



**Independent  
Age**



# Community Volunteer's Handbook

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# Introduction

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We know what an incredible difference volunteering makes to the people that we support, so we really can't thank you enough for giving up your time to be part of our work.

This guide will help you as you carry out your volunteering role for Independent Age, so please read the information thoroughly and if you have any questions please do not hesitate to get in touch with your Independent Age contact.

I would like to take this opportunity once again to thank you for joining Independent Age so we can help more people to live a happy, connected and purposeful later life.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "K. Butler".

**Kelly Butler**  
**Head of Volunteer Transformation**

## Volunteering at Independent Age

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Whether performing an active role in their communities, increasing awareness, campaigning for change, or raising funds, volunteers play an essential role in increasing our impact.

Our volunteers work in collaboration with our employees, bringing their skills, experience, passion and expertise to all areas of our work.

We appreciate, support and celebrate our volunteers for their diversity and creativity. Our volunteers increase our capacity and impact, enabling us to ensure that more people can grow old well, with dignity, choice and purpose.

By working with our volunteers, we increase our reach and impact in a wider range of communities across the UK.

# Useful contacts

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## Volunteering

For general enquiries about your volunteering role.

T [020 7605 4255](tel:02076054255) (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm)

E [volunteering@independentage.org](mailto:volunteering@independentage.org)

## Useful documents for volunteers

[www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources](http://www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources)

## Telephone services queries

For all telephone volunteering enquiries.

T [020 7605 4265](tel:02076054265) (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm)

E [telephone.volunteers@independentage.org](mailto:telephone.volunteers@independentage.org)

## Helpline

For free confidential advice on older people's issues, or to order our free guides.

T [0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789) (Monday to Friday 8.30am-6.30pm)

E [advice@independentage.org](mailto:advice@independentage.org)

Alternatively, you can order advice guides and access information and videos on our website: [www.independentage.org](http://www.independentage.org)

## Safeguarding concerns

If you have a safeguarding concern about the older person you support. During working hours Monday to Friday, please get in touch with your Independent Age contact.

**Safeguarding concerns out of hours**

T [020 7605 4455](tel:02076054455), from 5-9pm on the week days and 9am-9pm on the weekends.

## Campaigns enquiries

For enquiries about how we campaign to improve the systems that people rely on as they get older

E [campaigns@independentage.org](mailto:campaigns@independentage.org)

## Fundraising enquiries

For enquiries about making a donation or supporting our fundraising.

T [020 7605 4223](tel:02076054223)

E [supporters@independentage.org](mailto:supporters@independentage.org)

# Your role

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## About your role

As a Community Volunteer, your role supports the work of our Community Services Team. Our Community Services Team help isolated older people to re-build a fulfilling and independent social life and reduce feelings of loneliness. Independent Age's Community Services are designed to achieve positive change in the lives of older people by listening to what they need and shaping support accordingly over an agreed time period, usually between 6 and 9 months. Our overall aim is for people to feel better connected both socially and to other forms of practical help, advice and information.

As a Community Volunteer, you will support an older person to access the services and activities that they are interested in, accompanying and supporting them through the process over an agreed time period of 6–9 months. It's important to stress that what you will be doing in this role very much depends on the older person you are supporting.

You will be providing companionship, positive encouragements and ideas, to help people establish new friends, enjoy new experiences and to make connections to their local community.

## **Some of the potential ways that you could be supporting the older person are:**

- Meeting at café for a drink to help increase confidence
- Helping someone to get out and about again
- Going to visit local places e.g. Garden Centre
- Accompanying to different group activities for example, sessions/classes at a local community centre
- Supporting with use of technology or access to online services for example, online shopping
- Help with shopping

This is not an exhaustive list. When you meet with your Independent Age contact they will discuss with you the kinds of things that the older person needs support with and look at what activities will be part of this.

# Tips to help you get started in your role

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A key part of your volunteering will be about building a relationship with the person that you are supporting as a result we wanted to share some practical tips which might help you get started.

## Practical tips

There are a few things that we have to think about when it comes to meeting someone for the first time, this first meeting may often be in someone's home so there are some pointers of what needs to be considered when we meet someone in their home.

A home visit is different to visiting family/friends or having a professional meeting with a client in an office location so it's important to remember that:

- You are in someone's home and it's important to be aware that you are on their territory and to respect that
- You need to be invited in – invited where to sit (don't assume)
- You may not have space to sit/take notes (check ok to jot notes so you remember things you both plan to do)
- They may have felt the need to tidy/make an effort with how they look
- The way they keep their home may not be the same as yours
- You need to respect their space and their boundaries (be aware of body language when it's time to leave)

## Starting the conversation

Sometimes it can be tricky knowing how to start a conversation with someone you have not met previously. It can be useful to follow the below when starting a conversation with someone.

