

# Good Practice Guide for Volunteers

Operating safely & effectively while engaging in  
street outreach with people who are homeless

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These guidelines are aimed at assisting you in your work and guiding development of good practice and a safer working environment. They outline some of the fundamental standards for any organisation seeking to support vulnerable people to progress out of homelessness.

## 1. ORGANISATIONS SHOULD PROVIDE:

- A code of practice for all staff & volunteers
- An outline of aims and objectives
- Training on boundaries & confidentiality
- Debriefing following any incident
- Safety mechanisms, safer working & lone working protocols
- Clear protocols on recording and reporting incidents and concerns
- Interagency protocols for reporting concerns to and liaising with existing homeless services
- Protocols for use of social media, camera phones & recording equipment
- A procedure for monitoring & responding to volunteers who break the organisation's code of practice
- Protective equipment (rubber gloves, basic first aid equipment etc.) and training as appropriate to the work
- Access to vaccination and health screening programmes as appropriate
- A safe recruitment & Garda Vetting procedure for all volunteers & staff who will be encountering vulnerable adults & children in the course of their work.
- A procedure on how to provide support to volunteers who are previous/ current service users
- A complaints procedure for service users
- A complaints procedure for staff and volunteers.

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## 2. VOLUNTEER CONDUCT:

### Do

- Deal with issues in a confidential manner - don't share someone's information without good reason
- Record and report all health & safety risks and incidents
- Respect service users' personal space
- Be non-judgemental in your dealings with service users
- Share your concerns or experiences with colleagues and supervisors and seek support from them as needed
- Seek professional help from outside your organisation for service users that require it
- Be dependable and reliable
- Consider whether your intervention will be useful to the person. If a person is already working with another organisation it may be counterproductive and somewhat intrusive to get involved
- Inform the service user of actions you are taking. Any work you do for or with a person should be with their knowledge and consent.

### Don't

- Promise absolute confidentiality - there will be times where for the person's safety or someone else's you will have a duty to pass on information
- Share personal information such as your address or personal phone number
- Store belongings for people in your car/home.
- Bring service users to your home
- Socialise or use alcohol in the company of service users
- Arrange to meet service users outside of agreed operational hours
- Store medication
- Hold cash or give cash to service users
- Offer advice on matters for which you are not qualified (e.g. legal or medical issues)
- Form personal relationships with service users & respect boundaries if a previous relationship exists
- Stay in a situation which feels unsafe or uncomfortable
- Photograph or record service users without their informed consent and an ethical reason for doing so.

### 3. STREET WORK DO'S & DON'TS

- Do not wake someone who is sleeping unless you have a serious concern for their safety. In this case contact emergency services
- Do not work alone
- Do not go to work or engage with service users having consumed or while affected by drugs or alcohol
- Make sure you have a working mobile phone and that colleagues have your number
- Do ask permission to speak with service users
- Do respect people's right to privacy
- Do not provide privately funded accommodation without contacting DCC Homeless Helpline & Housing First Intake Team
- Operate within a check in/ buddy system where other members of your team know your whereabouts and check in at agreed intervals
- Dress appropriately for streetwork (warm, waterproof clothing and comfortable closed in footwear)
- Assess the area for risks before engaging with someone - pay attention to the physical environment, people and behaviour in the immediate area, i.e.; are there any groups in the area, will you be in a confined space with no exits or visibility, is there anyone engaged in volatile or unpredictable behaviour nearby
- If you have any cause for concern about a service user or yourself withdraw from the situation, report reasons for concerns to team leader and any relevant emergency or homeless services, i.e.; Gardaí, Ambulance, DCC Homeless Helpline, Housing First Intake team
- Ensure a quick exit can be made if necessary and agree a signal with team members to know to alert them to withdraw should a risk be noticed, e.g. "we have to go meet Joe now"
- Before starting agree roles - a lead person to communicate with the service user and a person to continue risk assessing the area throughout the meeting
- Report any health & safety issues, risks, incidents or concerns for individuals to team leaders and homeless services where appropriate
- Ensure all staff and volunteers have contact details for the Central Placement Service and Housing First.

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### 4. EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROCEDURES

#### **Non responsive client/overdose:**

Contact Ambulance first. Highlight to Housing First Intake team second.

#### **Client at risk to themselves/expressing suicide ideation:**

Contact Ambulance/ Gardaí first depending upon situation. Then report to Housing First Intake team.

#### **If there has been a violent altercation between clients**

Contact ambulance/Gardaí as necessary. Do not approach or intervene placing yourself at risk.

#### **If a client is injured**

Contact emergency services, and, if appropriately trained and safe to do so, administer first aid. Notify Housing First Intake team.

## 5. PERSONS WITH SPECIFIC VULNERABILITIES

### Families

- Make contact with DCC Homeless Helpline & Housing First Intake Team regarding any family at risk of, or found to be rough sleeping.

