



Lewisham Speaking Up

Registered in England and Wales No. 5320369 | Registered Charity No. 1109083

Volunteer Policy

Agreed by the Board: 24 September 2024

Review date: September 2026

Overview

Lewisham Speaking Up (LSU) recognises the importance of volunteers to its work. Volunteers get involved and add value to much of LSU's work. They are valued members of our wider team who make a huge contribution to outcomes of our project work through contributing their time, enthusiasm and skills. LSU will do its best to support volunteers with developing their skills while working with us.

Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance and direction to all who work and volunteer within LSU and to ensure that the experience of volunteers within the organisation is positive and beneficial to all. This policy sets out what LSU expects from volunteers and what their responsibilities are. The policy also sets out the procedures in place to make sure that each volunteer is recruited, trained and supported in a way that ensures that people with learning disabilities who use the project are well supported by volunteers and safe, and that volunteers themselves have a positive experience.

The policy does not constitute implicitly or explicitly, a binding contractual or personal agreement. There is a separate Code of Conduct for volunteers for this purpose. LSU reserves the right to change any aspect of the Volunteer Policy at any time and expects volunteers to adhere to the changed policy. Should any changes be necessary, they will be approved by the Board of Trustees before any changes are implemented in service delivery.

Scope of the Volunteer Policy

This policy applies to all volunteers in all projects undertaken by, or on behalf of, LSU.

Definition of a Volunteer

A volunteer is anyone who, without compensation or expectation of compensation beyond reimbursement of reasonable expenses incurred in the course of their duties, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of LSU. A volunteer must have completed the volunteer application form, DBS check, and induction process and be formally accepted by LSU prior to beginning any volunteer work for the organisation.

Beneficiaries as volunteers

LSU is in favour of people with learning disabilities and/or autism being volunteers within the organisation. LSU will ensure that supporting beneficiaries as volunteers does not conflict with or obstruct the provision of any services to them or others.

Volunteer rights and responsibilities

All volunteers who begin at LSU agree to work to a given role description for their role. They will be provided with appropriate induction and training for their project by a staff project lead. They will be provided with effective supervision and support, and the right to recognition for work done. In return volunteers will agree to perform their duties to the best of their abilities and to work within the mission, vision, values, policies and procedures of LSU and work within our code of practice for volunteers.

Scope for volunteer involvement

Volunteers are primarily recruited for specific roles on LSU projects but may be involved in other aspects of the organisation's work. For example, they may become volunteer advocates, money management volunteers, self-advocacy group supporters, and also support with any events such as the AGM or special celebratory days.

Volunteers should not, however, be used to displace any paid employees from their position.

Volunteer Management

A system of records will be maintained confidentially in the Charity Log database for each volunteer, including dates of service, positions held, duties performed, training, support and supervision received. Supervision notes will be recorded. Copies of references and a signed code of practice will be scanned and held with the volunteer record on charity log.

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest may be where a volunteer has a relationship with a beneficiary that may compromise their ability to act independently as an advocate, for example if they are a family member, support staff, working for a council or support agency involved with that person, or a friend.

A trusting relationship between an advocate and their advocacy partner is paramount to the delivery of good quality advocacy. In some cases people may have suffered unfair treatment or even abuse at the hands of providers of services and will therefore need to be confident that their advocate is able to represent their views effectively.

The advocacy relationship can sometimes be compromised when the advocate or the advocacy organisation encounters a conflict of interest. To minimize the impact that this may cause, LSU will ask volunteers to declare any conflict of interest before becoming volunteers with the organisation.

Representation of the Organisation

While volunteering at LSU, volunteers may be in a position of representing the organisation at external meetings or in public. They are expected to represent the organisation positively and within the boundaries of their role description. Prior to any action or statement, which might significantly impact on LSU's work and reputation, volunteers should consult and/or seek approval from their project lead. These actions may include, but are not limited to, public statements to the press, lobbying efforts with other groups or organisations, collaborations or join initiatives, or any agreement involving contractual or other financial obligations.

Confidentiality

Volunteers are responsible for following the LSU Confidentiality Policy at all times and should maintain the confidentiality of information to which they are exposed while acting as a volunteer, whether this information involves a member of staff, volunteer, beneficiary or another person, or involves overall business of the organisation. Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in the end of the volunteer's relationship with LSU or other corrective action.

