



CARAS Volunteering Policy

This policy is for all **volunteers** at CARAS.

This policy was agreed by trustees on: 23.06.21

It will be reviewed every two years and updated as necessary.

The next review is due by: 23.06.23

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Volunteering at CARAS

CARAS has a proud history of working with volunteers in order to deliver our charitable aims. Volunteers are an essential part of the CARAS community, bringing skills, insight, experience, and enthusiasm to the roles that they take on.

This policy sets out CARAS' commitment to volunteers and our expectations of them. We aim to enable and support members of all communities, including refugee and asylum seeker communities, to volunteer alongside one another on projects benefiting refugees and asylum seekers, in a creative and supportive atmosphere, and to empower all volunteers to share and develop their skills to the fullest possible extent during their association with the organisation.

All of our work is value led. Our values are:

Kindness CARAS will nurture all who are part of our community, helping everyone develop their skills, talents and interests.

Justice CARAS will strive for social justice following a rights-based approach and challenging instances when rights are not upheld in wider society.

Empowerment CARAS works alongside people, recognising and respecting their skills and strengths and striving together for better outcomes.

'With' not 'for' CARAS will put the voices, opinions, experiences and needs of its beneficiaries at the heart of all that we do.

Who is a volunteer?

A volunteer gives their time, unpaid, to help someone.

The following definition comes from NCVO, national experts on volunteering:

We define volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.

This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation and social action. Everyone has the right to volunteer and volunteering can have significant benefits for individuals.

A volunteer is not an employee. They do not hold the same duties or responsibilities as paid staff. This policy sets out how CARAS supports our volunteers, what they can expect of us, and what we hope for from them.

In this policy we use the term volunteer to mean people who have been recruited directly by CARAS to support CARAS' work within a specific role. This can include members of the public, as well as people who are currently or have been CARAS beneficiaries.

CARAS often works with partner organisations. They may include their own paid or voluntary team members at their discretion in the delivery of their discrete piece of work. In these cases, those teams will be covered by the partner organisation's code of conduct and other relevant policies. They are not members of CARAS' internal volunteer team. Partner organisations and their staff and volunteer teams are expected to align with and uphold CARAS' values in their work with us. These are set out in discussions led by the relevant Head of Service at the start of new partnerships.

Insurance.

CARAS holds appropriate insurance for the roles our volunteers undertake. We are insured on a specialist policy for charities, and the policy is reviewed annually. CARAS holds professional indemnity, employer's liability, public liability and personal accident insurance. The policy includes cover for our OISC accredited advice work and all of our activities. Volunteers are covered for any accidents that may occur in their role and lead to loss of earnings, disablement or death. Volunteers can see the full policy on request.

Volunteer recruitment.

CARAS aims to have as much diversity within its volunteer team as possible. We recognise that including a wide range of people from differing backgrounds and experiences, and specifically including people with protected characteristics, is a way to bring strength and enjoyment to our work. In order to ensure professionalism and consistency in recruitment, all volunteers are recruited in accordance with our standardised intake process, the Step-by-Step Volunteer Guide.

In order to have a wide reach, in general our roles are publicly advertised. We are keen to only promote appropriate roles for volunteers, manage expectations from the start and ensure clarity of role and purpose. Role descriptions are written with care, ensuring that we never over-state the qualifications, education or experience needed for each role. CARAS has a responsibility to pro-actively and fairly recruit new volunteers via word of mouth, written resources, internet resources, and engaging with relevant link organisations.

We recognise that whilst extremely valuable to society and to the lives of individual volunteers and those they support, inappropriate volunteering can also lead to exploitation of people's valuable skills. We endeavour to only ask people to volunteer for pre-agreed, short, time-limited sessions each week, and we are mindful of the challenges of job substitution. We will

not ask a volunteer to take on a role with significant risk or responsibility, or to lead a piece of work alone.

Applications.

All volunteers must apply using a standard form. This is included as a link in our adverts. We do this to ensure that everyone answers a standard set of questions that allow us to compare like with like.

