment from both organisations to take action to promote the value of volunteering to unemployed people and remove the artificial barriers that can prevent them taking up an opportunity, such as the mistaken belief that benefits claimants can only volunteer for 16 hours a week or that they cannot be reimbursed for expenses.

A close working relationship

Key to achieving this is a close working relationship and open communication between branches of Jobcentre Plus and Volunteer Centres. Partnerships at the local level will make sure that Jobcentre Plus staff understand the benefits of volunteering for unemployed people, and know how and when to advise their customers to visit a Volunteer Centre.

Helping people into work

Working together is going to be even more important given the Government's plans to help people into work. Chris Grayling MP, Minister for Employment, has urged the voluntary sector to provide unemployed people *"with the opportunity to spend some of their time volunteering while they are looking for work, as a way of developing new skills that can really help when it comes to looking for a job"*.

The Government has said that the Jobcentre Plus website will promote volunteering opportunities and advisers will *"proactively promote volunteering to people while they are looking to work"*.

An achievable goal

What follows are some examples of how relationships between Jobcentre Plus and Volunteer Centres can be fostered and the positive activity they can lead to. Whilst the initiatives are diverse they share a key element: they were planned locally in response to local needs.

We hope they will help you in developing an innovative relationship in your area, but we know there are many more examples of great practice out there. If you have one that you'd like to share with us, please do let us know.

Dr Justin Davis Smith
Chief Executive, Volunteering England

Black Country Volunteer Centres: the importance of a personal relationship

The Black Country Volunteer Centres - Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton - work with a named member of Jobcentre Plus staff. A personal relationship means that information and feedback can quickly be circulated. For example, a recent flyer resulted in far fewer inappropriate referrals to Volunteer Centres, with Jobcentre Plus staff calling to discuss possible opportunities before referring a claimant.

The creation of the Black Country Volunteer Centre Partnership has meant that the Jobcentre Plus liaison is able to meet with all four Volunteer Centres as needed and Jobcentre Plus staff have provided information sessions at Dudley Volunteer Organisers Network meetings. This has led to written information about volunteering being circulated to all Jobcentre Plus staff in the area, and presentations on benefits for staff and volunteers from various organisations.



"We have found our close relationship with the local Territory Manager to be invaluable. They have listened to our concerns and taken them on board, ensuring that local Jobcentre Plus staff are fully aware of the support that Volunteer Centres can offer their clients."

"I think we are certainly fortunate to have this rapport and even though new developments may come along, we have a communication channel open to raise our views and concerns locally."

Eileen Fielding
Development Officer, Dudley Volunteer Centre

Trafford Volunteer Centre: feel free to have some fun!

Trafford Volunteer Centre has built up relationships with several Jobcentre Plus branches over the years, including at local cross sector meetings. These contacts increased significantly during the Department for Work and Pensions volunteering brokerage scheme, with no clients sent to the Volunteer Centre without an appointment being made first.

Most recently, Jobcentre Plus advisers and staff from the Volunteer Centre found out a little more about each other's work at a 'speed dating' event. After about five minutes of chatting with an adviser, Volunteer Centre staff moved along to the next table, so everyone met everyone else. As well as being a valuable opportunity to increase understanding, it demonstrated that there are more ways than one to meet your local partners.

Voluntary Action Maidstone & Malling Area Volunteer Bureau: a programme for change

Voluntary Action Maidstone and Malling Area Volunteer Bureau worked with Jobcentre Plus to pilot a six month programme of partnership working, funded by Kent County Council, with the aim of raising awareness of volunteering amongst Jobcentre Plus staff and claimants.

A member of Jobcentre Plus staff was designated 'Volunteering Champion' and received an induction from both Volunteer Centres. This contact has been vital for communication, ensuring that staff on both sides of the relationship have known who to go to. Key activities included workshops for Jobcentre Plus managers and advisers, leaflets promoting volunteering and a one-to-one advice event for unemployed people.

