

MS Research: Volunteering Policy

Introduction

Our volunteering policy aims to reflect the high esteem in which **MS Research** holds volunteers. Volunteers bring valuable experience of life to the charity. They champion the cause whilst demonstrating loyalty and commitment to the charity's mission to: *restore to people with MS, functions and capabilities lost as a result of MS by whatever means possible and to contribute to its eventual cure.*

This policy sets out the broad principles for volunteering with **MS Research**. It is relevant to everyone concerned with the recruitment, support, development and coordination of volunteers as well as volunteers themselves across the charity.

MS Research recognises that volunteering must benefit the individual as well as the charity and aims to provide an environment that is inclusive, stimulating, friendly and supportive.

Commitment to volunteering

MS Research acknowledges the contribution and impact volunteers have on society through their involvement in organisations. **MS Research** recognises the historic and on-going role that volunteers play in the development of the voluntary and community sector. We acknowledge that our sector would not exist without the dedication and commitment of volunteers. The activities of the charity's volunteers are crucial in helping to raise funds necessary to carry out our research work and the charity seeks volunteer involvement wherever appropriate.

MS Research is committed to involving volunteers in all aspects of its activity. We have developed a volunteering policy and programme to provide a framework for the involvement of volunteers in our work and in meeting our aims. **MS Research** recognises that the activities of volunteers are a positive force in raising the charity's profile and support in the community. Volunteers are able to generate large sums of money, directly through fundraising activities, but also indirectly, networking through family, friends and associates.

MS Research is committed to continuous improvement and working within recognised good practice framework, as far as our capacity reasonably allows.

Policy Statement:

MS Research values the contribution that volunteers can make to our organisation. They help reflect the diverse interests, needs and resources of the communities we aim to serve and bring a unique perspective to our work. We recognise volunteers as a core part of our team, with a distinctive but complementary role to paid staff.

MS Research recognises that volunteering is a two-way process that provides us with the benefits of the skills, experience and enthusiasm that volunteers bring and provides volunteers with opportunities to further enhance or develop skills, gain experience of new working environments and gain personal benefits from the volunteering experience. We are committed to managing and supporting volunteers in a way that ensures that the needs of both parties are met, as far as our capacity reasonably allows.

Equal opportunities and diversity

MS Research operates an Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy for both staff and volunteers, and believes that no one should be treated less favourably than anyone else because of their gender, marital status, sexual orientation, social class, race, ethnic origin, religious belief or disability.

We are committed to diversity in all areas of our work and believe that we can learn from diverse cultures and perspectives.

MS Research strives to create a diverse and inclusive organisation; we are therefore committed to ensuring equality of access to high quality volunteer opportunities and equality of treatment for our volunteers in all our policies and practices.

Principles Statement:

MS Research recognises four principles fundamental to volunteering. *These are Choice, Diversity, Mutual Benefit and Recognition.* These inform every aspect of **MS Research's** volunteer policy and programme.

Choice – volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. Freedom to volunteer implies freedom not to become involved.

Diversity – volunteering should be open to all, no matter what their background, race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, age, gender, marital/partnership status, sexual orientation or disability.

Mutual Benefit – volunteers offer their contribution and skills unwaged but should benefit in other ways in return for their contribution. Giving time voluntarily must be recognised as establishing a reciprocal relationship in which the volunteer also benefits and feels that his or her contribution is personally fulfilling.

Recognition – explicit recognition that valuing the contribution of volunteers is fundamental to a fair relationship between volunteers and **MS Research**. This includes recognising the contribution to the organisation, the community, the social economy and wider social objectives.

Who is a volunteer?

A volunteer is someone who does not receive financial compensation beyond the reimbursement of expense and who performs a task at the request of, or on behalf of, **MS Research**.

The volunteer relationship is binding in honour, trust and mutual understanding. No enforceable obligation, contractual or otherwise can be imposed on volunteers to attend. Likewise the charity does not undertake to provide regular volunteering opportunities, payment or other benefit for any activity undertaken.

Recruitment

MS Research encourages involvement by volunteers from all sections of the community and will not discriminate against any volunteers in the selection procedure.

The charity welcomes volunteers of all ages. We do not specify an upper age limit and MS Research recognises the valuable contribution made by older volunteers in terms of knowledge and experience.

Young volunteers can bring fresh perspectives and enthusiasm to the charity whilst gaining valuable skills and experience. Young volunteers must be at least 16 years old. All young people who have not reached the age of 18 will be protected in accordance with the Health and Safety (Young Persons) Regulations 1997.

The charity would be irresponsible if it permitted volunteers to continue beyond a point where volunteering may be detrimental to their own or other people's health or safety and may decide it is appropriate for a volunteer to reduce or cease their volunteer contribution.

Selection procedures for individual volunteers must protect the charity's interests. References are sought in most cases. The charity must be satisfied that the volunteer possesses the appropriate personal qualities e.g. responsible, reliable and considerate of those around them.

Responsibilities:

MS Research recognises that the success of its volunteer policy and programme is dependant on the active support of all parts of the organisation.

Trustee Board – the Trustee Board of **MS Research** has overall responsibility for ensuring that the Volunteering Policy and programme meet the needs of **MS Research**, are implemented effectively and reviewed at appropriate intervals.

Management – the Chairman has operational responsibility for ensuring that all of **MS Research's** policies and related programmes/ procedures are implemented effectively.

The Chairman will designate a member of staff to have responsibility for the implementation and management of **MS Research's** volunteer policy and programme.

Staff – all staff are responsible for ensuring that this policy, related procedures and other aspects of the volunteering programme are implemented effectively within their projects/services, with any volunteers they supervise and in any other areas of their work.

Volunteers – all volunteers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented effectively within the volunteering roles they are undertaking.

Grievance and conduct issues

Every effort will be made to settle any dispute or volunteer grievance fairly and amicably. In the first instance, a volunteer should take their grievance to their contact or supervisor. If the matter is not settled satisfactorily, a volunteer may then escalate their grievance to their supervisor's line manager. Where an issue cannot be resolved at a local or departmental level, the Chair may mediate.

If there are concerns around a volunteer's behaviour or contribution, the matter will be discussed amicably and steps agreed to address it. These may include additional training or mentoring. However, if these areas of concern cannot be resolved after more formal discussions, their volunteering relationship with the charity may have to cease.

MS Research must protect its reputation in all circumstances and where a volunteer takes an action that may bring our name into disrepute, the volunteer's involvement with the charity will be stopped immediately. This also applies to any financial irregularity or violent conduct towards staff, other volunteers or members of the public.

Expenses

Reasonable expenses will be paid providing they are agreed in advance with the volunteer's supervisor.

Health and Safety

MS Research is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for all volunteers on its premises and to giving appropriate instruction, training and supervision for their welfare.

All volunteers are expected to conduct themselves in a safe and responsible manner and not to act in a way that may put themselves or others at risk of injury.

Fundraising volunteers must take all necessary steps to ensure their own and the public's safety at any event they organise, seeking advice, if required, from their supervisor.

Related documentation:

Equal opportunities policy
Health and safety policy

Exclusions:

MS Research recognises that its Trustee Board members are volunteers. However, where a Board member is acting purely within that role description they are covered by separate Board policies in recognition of that unique role and the statutory obligations placed on them by Charity and Company law. When Trustee Board members are undertaking other voluntary activity within **MS Research** their involvement is covered by this policy.

Review:

This policy will be reviewed by the Board every three years.