All prospective volunteers are assessed against the essential and desirable criteria for the role and, if successful, will be offered an interview with the relevant Project Coordinator. During this interview, the role can be explored in greater detail and attention will be paid to the values and attitudes the applicant holds. We encourage volunteers to actively use the information in the role description and application pack, making their own personal judgements about the appropriateness of the role to their personal situation as part of the recruitment process. CARAS group members are present at a sample of interviews.

Following a successful interview, the prospective volunteer will need to attend two compulsory induction training sessions, receive a DBS check, and have a positive reference returned. These steps must all be completed before the person is invited to join as a volunteer.

These steps are all part of Safer Recruitment processes which we follow in order to achieve a robust standard of safeguarding.

Consent.

Volunteers are asked to give their consent for their contact details to be stored, including an emergency contact and any relevant medical details. We also keep a record of each volunteers DBS number.

Additionally, we currently ask for consent to share details with NHS Track and Trace so that positive covid cases can be tracked and people can self-isolate accordingly.

All data is stored on our secure database. Volunteers can ask to view their own record at any time.

DBS checks, disclosures and references.

In order to uphold strong standards of safeguarding within our organisation, we ask all prospective volunteers to disclose on application whether they have any criminal convictions or cautions. Additionally, all volunteer roles have the possibility of being with children (adults may be in groups that their children attend with them); we therefore ask that all volunteers undergo an enhanced DBS check. Existing DBS certificates will be considered as valid provided

they are both within 2 years' of issue and relate to children at the enhanced level. In these cases the date of expiry and certificate number will be logged under the volunteer profile. The certificate will need to be shown to the Volunteer Development Lead or their deputy. Finally, all prospective volunteers must be supported by a positive reference from a previous or current employer, or if studying or volunteering, their supervisor or tutor.

There are some exceptions and these will be dealt with on a case by case basis by our Volunteer Development Lead. Examples include where people seeking asylum are applying to enrol as a volunteer. It may be difficult to gain a reference or to receive a full DBS check. In such cases, we will seek meaningful alternatives.

If a prospective volunteer discloses a conviction or caution, we will weigh up whether it has any bearing on their ability to safely take up their role. We will do the same with anything that is highlighted on a DBS check, seeking anonymised guidance from the Local Authority Designated Officer if necessary. In cases where someone did not disclose something that shows up on their DBS, we would be concerned no matter the offence. We may choose not to proceed with that applicant. Any caution or conviction that is recorded on a DBS will be carefully considered by the Safeguarding Lead before a decision is made as to whether that applicant can proceed. The final decision to proceed with the placement will be that of the Volunteer Development Lead and Managing Director together.

Training, induction and support.

All prospective volunteers must attend two mandatory training sessions. These are a general session which sets out our values, the context for our work and the people we support and a second session focusing on a safeguarding and child protection.

Volunteers will also be given access to additional training that is specific to their role. A great deal of additional support will be gained from the debriefs that take place at the end of every CARAS activity- these are a mandatory part of volunteering roles.

Additional support is offered throughout the year with a diverse range of extra, non-mandatory trainings and learning opportunities on offer covering a wide range of topics.

Volunteers have a range of support to call upon in their role. There is always a staff member on hand, no matter the activity, and this is a volunteer's first port of call.

Volunteers can also turn to our Volunteer Development Lead for support and advice on any issues they feel they prefer not to share directly with their supervisor. They can also contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead directly with any concerns that they feel have not been addressed fully. Contact details are at the end of this policy.

Additional individual feedback.

Some volunteers are pursuing specific individual goals and may seek extra feedback from the staff team they support. This can include feedback on specific skills and planning opportunities to develop these further. Examples include, but are not limited to, observations for volunteer teachers on their teaching skills; training and accreditation in advice work; specific one to one supervision; access to specialist training. These are all optional and are offered at the request of individual volunteers and the discretion of the staff team.

Code of Conduct.

Volunteers are asked to uphold CARAS' values in all that they do. Additionally, all volunteers are asked to adhere to a 'Volunteer Agreement' that sets out the relationship between CARAS and them, including what we ask for in terms of behaviour and expectations.

Breach of Code of Conduct.

Volunteers may be asked to leave their role on the following grounds:

- any act of abuse, harassment, bullying or safeguarding issue
- any breach of confidentiality, act of theft, fraud or other unlawful incident
- bringing CARAS' reputation into disrepute
- repeated failures to uphold CARAS' values

Volunteer pathways.