All involved agreed that the pilot was beneficial in a number of ways, including an increase in the quantity and quality of information about volunteering that is available to unemployed people. There is now a much better understanding of volunteering and the benefits for people who are unemployed amongst Jobcentre Plus staff.



"The project has really helped us reach out to unemployed people in the area and offer our service to those who may not have considered volunteering before."

"It has also helped Jobcentre Plus staff and customers see volunteering as a great way for anyone to boost confidence and self esteem, not just to gain specific experience or new skills."

Charlotte Osborn-Forde, Manager, Maidstone Volunteer Centre

"My advisers now know far more about local volunteer opportunities and they are much more confident in advising customers about volunteering and referring them to the Volunteer Centres. Referrals to volunteering have trebled in the last three months. This means that those customers are moving closer to finding work as well as having useful information to record on CVs and discuss at job interviews. The project has proved a win-win."

Lynn Coveney, Business Manager, Jobcentre Plus

Oswestry Volunteer Centre: as simple as some information

Oswestry Volunteer Centre is a member of a group that has been considering initiatives to tackle unemployment in Shropshire, including the role of volunteering in helping people develop new skills. To further this aim, the Centre has developed a folder containing information for both Jobcentre Plus advisers and unemployed people.

Its aim is to clarify rules about volunteering whilst receiving benefits, such as claiming expenses, and promote the benefits of volunteering. As well as clear, concise information, the folder will include case studies that demonstrate how volunteering has helped people into work. Once the project has been rolled out in Oswestry, it's hoped that it will be extended to the entire county.



“Oswestry Volunteer Centre is glad of the opportunity to work with JCP in North Shropshire.”

“We hope that the volunteering information packs we have developed will help promote the many benefits of volunteering to those seeking work.”

Laurel Roberts, Chief Officer, Oswestry Community Action

“Jobcentre Plus in Shropshire has always valued the opportunities volunteering gives to people out of work and as such we have developed a working partnership with local Volunteer Centres. The new Work Together initiative gives us a chance to build on this relationship to encourage unemployed people to take up volunteering to help build and retain their skills.”

Kairen Francis, Local Partnership Manager, JCP Shropshire

Further information

jobcentreplus

www.direct.gov.uk/employment

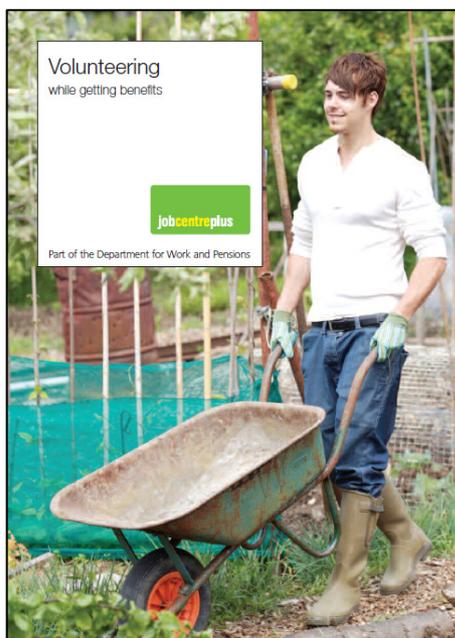
Contact details for local branches of Jobcentre Plus can be found on the Directgov website.



policy@volunteering.org.uk

Please feel free to email us if you want to talk about the ideas in this publication, or if you want to tell us about your experience of working with Jobcentre Plus.

Volunteering while getting benefits



As you may know, Jobcentre Plus produced *Volunteering while getting benefits* to make sure unemployed people know and understand what they can and cannot do while claiming benefits.

The leaflet dispels the myths by stating the rules clearly and concisely. In particular, it tells claimants:

- What volunteering is, and what it isn't
- That they can volunteer as much as they like, including full time, as long as they continue looking for paid work
- That they can be reimbursed for expenses incurred whilst volunteering.

We're still hearing that some Jobcentre Plus advisers are giving incorrect advice. Where you hear of this, direct the potential volunteer to *Volunteering while getting benefits*, which can be found on the Directgov website.