- **Pick a topic and ask open questions to find out more detail – Who, What, When, Where, How.** For example: How is your garden at the moment? Are you watching anything on TV?
- **Understanding meaning.** Find out more about what interests them. Try and understand what they value. For example: What do/did you enjoy about gardening? How are you finding watching xx?
- **Understanding values.** Understanding what they value and why. These questions require a more established rapport with the older person. For example: Why is... important to you? Why do you feel like that? You mentioned you felt strongly about... why's that?

## Tips for active listening

- Repeating, summarising, paraphrasing
- Asking questions
- Remain focussed on them – it's fine to relate to their experiences but allow them to expand if they'd like to
- Hearing them talk more than you – assuming they want to!
- Some silence/reflection
- Makes encouraging noises/uses encouraging words

## Speaking to the older person on the phone

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, some of you might support an older person over the phone for a short period of time, until it is safe for face-to-face visits to go ahead. The tips below will help you as you get to know and support someone over the phone.

- Plan your call – check you're somewhere you won't be interrupted
- If using a mobile, check your phone is charged
- If you don't feel comfortable sharing your number, please use **141** when you dial their number
- Introduce yourself and that you're a volunteer at Independent Age
- Check that it's convenient to speak
- If you notice any delays in them responding, check that the line is clear, and they can hear you well
- Be aware of how you speak, you may need to speak slower than you usually do
- Don't be afraid to say that the radio or TV is on too loud in background if you can't hear
- Recap on the reason for your call. Explain that what you talk about is between you but if you felt they were at risk for any reason you'd have to talk to your Independent Age contact
- Show empathy, ask questions, actively listen, get to know them
- Listening on the phone can be more challenging as you can't see the person. There is a greater reliance on your voice and being aware of: tone, pitch, emphasis, speech and volume. We have more useful tips on listening and [www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources](http://www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources)

# Supporting someone who is very emotional

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Sometimes the person you are supporting may be having a difficult time and as a result may be feeling emotional here are some suggestions on how you might be able to support someone in that circumstance.

There's often little you can say that's useful or helpful. The most important part is just your presence and your time.

- **Let them cry.** They are sharing a vulnerable moment with you, allow them to express what needs to be expressed without telling them how to feel. Avoid telling them to stop crying or that whatever they are crying about isn't worth their tears. Emotions when vented are better than if they are stored inside.
- **Don't jump to creating solutions.** If the person is crying and upset about a situation, don't try to immediately solve the problem for them. It's more important for you to do less talking and more listening. Their crying is a way to express their emotions. Let them do so without interfering.
- **Don't try to turn the conversation instantly positive.** It's a natural tendency to want to help the person feel better by having them look at the positive side. However, when you do that, they may feel like you are glossing over what's wrong and they may feel like their feelings aren't important.
- **Ask what they need.** Don't assume you know what they want. Asking what they want and need puts the other person in control and gives you the opportunity to listen and respond. Whatever they ask for or need, respect what they say.
- **Acknowledge your helplessness.** For example, you could say, "I'm so sorry you're going through this. I don't really know what to say to make it better, and I know no words really could. But I want you to know that I'm here for you when you need me".

# What we expect from you and what you can expect from us

Volunteers are essential to Independent Age and we really appreciate that you've chosen to volunteer with us.

We want you to know that we will do our best to make your volunteer experience as enjoyable and rewarding as possible. Effective relationships are built on trust and mutual understanding and it's for that reason that we have pulled together this agreement.

This agreement aligns with Independent Age's values of:

- **Purpose-driven** – the experience, needs and views of older people are central to everything we do
- **Compassionate** – we listen, care and take action
- **Expert** – our work is evidence-based and solution-focused
- **Collaborative** – we work in partnership to maximise our impact
- **Accountable** – we work with integrity and transparency
- **Inclusive** – we value diversity and always treat everyone fairly with dignity and respect.

Although this isn't a legally binding agreement and both Independent Age or you as a volunteer can end the agreement at any time we want to be clear with you from the beginning that there are some things that we'll ask and expect of you and that equally there are things that you should ask and expect from us, those things are listed below:

We ask that you	In return we will
Are <b>Purpose-driven</b> and strive for the best that you can do and complete your volunteering activities with dedication and commitment.	Be <b>Inclusive</b> and introduce you to how our organisation works and your role within it.
Go to any briefings and training that we think will help you in your role.	Use our <b>Expert</b> knowledge offering you relevant training and resources to support you in your role.

**We ask that you**

**In return we will**

Be **Accountable** and operate responsibly and within the law following the policies and procedures of Independent Age including Safeguarding, Health and Safety and report any concerns which occur.

Ensure your health, safety and welfare, give you information about Independent Age's policies and procedures and provide relevant training to support you.