Holding beneficiary records

If a volunteer is required to record or hold information about a service user (e.g. volunteer advocates), volunteers should follow LSU procedures for record keeping and work in accordance with our data protection policy at all times. Any records/notes held by a volunteer about a beneficiary should be shared securely with the project lead regularly then destroyed or deleted from their computer. Records will then be uploaded to charity log.

Volunteer recruitment and selection

Role Descriptions

Volunteers require a clear, complete and current description of the duties and responsibilities of the role that they are expected to fulfil. Prior to any new volunteer assignment or recruitment effort, a role description must be developed for each volunteer post. This will be given to each volunteer at induction.

Recruitment

- LSU will aim to identify worthwhile and satisfying opportunities for volunteers.
- Volunteers will be asked to complete a simple Volunteer Application form and attend an informal interview with the relevant project lead and a person with a learning disability. It will be explained to all applicants that where it is agreed that they are suitable for the position, 2 references will be taken up, satisfactory recommendations received and induction training completed before the position is formally offered. References must not be from a friend or family member. Anyone who is not accepted as a volunteer following interview can ask for feedback to explain the decision.
- LSU will aim to help any volunteer overcome barriers that may make it difficult for them to volunteer at LSU. The organisation will make reasonable adjustments

wherever possible. Volunteers will be asked at interview if any reasonable adjustments are needed to support them fulfil their duties.

- LSU will operate its Equal Opportunities policy at all times in relation to both recruitment and support of volunteers. The organisation welcomes and actively seeks a diverse cohort of volunteers that reflect the diversity of the Lewisham community. LSU will adopt the support of local community resources, websites, social media, and nationwide resources to aid with the recruitment of volunteers.
- The careful selection of volunteers will protect the well-being of clients and the interests of LSU.
- If volunteers will be working with vulnerable adults, then checks will be carried out in line with current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) guidance. No volunteer who works with vulnerable adults can start volunteering until a DBS has been completed.

Induction and Training

All volunteers will be entitled to a structured induction period, to familiarise them with the work of LSU in general and their own area of work in particular. Induction training will be provided to equip volunteers with the skills and information they need to perform their role. It will include history of LSU, advocacy, learning disability and autism, and safeguarding, and any other information necessary for the successful delivery of duties. Volunteers may be expected to do additional external adult safeguarding training.

All volunteers will be given a 'Volunteer Handbook' on induction. This will contain information on the organisation's structure, necessary policies (or link to policies), role description, volunteer agreement, and necessary templates including expenses form.

All volunteers will be asked to read the necessary policies and procedures that are applicable to our advocacy work. These include:

- Volunteer Policy
- Confidentiality
- Adult Safeguarding
- Health & Safety
- Lone Working
- Code of practice for volunteers/advocates

All volunteers will be briefed about the importance of maintaining confidentiality and asked to sign a confidentiality statement.

There will be a three month trial period for all volunteers.

Expenses

Volunteers will be encouraged to claim necessary travel expenses. Reimbursement of other out-of-pocket expenses will be considered where funding permits, e.g.: soft drinks during meetings. Receipts must be provided and attached to the completed

LSU Volunteer Expense Claim form. Expenses will usually be paid through BACS, although in certain circumstances a discretionary arrangement can be made to pay some expenses to volunteers through petty cash.

Guidelines for Volunteer Expenses

1. Travel

Volunteers are expected to use the cheapest and most effective means of transport possible, namely public transport. Please ask for a receipt for tickets, or provide the used ticket to claim back expenses. When using Oyster cards, please record all journeys and fare for that journey on the expenses form.

2. Telephone

Volunteers may claim for legitimate telephone calls made on LSU business. However, a copy of the telephone bill with the relevant calls highlighted must be provided.

3. Stationery

Volunteers should identify stationery they require to carry out LSU work, with the project lead.

4. Postage

Where a volunteer incurs postage costs in the line of their role, all reasonable costs will be reimbursed.

5. Other costs

There may be other costs incurred by the volunteer not covered by the above categories. A volunteer is in no way obliged to buy birthday or other gifts for a person they are advocating for on behalf of LSU. If, in their discretion they decide to do so, these costs will not be reimbursed. Conversely, a volunteer should not accept gifts from or on behalf of those they are advocating for.