We want to include people who are joining CARAS as volunteers from the wider community, and people who are taking on new roles having been a CARAS beneficiary. We have developed a 'Volunteer Pathways' plan that sets out our approach for supporting CARAS beneficiaries into volunteering roles.

Reward and recognition.

CARAS can offer a range of training for our volunteers, including some provided by external providers that we have access to.

Additionally, we create occasions where volunteers receive thanks, recognition and acknowledgements of service. The Volunteer Development Lead will encourage and support both organisation-wide and team specific acts of informal and formal recognition as part of the annual Volunteer Development Plan.

Volunteer voice.

Volunteers are a vital part of our vibrant CARAS community. Their views matter to us. We will therefore ensure that volunteer feedback is sought in a number of ways that influence our practice. All volunteers should stay for a debrief at the end of their session; this is an important part of our safeguarding procedure but is also a space to share and reflect on changes and improvements. CARAS also hosts a meeting called 'CARAS Voice' which happens at times of change and development- all CARAS volunteers are invited to give their views and help develop

appropriate change. Volunteers are also encouraged to attend and welcomed at our AGM where their achievements are celebrated.

Monitoring and evaluation.

We recognise the value of volunteers and the work they do.

We collect data that allows us to track the number of sessions volunteers give to CARAS; we have systems and processes in place to manage volunteer intake and exit. We hold data, with volunteers permission, that forms part of our reporting and accountability to eg funders, partners, trustees, and to volunteers themselves. The storage of data is covered by our Data Protection Policy.

There is a monthly audit meeting convened by the Volunteer Development Lead in order to assess the needs of CARAS teams, adjust systems as needed, and plan for volunteer reward and recognition.

When things go wrong.

In general, volunteering experiences are hugely enriching for all concerned. We want volunteers to feel safe, supported and respected in their roles.

However, should the need to raise a complaint arise, the procedure is as follows:

- in the case of raising a complaint about a fellow volunteer, the first point of contact is the staff member who leads your team; you can also include the Volunteer Development Lead
- in the case of bullying, we will follow steps that mirror our Anti-bullying Policy. The perpetrator will be asked to leave
- if a complaint relates to a staff member, you can approach their line manager or the Volunteer Development Lead
- in the case of whistle blowing, volunteers should refer to the Whistle Blowing Policy.

You should clearly state the nature of your complaint and discuss with the relevant staff member what the next steps will be. In general, the following steps should be followed:

Step 1- The volunteer should share their complaint verbally with their Project Coordinator. They will try to resolve the matter with you.

Step 2- If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you should put your complaint in writing and share it with the Volunteer Development Lead. They will reply to you within a working week. They may seek to include staff from the senior leadership team, depending on the nature and severity of the issue. Together, they will decide an appropriate plan of action and will communicate this to you.

Step 3- If the matter is still not satisfactorily resolved, you can raise it with the Board of Trustees.

You will be informed of the outcomes at each stage.

Further guidance is available here <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/if-volunteering-goes-wrong>

Whistle blowing.

CARAS has a separate Whistle Blowing Policy that you should familiarise yourself with. Your project coordinator, the Volunteer Development Lead, or any other staff member can share a copy with you.

Exit.

We are aware that sometimes volunteers need to take a break from their role, and we encourage people to take the time they need without the fear of negative consequences. Volunteers should discuss their plans with their project coordinator. Volunteers are under no obligation to remain in their role and can leave at any time.

Volunteers are asked, where possible, to tell their project coordinator of their intention to leave, giving as much notice as possible. The Project Coordinator will then follow the step by step exit guide which includes encouraging volunteers to complete the anonymous online exit questionnaire. Exit questionnaires are collated by the Volunteer Development Lead. Information gathered as part of this exit process help us to gain a sense of volunteer trends, including length of service, quality of training, support within their role, and general feedback about their experience. Qualitative and quantitative data will be used as part of the annual project review to guide and inform best practice.

Return.