### Child protection

- All services involved with children have an obligation to provide them with the highest possible standard of care in order to promote their well-being and safeguard them from harm and/or abuse.
- The guiding principles to operate under are that:
  - the safety and well-being of the child must take priority;
  - reports should be made without delay to Tusla Child & Family Agency.
- During working hours concerns about a child should be reported to Tusla Child & Family Agency. A copy of the Tusla Standard Reporting form is available at <http://www.tusla.ie/services/child-protection-welfare/child-protection-and-welfare-practice-handbook/>

If you are unsure if you should report your concerns, please telephone your local Child and Family Agency duty social worker and discuss your concerns with them. Contact details are available at <http://www.tusla.ie/services/child-protection-welfare/contact-a-social-worker>

- Outside office hours or in the event of an emergency where you think a child is in immediate danger and you cannot get in contact with the social work team, you should contact the Gardaí. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a situation that exposes him or her to harm.

### Unaccompanied under 18's

- If you have contact with a homeless or at risk young person under 18 years of age outside office hours, the Gardaí should be contacted immediately. The Gardaí will contact the Out-of-Hours Social Work Service who will ensure that the young person is provided with accommodation and follow-up social work intervention.
- Staff members should record a description of the young person and provide this to Gardaí.
- If possible or appropriate, staff members should offer support to young person and stay with them until relevant professionals arrive.
- If unsure of someone's age but you suspect they may be under 18 follow this procedure.
- If you are told of a young person under 18 rough sleeping follow this procedure giving as much information as you have to Gardaí.

### Pregnant service users

- If you hear about or meet a pregnant woman rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping contact DCC Homeless Helpline & Housing First Intake Team.

### Vulnerable Adults

- If you encounter someone who has the appearance of deteriorating physical or mental health contact emergency services, DCC Homeless Helpline and Housing First Intake Team as appropriate.
- If you become aware that a known vulnerable adult is absent for a period of time contact the Housing First Intake Team to discuss the situation.



## 6. CONFIDENTIALITY & DATA PROTECTION

### Confidentiality

- While you should always limit the sharing of a person's information and protect their privacy, absolute confidentiality should never be promised.
- Information may have to be passed on:
  - for the safety of the service user or someone else based on something they have told you or you have observed.
  - when legally obliged to do so.

### Data Protection

- All files and other information on service users are to be kept in a secure place and access should be limited to those who require the information to directly support the service user.
- Any information gathered should only be used for the purpose for which it was gathered and with the consent of the service user.

### Consent

- Be mindful of a person's ability to give informed consent. If a person is under the influence or a substance, under significant stress or otherwise compromised they may not be in a position to understand the consequences of giving you permission to take any action on their behalf.

- Consent, confidentiality and what you intend to do with a person's information should be explained thoroughly at a time when the person can fully take part in the conversation and this should be revisited at regular intervals.

### Social Media/ Media guidelines

- It is not appropriate to use people's images, disclose their personal details or divulge any identifying information to media outlets, in publications or on social media. Workers must at all times be respectful of service users right to privacy and the potential harmful impact of publicising their image or personal information.
- Any information provided to media, used in publications, on websites or social media outlets should be accurate and evidence based and in no way identify specific individuals.
- It is best practice not to use your own camera or phone to take images or recordings in the course of your work.

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## 7. HEALTH & SAFETY GUIDELINES

- Do not work alone.
- Take precautions as outlined above in the do's & don'ts to work as safely as possible.
- Always assess your safety and that of others and call for the assistance of emergency or support services as required.
- Familiarise yourself with Standard Precautions and what steps to take in the event of injury or potential exposure to blood borne viruses or infectious diseases.
- Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where appropriate (e.g. rubber gloves, hand sanitiser).

## 8. USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS

SERVICE	CONTACT	SERVICE INFORMATION
<b>DCC Homeless Helpline</b>	1800 707707	Hours of operation - 2-4pm & 4.30pm - 2am Mon to Fri 10am - 2am Weekends & Bank Holidays
<b>Housing First Intake Team</b>	086 8139015	7am to midnight every day
<b>Garda stations</b>	Pearse St 01 6669000 Kevin St 01 6669400 Store St 01 6668000 Mountjoy 01 6668600 Bridewell 01 6668200	
<b>Rough Sleeper Location Reports</b>	<a href="http://www.homelessdublin.ie/report-rough-sleeper#1">http://www.homelessdublin.ie/report-rough-sleeper#1</a>	In order to assist people who are sleeping rough, this weblink can be used to let the Housing First Service know where they are located/ bedded down. The Housing First Service will then attempt to make contact with the individual at that location.  Please do note that this is to be used for persons who are actually bedded down and sleeping rough rather than begging/ tapping.

## 9. RESOURCES

### Child Protection

**Children First:** <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/Publications/ChildrenFirst.pdf>

**Child Protection & Welfare Practice Handbook:**  
[http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/CF\\_WelfarePracticehandbook.pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/CF_WelfarePracticehandbook.pdf)

### Data Protection

[https://www.dataprotection.ie/ViewDoc.asp?fn=/documents/guidance/Guide\\_Data\\_Controllers.htm&CatID=90&m=y](https://www.dataprotection.ie/ViewDoc.asp?fn=/documents/guidance/Guide_Data_Controllers.htm&CatID=90&m=y)

## 10. OUTREACH GROUPS WHO HAVE ADOPTED THIS GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE:

- Cairdeas Homeless Action Group
- Clondalkin Helping Homeless
- Dublin Simon Soup Run
- Dublin Simon Rough Sleeper Team
- Housing First Intake Service
- Humans Too
- Inner City Helping Homeless
- Jacket Off Your Back
- Mustard Seed Soup Run
- The Light House
- Tiglin

