



Information sheet: Informal volunteering

Informal volunteering is vital for building connections and resilience within communities, often reaching those who need help the most and is one part of social action. For many of us, helping a neighbour with their shopping, giving someone a lift or walking someone's dog, are small acts that are part of our everyday lives. The ordinary things that we do for our communities and neighbours in our free time, without any expectation of anything in return. Defined as unpaid, voluntary work or volunteering not coordinated by an organisation or institution, it means that many of us are carrying out informal volunteering without even knowing it.



Volunteering informally within your community can be very rewarding, but before you start, you may want to consider the following advice, so that you keep yourself and those in your community safe.

Consider what it is that you feel able to help others with

Defining what it is that you want to do will help you to feel comfortable with saying 'no' if people ask for more help than you are able to give. For example, if you are a nervous driver or drive a sports car, it may be inappropriate to offer elderly neighbours a lift to the shops. However, you may feel more comfortable picking up a prescription on your own or taking their dog for a walk, so that they can utilise public transport. Be clear about what help you are offering, so that there is no cause for confusion later.

Do not offer advice

Remember that you are not doing this in a formal capacity or as a professional. If you feel comfortable to do so, signpost people to the relevant agencies and organisations if they are asking you for specific advice. Organisations such as the [Citizen's Advice Bureau](https://www.citizenadvice.org.uk/) can offer specialist advice and support or signpost people on as appropriate.

Be cautious about financial safety





Handling someone else's money can leave you exposed to accusations of dishonesty or even fraud if you are not careful. While you may have a good, trusting relationship with the person you help, remember that there may be family members or friends who are not as trusting. Don't be tempted to use someone else's bank card to withdraw money from an ATM or make purchases on their behalf. If you regularly purchase large amounts of shopping then come to an arrangement about how this is paid and accounted for. There are a number of different ways you could be reimbursed for any regular shopping which you do, from direct bank transfers and cheques, to PayPal and store e-cards.



Know when to ask for help

Circumstances can change over time. Someone you may have been helping for many years may suddenly fall ill or become unable to do the things that they have done in the past. You may find that a change in circumstances means that what you have always done is now no longer appropriate. Have an open conversation with the person you are supporting and let them know of your concerns. Ask for help from other neighbours or, if necessary, from the relevant agencies or organisations that provide support in your area. [The North Yorkshire Connect](#) website can help you find support that is local to you.

Keep yourself and others safe. Trust your instincts

If you are ever in a situation that doesn't feel safe, walk away. Contact the police if you or the person you help are ever in immediate danger.



Look after yourself and keep it manageable

As we have said before, helping others in your community can be very rewarding, but you don't want to do it at the expense of your own health or at the risk of losing personal time with your family or friends. Make sure that you have the time and opportunity to do the things that you need to do and learn to say no if people keep demanding more of your time. Consider whether you could support someone as a group of friends and share the load.





Community First
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If you want to hear more about how informal volunteering can benefit you and your local community, then listen to [this inspiring podcast](#) from Hilary, one of our development officers.



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