Volunteers can resume a role if their Project Coordinator is satisfied that there is an available vacancy and the volunteer still fits the role. If a role is resumed within a two -year time-frame, no additional training is required. If the gap is more than two years, the volunteer must take refresher training sessions. A DBS check will need to have been obtained within the last two years.

Reference requests.

CARAS can provide volunteers with a reference to a prospective employer or place of education. This is on offer to those who have volunteered with us for a minimum of three months. Requests should go to the Volunteer Development Lead who will discuss with the relevant Project Coordinator and reply directly to the requesting organisation. Copies are available for volunteers. Testimonials or pre-written letters are not given.

Contact details for raising a concern, making a complaint, or seeking advice are:

Helen@caras.org.uk - Volunteer Development Lead

Eleanor@caras.org.uk - Managing Director

Peter@caras.org.uk - Director of Operations and Development

This policy was updated and approved on behalf of the trustees by:

Signed:

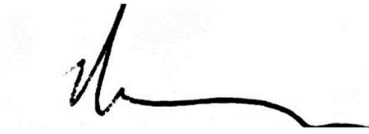
Date: 23.06.21



Charles Whitehead

Signed:

Date: 23.06.21



Keith McGuinness

Appendix

1. Volunteer Agreement
2. DBS process and Declaration
3. Volunteer Pathways

Volunteer Agreement

We are delighted to welcome you to CARAS. The majority of CARAS projects operate thanks to our highly skilled and committed volunteer team.

This Volunteer Agreement is a description of the arrangement between CARAS and you regarding your voluntary role. The purpose of this agreement is to set out the reasonable expectations on both sides. We also want to assure you that we take our responsibilities seriously. We appreciate your volunteering with us and give you our commitment to do the best we can to make your volunteer experience positive and rewarding.

As a volunteer you can expect the following from CARAS:

- a description of your role
- a named Project Coordinator
- safe volunteering conditions
- to be respected and have your contribution valued
- to be able to reclaim relevant expenses as per our current policy
- to receive CARAS induction and ongoing learning and development as appropriate for your role and placement.
- to contribute your experience of volunteering as feedback
- to ask CARAS for a reference
- that your personal information will remain safe and secure
- permission to stop volunteering at any time

- to receive communications on our projects, achievements, events and volunteering opportunities
- the right to raise a reasonable concern and for this to be investigated
- the right for any complaint about you to be investigated fairly

In order for things to run as smoothly as possible we ask you to adhere to our **Code of Conduct:**

- Attend mandatory induction trainings prior to volunteering
- Be on time for the session and stay until the end
- Let your Project Coordinator know ASAP when you can't make it
- Help to tidy up spaces after the session
- Observe and implement our safeguarding, health and safety, and data management policies
- Observe and implement project rules
- Talk to your Project Coordinator about supervision and training needs
- Help in creating positive, inclusive safe spaces
- Not to take photos unless your Project Coordinator has requested this; in this case they should be shared with the Project Coordinator and then deleted
- Not to ask anyone about their reason for being in the UK, nor to prompt them to share their history
- Welcome all refugees and asylum seekers, staff and volunteers in our groups, regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, gender re-assignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation
- Challenge bullying and discrimination
- Challenge and halt any unacceptable behaviour and language
- Discuss and agree with your project coordinator any use of CARAS' name in social media, press releases, presentations, research or any other public event
- Maintain professional beneficiary-volunteer boundaries (e.g. no physical or social media contact, no sharing of personal contacts (including but not exclusively WhatsApp and Facebook))
- Recognise that you are a representative of CARAS whilst volunteering
- Never share personal information about beneficiaries outside CARAS except when required by law

Before you start volunteering, make sure the checklist is complete and signed:

- I have filled in my volunteer application form
- I have completed my DBS check
I have read Safeguarding and Child Protection, Health and Safety and Data management policies
- I have attended the induction training sessions 1 and 2
- If I am joining as an ESOL, Community Connector or Casework volunteer I have read the project-specific handbook and understand my role
- I know that I can claim my transport expenses coming to and from the project and how to do so
- I know that I can receive a regular supervision from my project coordinator/volunteer coordinator
- I know how CARAS stores my personal data and that I can access it within a timeframe specified in Data Management Policy
- I know the ways I can get involved in CARAS' governance and decision making
- I have read the Code of Conduct and will adhere to it