Be **Inclusive** and adhere to our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion statement.

Provide an opportunity to discuss what Equity, Diversity and Inclusion means and how it relates to you in your role.

Maintain the confidentiality of Independent Age's activity and that of the people that we work with.

Provide you with our **Expert** information relating to GDPR and confidentiality best practice.

Be **Compassionate** by valuing and respecting the rights of the people that we support.

Ensure that you have access to regular support.

Be **Collaborative** and work in partnership with staff and other volunteers to achieve Independent Age's mission.

Be **Accountable** and respectful and listen to your feedback, and keep you informed of any relevant changes.

Let your volunteer manager know if you are having any problems or if you have any complaints, concerns or feedback.

We will be **Purpose-driven** and strive to resolve any concerns fairly and reasonably, applying our complaints procedure when it's needed.

If you volunteer directly supporting an older person we ask that you be **Accountable** and remember that your role is about helping someone to develop their confidence and independence and as a result that you do not retain or use the keys to someone's home, you don't provide medical, health or personal care, that you do not act as an advocate or power of attorney for someone nor act as qualified therapist as part of your volunteering role with us.

**Expert** and **Collaborative** by providing you with advice and support to ensure that the people that we work with are referred to other relevant services to support their needs.

We hope that volunteering with Independent Age will be a fun, enjoyable and fulfilling experience and would like to thank you once again for choosing Independent Age.

## Data protection

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As an Independent Age volunteer, you may have access to personal and sensitive information in order to enable you to carry out your role properly. It is vital that this information is not shared with unauthorised persons and that it is handled correctly, in line with the GDPR Regulations 2018. We have clear guidelines to ensure you fully understand how best to protect the data you have access to on behalf of the charity which we ask you to read and sign when you start volunteering with us. It can also be found on: [www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources](http://www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources).

If you witness, are told of, or accidentally disclose any information to others who should not be privy to the information, immediately report this to your Independent Age contact and the Information Governance Team on [dp@independentage.org](mailto:dp@independentage.org).

Please remember to delete or securely destroy any notes you make or saved files containing personal information you no longer need.

## Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

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This statement applies to everyone who may seek our support, and also to those who seek to support us in delivering our mission to ensure that **as we grow older, we all have the opportunity to live well with dignity, choice and purpose**. This includes the people who use our services, our staff, volunteers, partners, supporters and suppliers.

We celebrate diversity at Independent Age and we champion the differences and nuances which make each and every one of us unique. We believe that everyone should benefit from equity of opportunity and no one should be subject to any form of discrimination.

We value the diversity of our dedicated team of staff and volunteers, of those who choose to use our services, our partners, supporters and suppliers. We commit to further building upon this diversity over the next three years so that we can be more representative of the communities we work with. We want everyone who uses our services and those who work with Independent Age as a staff member, volunteer, partner, supporter or supplier to feel safe, protected, welcome and included.

In the UK, we all have the right to be treated equitably regardless of our age, colour, disability/health, ethnic or national origin, gender reassignment, marital/family status, nationality, race, religion/belief, sex, sexual orientation, social class, or any other status.

We therefore expect that anyone working with or supporting Independent Age or using our services will treat each other with dignity and respect. We will not tolerate any form of discriminatory behaviour or language from or towards our staff, volunteers, the people who use our services, partners, supporters and suppliers and we will challenge respectfully if this occurs. If changes in behaviour are not made, we will re-evaluate our relationship with the offending party and take appropriate action including potentially ending our relationship with them.

We hope you will help us in creating the respectful, equitable, inclusive environment we all want to enjoy life in, and in celebrating the rich diversity that exists across our nations.

## Safeguarding

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We all have a duty to protect anyone who is at risk of harm or abuse: this is known as safeguarding. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. The training provided by Independent Age will ensure you are well equipped to handle any concerns you have, and you will be fully supported at all times.

If anyone tells you of any type of abuse, remain calm, listen and reassure them that it will be taken seriously. Don't promise confidentiality as you will need to speak to your Independent Age contact who will take this forward. We also have an out of hours number to assist you on **020 7605 4455**, from 5 to 9pm on the week days and 9am to 9pm on the weekends.

You can access more detailed information on safeguarding on our dedicated pages for volunteers on:

[www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources](http://www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources)

# Keeping you safe: COVID-19

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We want all of our volunteers to feel safe and supported during their role with us.

- Please continue to follow the government guidance regarding coronavirus and any guidance sent to you by Independent Age. We will communicate with you as and when there are changes to government guidance that will affect you in your role. If you have questions or queries about your specific circumstances please get in touch with your Independent Age contact who will be happy to help.
- Here at Independent Age, we will not be asking for or keeping data related to vaccinations. We are, however, encouraging people to consider getting vaccinated if possible, because this will help protect us all from the impact of COVID-19. If you do come into contact with people as part of your volunteering we encourage you to use personal protective equipment (e.g. face masks) and hand sanitiser, and to take precautionary measures as appropriate and in line with current government guidance.

