



VOLUNTEERING

within the
NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE

Policy to Manage Volunteer Involvement

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Section 1:

Purpose

The Northern Ireland Prison Service has developed this volunteer policy to recognise the contribution of volunteers to life in the prisons in Northern Ireland and to create an enabling and facilitating environment for volunteering to develop in line with best practice.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service aims to provide an efficient, effective, modern and affordable service which is focused on the rehabilitation of people in our care. Volunteers can play an important role in this journey.

Volunteering is defined as:

“The commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment or individuals outside, (or in addition to) one’s immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice”

(Department for Communities, Join in Get Involved, Build a Better Future 2012)

The policy is supported by a volunteer development strategy and a range of procedures which are applied consistently across the areas of work and which aim to reflect the voluntary nature of our relationship with volunteers.

Section 2:

Values and Vision

This policy recognises that volunteering can take many forms within prisons through a range of organisations that facilitate volunteer involvement and importantly through the involvement of prisoners and ex-prisoners as volunteers. This policy does not extend to people currently in the care of the Northern Ireland Prison Service as there are other opportunities for peer mentoring and volunteering provided by the three individual establishments. Therefore this policy will focus on those voluntary organisations that provide volunteers for work with people during their sentence and in the important period post release. Volunteers can prove invaluable in the assistance of reducing offending through supporting the management and rehabilitation of offenders.

Volunteering roles include activities such as;

- a. Mentoring
- b. Befriending
- c. Delivering therapy sessions (including addiction therapy, providing a listening ear, support and advisory services)



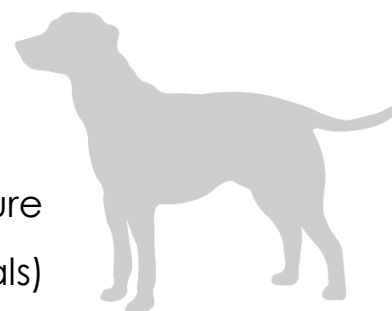
d. Delivering educational and vocational programmes

e. Facilitating a choir

f. Counselling

g. Giving spiritual guidance

h. Therapeutic projects (such as horticulture
and the handling of companion animals)



The Northern Ireland Prison Service values the involvement of volunteers in our work as an expression of active citizenship, bringing the community into the Prisons and providing independent support and care to prisoners. It recognises volunteers as an important part of our team, with a distinctive but complementary role alongside paid staff.

We believe that volunteering is a mutually beneficial experience with the Northern Ireland Prison Service benefiting from the skills, experience and enthusiasm of volunteers and in turn we believe that volunteers should gain personal benefits such as skills development, satisfaction, and increased wellbeing from their volunteering experience. We are committed to facilitating volunteers in a way that ensures the needs of both parties are met.

While the benefit to the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the volunteers is, of course, important, it is the improvement of the outcomes for prisoners and their families that is at the focus of why we welcome volunteers.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service strives to create a diverse and inclusive organisation and therefore is committed to ensuring equality of access to high quality volunteer opportunities and equality of treatment for those who volunteer in our establishments in all our policies and practices.

We value the role of voluntary and community organisations in facilitating volunteer involvement across a range of areas and will strive to develop and support these partnerships including with others such as the Probation Board for Northern Ireland where sentences include a licence element. Volunteers can play an important role when a person moves from custody to the community and given our knowledge that this is a challenging time, it is critical that there is clear contracting and oversight of the ending of a volunteering relationship.



Section 3:

Approach to Volunteering

A Volunteer Coordinator role has been assigned to a member of Northern Ireland Prison Service staff in Resettlement Branch who is responsible for facilitating volunteer involvement, including overseeing the implementation of this policy.

Resettlement Branch has responsibility for relationships with voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations working within the prisons. The role of the coordinator will involve developing and promoting volunteer opportunities across the Prisons, communicating with all the partner organisations and prison personnel, ensuring ease of access for volunteers to their volunteering opportunities. The coordinator role will also include assisting with security clearance issues, ensuring that volunteers are inducted, trained and supported (by both NIPS and the partner organisation), addressing any complaints or issues, ensuring that staff are aware and supportive of volunteer involvement and that volunteers get recognised for what they do.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service will identify and discuss potential volunteer roles with partner organisations, Governors from the various prison departments and relevant Trade Unions to ensure that they will add value to our work.





Volunteers can be involved at appropriate levels in roles which complement, but never substitute, the work of paid staff. They will not be used in times of industrial action to do the work of paid staff. They may continue with their regular tasks but will not be asked to undertake additional duties and should never be seen as an opportunity to reduce funding in an area.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service expects all organisations providing volunteers to have appropriate insurance in place to protect volunteers while carrying out their volunteer role and will endeavour to provide adequate and appropriate facilities, equipment and resources to enable volunteers to fulfil their roles.