How we will communicate with you:

You will receive emails from your Project Coordinator (or their representative) regarding your volunteering. Your email can be shared with other volunteers or not (i.e. you will be copied CC or BCC) as you prefer. Please indicate your preference:

- Please make my email visible to other volunteers on my project (CC)
- Please do not make my email visible to other volunteers on my project (BCC)

You will also receive our e-newsletter for volunteers and the quarterly CARAS newsletter. You can unsubscribe from these at any time. If you would also like to receive our fortnightly bulletin, which contains much more information about CARAS activities and achievements and job adverts in our sector, please tick this box:

- I would like to receive the fortnightly CARAS Bulletin

I understand that this agreement is binding in honour only, is not intended to be a legally binding contract between us. It may be cancelled at any time at the discretion of either party. Neither of us intend any employment relationship to be created either now or at any time in the future.

I have read and understood this agreement and confirm I am happy to comply with the contents:

Volunteer Name:

Signature:

Date:

Witnessed by (Project Coordinator /staff member):

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Declaration

- Have you ever been cautioned, charged or convicted in relation to any offence (this question relates to all convictions, spent and unspent, as per the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974)?
- Has any complaint of abuse ever been made against you?
- I understand that a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS - formerly known as CRB)/pre-appointment vetting checks will be required as part of the recruitment process. Details of the Disclosure will be recorded and retained in CARAS Database for the length of your volunteering.
- By making this application I confirm that I am not barred from working with vulnerable groups and understand that to apply to work with such group/s in Regulated Activity roles when barred from doing so is a criminal offence.
- I declare that the information I have given on this form is correct and true to my knowledge.

Signed:

Dated:



Routes to volunteering

CARAS aims to support beneficiaries into meaningful opportunities of personal learning, employability and skills development beyond CARAS. This document sets out some of the ways we seek to do this through our volunteering pathways.

1. Straightforward volunteering within CARAS

Some people are referred to us because they are seeking asylum or are a refugee. However, upon meeting them it becomes that they have a great deal to give and very little that they would gain from CARAS' groups. These people, if they wish, can simply be put onto a volunteering pathway. They would not become beneficiaries and would be treated exactly the same as any other volunteer.

Reasonable adjustments are underway to ensure that our mandatory training is accessible to people who are emergent English speakers; we may also have to make adaptations to DBS processes in recognition of the lack of records for most people who are seeking asylum.

2. Peer to peer support / activity facilitation

This option exists for people who are active members of groups and will be remaining as beneficiaries for at least part of the time. For those who are interested, there are some roles that are regularly handed over to beneficiaries. These may be ad-hoc, for example, leading a warm-up activity, taking a register or may be part of a more sustained approach. These roles are in the hands of Project Coordinators and Heads of Service. They may be linked to AQA accreditation if appropriate.

3. Signposting to volunteer positions in other organisations

Some people will have no interest in volunteering at CARAS or their skills or availability don't match current volunteering opportunities. They may have skills and interests that are needed elsewhere. This group can be signposted towards opportunities in organisations that we already know and trust (current examples included Little Village, OASIS, Trinity Hospice, Chestnut Grove Academy, Be Enriched, Tooting Transition Town- each of these have expressed willingness to welcome people from all backgrounds and adapt to language needs). For people who are not CARAS beneficiaries, this information can simply be passed on when we first meet them. For those who are CARAS beneficiaries and want additional support, casework volunteers could facilitate these links.

4. Becoming a volunteer after being a CARAS beneficiary

For some people, moving into being a CARAS volunteer will be part of their pathway. These will be beneficiaries who have been members of CARAS groups who have reached a point where they no longer need support but are not (yet) looking for opportunities elsewhere. These people will need to undergo regular volunteer training. They will become part of regular volunteer teams. Care will be given to placing people in a different group to the one they attended, and to supporting them to maintain good boundaries between their volunteer role and the friendships they will have developed with other beneficiaries.

CARAS is currently in a position to support pathways 1 and 2.

As part of our Volunteer Development Programme, we will work towards developing further options, following an iterative path, being responsive to volunteer and beneficiary needs.