We keep the most updated information for volunteers on COVID-19 on our website on: [www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources](http://www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources).

## Specialist Coronavirus support

### **NHS**

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19)

### **Samaritans**

[www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/support-and-information/if-youre-having-difficult-time/if-youre-worried-about-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak](http://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/support-and-information/if-youre-having-difficult-time/if-youre-worried-about-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak)

### **Anxiety UK**

[www.anxietyuk.org.uk/coronavirus-support-resources](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/coronavirus-support-resources)

# Lone Working

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There may be occasions when you need to go out and about in your volunteering role in a setting where there aren't any other people around. This is called 'lone Working'.

Lone Working is "Any situation or location in which someone works without a colleague nearby; or when someone is working out of sight or earshot of another". We all often find ourselves in these situations so it's not something to worry about but it's important that we think about it and that we're thinking ahead.

The first thing to do is to let your trusted contact know where you're going and when you plan to be back and keep them posted if things have over run or plans have changed.

Remember you can always contact your Independent Age contact and they can help ensure that you feel comfortable.

Here is a list of things that are helpful to remember:

- Tell your Trusted Contact where you are going.
- PLAN – Prepare, Look Confident, Avoid Risk and Never Assume
- Familiarise yourself with the area
- Be mindful of the personal information you share
- Be aware of cultural context
- Keep your mobile charged and nearby
- Carry your ID badge with you
- Record and report any incidents that cause you concern

# Problems with your volunteering

If you encounter difficulties in your volunteering role or just feel it isn't working out as hoped, please talk to your Independent Age contact as soon as possible for advice and support. They will help you try to work out any difficulties and finding a more suitable match or volunteering role with us. Alternatively, you can contact the volunteer team on **020 7605 4255**.

If you find that during your volunteering role you're struggling with your mental health for any reason, we encourage you to speak to your Independent Age contact in the first instance. You might also find it helpful to contact one of the organisations below who can offer support and advice.

## Organisations who may be able to help:

### Samaritans

Emotional support day or night for anyone who needs someone to listen without judgement or pressure.

T **116 123**

E **[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)**

W **[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)**

### Mind

Mental health specialists. Mind provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

T **0300 123 3393**

E **[info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)**

W **[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)**

### Anxiety UK

A user-led organisation, run by people with experience of living with anxiety, stress or anxiety-based depression, supported by a high-profile medical advisory panel

T **03444 775 774**

Text service: **07537 416 905**



If you can't get hold of your Independent Age contact as soon as possible, contact the Out of Hours Support number on **020 7605 4455**, 5–9pm on the week days and 9am–9pm on the weekends.

# What to do if...?

## What to do if someone doesn't answer your call or misses an arranged meeting?

- If you can't get hold of them at the agreed time, try again in 15 minutes and then again in another 15 minutes
- If you have still not been successful, leave a voicemail and ask them to contact their Independent Age contact
- Inform your Independent Age contact of the situation or call the Out of Hours Safeguarding Team on **020 7605 4455** (5–9pm on the week days and 9am–9pm on the weekends)
- If the older person is at immediate risk, for example if there is a medical emergency, contact emergency services on **999**

## What to do if you are concerned about someone's wellbeing?

If you are concerned about someone's wellbeing, let your Independent Age contact know as soon as possible.



**If you can't get hold of your Independent Age contact as soon as possible, contact the Out of Hours Support number on 020 7605 4455, 5–9pm on the week days and 9am–9pm on the weekends.**

## What to do if you want to order our information and advice guides?

If you or the person you are supporting would like to order any of our information and advice guides you can order them by going to our website [www.independentage.org](http://www.independentage.org). You can either download them from the website or can order a paper version to be sent to you or the person you are supporting. Audio versions are also available to download of some of our publications.

## What to do if you have expenses to claim?

- We encourage all volunteers to claim any expenses that are incurred as a result of your volunteering.
- Your Independent Age contact will talk to you about how to claim expenses and will go through the process with you.

You can also find our expenses policy and claim form on our dedicated information pages for volunteers [www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources](http://www.independentage.org/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-resources)

## Take care of yourself

Independent Age really value your support and contributions. We know that life has its ups and downs and it's important to look after yourselves.

Mind website has very good resources on how to look after your own wellbeing: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk).

You can always contact your Independent Age contact as well who will be able to offer support.

**Remember, look after yourself,  
there is only one you!**



CHRISTINA



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[www.independentage.org](http://www.independentage.org)  
**Helpline 0800 319 6789**



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