Insurance

All volunteers are covered by the LSU insurance policy while they are on the premises or engaged in LSU work.

Support and supervision

All volunteers will have a named person as their main contact; initially this will be the relevant project lead. They will be provided with regular supervision to feedback on progress, discuss future developments and air any problems. This may be with the project lead or as part of volunteers group supervision.

Volunteers will be encouraged to express their views on matters concerning the organisation. Their opinion will be sought concerning any changes or developments which may affect them.

LSU will respect the confidentiality of volunteers and will not release any information about them without their agreement. We hold volunteer details securely on Charity Log.

Volunteers are expected to perform their role on a regular and punctual basis. When expecting to be absent, volunteers should inform their project lead as far in advance as possible so that alternative arrangements may be made. Continued non-attendance or poor punctuality may result in the volunteer being asked to finish volunteering with LSU.

Volunteers will be introduced to staff members, made to feel welcome, valued for what they offer, and thanked for their contribution.

LSU will supply a reference to any volunteer seeking other voluntary work or paid employment if they have volunteered with the organisation for six months or more.

Equality and Diversity

LSU will operate its Equal Opportunities Policy at all times in relation to both recruitment and support of volunteers. LSU is committed to equal opportunities and believes volunteering should be open to all regardless of gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, sexual preference, race, disability, marital status, age, religion, community background or political beliefs. The acceptance of a volunteer in a particular role is based on merit and the sole criteria of the individual's ability to do the work.

LSU will regularly monitor progress on equal opportunity within volunteering.

Health and Safety

LSU will ensure that volunteers are made aware of health and safety procedures and requirements, and will, as far as practicable, provide a safe environment for volunteers.

The LSU Health and Safety policy will be read and understood by all volunteers.

LSU is committed to, and takes seriously, safe working practices for volunteers. Risk Assessments will be carried out and safe working will be discussed during the induction and support meetings. Volunteers must read all applicable risk assessments before starting a piece of work.

Complaints, Grievance and Disciplinary procedures

In the first instance the project lead should be contacted and notified of any concerns to see if they can be resolved informally. If any person feels unable to talk to the project lead or if it is inappropriate to do so, they can contact the Director. If they feel they cannot speak to either these persons, then the LSU Complaints Policy will be implemented (please see Complaints Policy).

Termination

LSU reserves the right to terminate your volunteer relationship. This will be done in writing by either the project lead or the Director. LSU will where possible, try and give volunteers at least two weeks' notice of termination of the volunteering relationship but has the right to terminate the volunteer relationship without notice at any time without prejudice.

If you wish to withdraw from your voluntary role you are asked to give your supervisor as much notice as possible. LSU would appreciate at least two weeks' notice of you leaving your role but we recognise your right to withdraw at any time without prejudice.

You will be offered an exit interview upon leaving your voluntary role at LSU.

In the event that a volunteer departs from LSU whether voluntarily or involuntarily, it shall be the responsibility of the project lead to inform the affected staff and/or beneficiary that the volunteer is no longer available. Every effort will be made by the project lead to replace the volunteer as soon as possible.

Recognition of Volunteers

All staff responsible for volunteer supervision are encouraged to undertake methods to recognise the positive contributions made by volunteers on a regular basis throughout the year. This can range from a simple 'thank you', regular positive feedback, or discussion with the wider team about a recognition or celebratory activity during volunteers week or at the AGM.

Monitoring and Review

It will be the responsibility of LSU to review the operation of this Volunteer Policy regularly and to make sure that it is always in accordance with the Equal Opportunity Policy and current volunteering best practice.

Note:

LSU works to support people with learning disabilities. As adults at risk, we work to ensure their safety and operate an applicable Adult Safeguarding Policy.

All volunteers will need to demonstrate to LSU that they are fit for the role that they are undertaking. This will require the taking up of references and undergoing a relevant enhanced DBS check, in compliance with our policy.

Other Relevant Policies and Procedures

- Code of Conduct or Practice for Advocates and Volunteers
- Confidentiality Policy
- Adult Safeguarding Policy
- Equal Opportunities & Diversity Policy
- Staff and Volunteer expenses policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Complaints Policy & Procedure
- Grievance Procedure
- Conflict of Interest Policy