Section 4:

Induction and familiarisation



The Northern Ireland Prison Service strives to address any barriers to volunteering in the prisons ensuring that the induction and familiarisation process is as straightforward as possible. In collaboration with the partner organisation, we will provide all external volunteers with an induction before commencing their role which can continue as required during the settling in period. The induction provides background information on the Northern Ireland Prison Service, explains its structures and procedures, describes the volunteer role and the work team and outlines how s/he will be supported, including practical information on the prison estate, health and safety, confidentiality, and code of behaviour.

Recruitment and selection of external volunteers is the responsibility of partner organisations, however NIPS will work closely with partner organisations to ensure that volunteer opportunities are widely promoted, and recruitment and selection methods are appropriate for volunteering roles within prison establishments. We are committed to involving all sections of the community as volunteers and will support partner organisations to identify and target any under-represented group(s).

Section 5:

Guidance

All volunteers' details are protected in line with general data protection regulations.

Volunteers' expenses for travel and dependent care are provided by their supporting organisation to ensure that volunteers are not out of pocket in any way while carrying out their volunteering activity.

All complaints about or by volunteers will be taken seriously. Any complaints or concerns should be reported immediately to the NIPS Volunteer Co-ordinator:

Address:

NIPS Volunteer Coordinator
Resettlement Branch
HMP Maghaberry
Old Road
Lisburn
BT28 2PT

Email:

NIPS.VolunteerCoordinator@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk



Section 6:

Responsibilities

All volunteers should be provided with a written role description by their organisation, outlining the purpose, tasks and main expectations and boundaries of their role. This role is reviewed at least once a year with the volunteer's designated supervisor (in the partner organisation) and the Volunteer Coordinator. It will then be communicated in writing to the volunteer.



Expectations of partner organisations and the Northern Ireland Prison Service in relation to volunteering are outlined and agreed in advance through a written Partnership Agreement. Volunteers are provided with a written letter of welcome, which outlines the expectations and responsibilities of both the volunteer and the Northern Ireland Prison Service, while fully acknowledging the voluntary nature of the relationship. This agreement may be reviewed at any time with the consent of the volunteer and his/her supervisor within the partner organisation, and/or Volunteer Coordinator, including during the initial review meeting at the end of the settling in period.

Section 7:

Management of Volunteers

All volunteer placements are subject to a settling in period, the length of which depends on the nature and hours of the voluntary work. During this period NIPS recommends that volunteers are given additional support and a review meeting between the volunteer and his/her supervisor is held at the end of the settling in period to ensure that all parties are satisfied with the arrangement.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service is committed to supporting the effectiveness of volunteers. Volunteers are provided with relevant training (some of which is compulsory eg safeguarding, security procedures) to help them carry out their role and keep themselves safe. They may be offered other training courses running through the Northern Ireland Prison Service that could be relevant to their voluntary work, subject to the approval of their supervisors and availability of places.

We recognise the importance of the support provided to volunteers by their allocated supervisor and therefore recommend that a Service Level Agreement stipulates a minimum level of contact between the volunteer and the supervisor for the duration of the volunteering contract.



NIPS recognise that the relationship between the volunteer and prisoner can continue post release and in situations where the person is subject to post release supervision by PBNI, it will be important for relevant information to be shared with the Supervising Probation Officer. It will also be important that the involvement of a volunteer is included in the pre-release work plan / personal development plan.

Section 8:

Implementation

The Northern Ireland Prison Service recognises the important role that volunteers fulfil across a range of areas in the Prisons. It endeavours to communicate with volunteers in appropriate ways to ensure that they have up to date information about their area of work. Equally it recognises the importance of seeking volunteers' ideas and opinions at regular intervals and so will implement methods to do this such as an annual volunteer survey or annual volunteer roadshow.

We recognise that volunteers can have a very positive impact on the lives of prisoners and on the services provided by the Northern Ireland Prison Service. We will aim to gather evidence of the difference made by volunteers and report on outcomes achieved by monitoring volunteers' volunteering journey within the Northern Ireland Prison Service and into the community, gaining feedback from them and those they have engaged with.

Opportunities will be sought for Northern Ireland Prison Service staff to recognise the value of volunteers' contributions and communicate their appreciation to volunteers both formally and informally. To this end Resettlement Branch will organise an annual event at which the work of volunteers will be highlighted and recognised.



This policy will be reviewed every three years to ensure that it reflects best practice for volunteering in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

“Volunteers don’t get paid, not because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless.”

~ Sherry Anderson



Volunteers