



The spectrum of volunteer participation – discussion starters

The [spectrum of volunteer participation](#) (eden project communities 2021) explains, with examples, the difference between formal and informal volunteering. They are not distinct categories, however; volunteering in some contexts lies in between the two. Sometimes 'informal' volunteering may in fact be supported by formal, constituted organisations.

The information sheet illustrates how volunteering activity of different kinds can complement and work together - making their combined impact greater than 'the sum of the parts'.

DISCUSSION STARTERS - PURPOSE

These discussion starters are designed to encourage you to think further about the risks or 'pitfalls' that can be associated with volunteering. We do not expect life to be risk free ('nothing ventured, nothing gained' as the saying goes), but approaches to risk and its management are one of the things that distinguish informal and formal volunteering.

Responsible volunteering of any kind, means having due regard for the welfare others- this includes being aware of possible harms or unintended negative consequences of what we do. How we minimise or manage risks will depend largely on personal judgement and experience (in the case of the most informal expressions of volunteering) and on organisational structure and culture (in the case of more formal volunteering).

In the scenarios below, what action or actions would, in your view, be appropriate and proportionate to the context?

A CASE STUDY SCENARIO

Sam lost his wife, Mary, 15 months ago. He and Mary had 'done everything together' and he cannot face social activities alone. His stepson lives abroad and visits or phones occasionally. Contact with friends has all but stopped and he feels not only alone but lonely too. Sam has lost interest in food and has lost too much weight. Mary was the one to organise household finances and Sam struggles to keep track and pay the bills. The latest bills include some red 'final warnings'.

Sam is supported in different ways by 5 different volunteers.

ALEX

Alex lives next door. She has noticed that Sam is no longer out in the garden much and that he looks unkempt and sad. When she goes shopping she asks Sam if he needs anything. When she cooks she sometimes makes extra and pops round with a portion for Sam.

As time goes by, Alex finds that she is doing almost all of Sam's shopping. She notices that he is cooking less for himself and coming to rely more upon the meals she takes round. She fears that she is becoming his unpaid carer and wonders if her kindness is making him unnecessarily dependent on her.

Question: What should Alex do now?

AMIT

Amit is on a 'WhatsApp' group for the street where Sam lives. Its members use the group to exchange information, to ask for or offer help and to organise occasional events. Amit is aware that Sam doesn't have a smartphone but makes a point of keeping him in touch. Now Sam has help with cutting his lawn and he gives most of his apple crop to Amit to distribute to a few local families

Amit has agreed with Sam, that he will arrange for someone to prune his apple tree. He puts out a message on the local neighbourhood whatsapp group, including a follow up message stating that a ladder and pruning equipment can be found in the shed, which is left unlocked.

The following day, Sam notices that the shed door is open and items of garden equipment have disappeared.

Question: What happens next?

JANE

Jane volunteers in the local community centre two days a week, which runs a charity shop, foodbank and a programme of activities. Jane talks to Sam about what is going on at the centre and what might be of interest or help to him. When he subsequently attends a coffee morning for those who have been widowed, Jane makes a point of introducing him to the others and gives him a tour of the community garden

Sam goes along to a coffee morning at the local community centre, for those who have been widowed. He is pleased to see Jane, who introduces him to one of the regulars, called Nancy. As weeks go by Sam makes a point of sitting with Nancy - to Nancy's dismay!

Nancy makes a complaint to Jane that Sam is bothering her and says that she will meet with her friends elsewhere if something doesn't change.

Question: How might this be managed?

BOB

As the unpaid bills accumulate, Sam is persuaded by someone at the community centre to make contact with a national advice charity, to talk about managing his finances. He is helped to register for an appointment with Bob who runs advice sessions at the centre. Bob helps Sam to work out financial priorities and to make a plan to clear debts and keep on top of the situation in the future.

However, following the death of his wife, Sam has had occasional letters from his solicitor to say that the will is contested by Mary's former husband. Sam is unclear of the implications and completely forgets to mention it to Bob.

When Sam gets news of the financial settlement in favour of Mary's ex-husband, his financial position changes significantly and the plan agreed with Bob is unworkable.

Question: How could a better outcome be achieved for Sam?

MO

Sam's weight loss causes concern and he is referred for an outpatient hospital appointment, but has no transport. Mo volunteers for the local hospital patient transport service and makes sure that Sam gets to his appointment on time, and home again safely

One day Sam is transported to the hospital by Mo and a liaison officer meets him and escorts him to his appointment. On the return journey Mo drops him off at the door to his house, driving off in haste to pick up her next passenger.

Immediately Sam realises that he has left his hat in the back of the car, but Mo doesn't see his frantic wave. He has no contact number for Mo directly and has to phone the call centre to report his loss. He is told that someone will contact the driver to let her know, but 24 hours later he has heard nothing.

Question: How do we develop services that are person-centred?

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

[County Voluntary Councils](#) offer advice and support to voluntary and community organisations including for the development and management of volunteering.

The Third Sector Support Wales Knowledge Hub includes information and resources to support [volunteering](#) and [good governance](#), including safeguarding.

The Volunteering Wales website supports recruiting and managing volunteers www.volunteering-wales.net.

Produced by Helpforce Cymru. Helpforce Cymru is working with Third Sector Support Wales (WCVA and 19 CVCs), Welsh Government and other partners to develop the potential of volunteering to support health and social care services in Wales,

The [Helpforce Cymru page](#) on our website includes links to resources, articles, blogs and case stories.

