



Swansea Asylum Seekers Support

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INFORMATION FOR VOLUNTEERS

Many thanks indeed for showing an interest in volunteering with SASS. We are keen for volunteers to familiarise themselves with our community drop-ins before making a commitment. This information is provided to offer guidance in volunteering with SASS.

Volunteering helps SASS to be sustainable as we survive on donations and grants. Being a volunteer led organisation we rely almost entirely on people who kindly give their free time. A strong, diverse volunteer base helps SASS develop new activities and services. Asylum seekers, refugees and “locals” foster understanding and friendship as they contribute together in our volunteer team, building on each other’s skills and confidence. Volunteering can provide evidence of someone’s skills and commitments. Our volunteer references are useful when seeking employment, or for Home Office character references.

How can you help? Informal volunteering at drop-ins: Every member of our drop-in community – whether local, asylum seeker or refugee – can help informally, by chatting to newcomers, bringing games, setting up for the drop-in, helping in the kitchen, cleaning and tidying up afterwards; offering friendship and support.

In addition, SASS needs volunteers to undertake specific roles. These can be occasional or regular volunteering activities and are available at all levels of the organisation.

Befriending	Venue upkeep
English Language Support	Fundraising
Kitchen Duties	Support/Signposting
Children's Activities	Welcome Desk Duty
Driving (giving lifts/delivering donations/shopping)	Family Fun Activities
Interpreting	Sorting/Distributing Donations

We are committed to consulting with our membership on what would help SASS meet our aims more fully. This can lead to **additional volunteer roles, for example:**

- Organising further leisure and educational activities
- Providing practical information and support to asylum seekers
- Helping with fire drills and other health and safety procedures
- Help with outreach and/or fund raising
- Supporting asylum seekers and refugees outside drop-in time. For example, help with lifts in an emergency; accompanying people to MPs, solicitors, court appearances (where no solicitors) etc. Seek/ discuss with SASS management.
- Liaison with the wider community, or with other groups which support asylum seekers and refugees
- Supporting people in detention and helping people to support their friends who have been detained.
- A number of roles will need additional training before being undertaken.

VOLUNTEERS are people who, unpaid and of their own free will, contribute their time, energy and skills to the benefit of the community. It is different from paid work as there is no financial reward and no legal contract. (**This distinction is particularly important for asylum seekers**).

What we aim to offer SASS volunteers

All new visitors to the drop-in, including potential volunteers, should receive **a warm welcome**.

Our Volunteer Development Workers/Team Leaders will have an initial conversation to begin to find out what each volunteer might be interested in doing. S/he will also explain some important guidelines that we all need to follow. This could be a chance to observe an area of volunteering that they might be interested in.

You are provided with this information so you can see what we do and what we expect from the beginning.

When a volunteer has had time to read our volunteer guidance and think more about their involvement, the VDW will discuss **specific volunteer roles** with them, which might match their skills and interests. Each role will have a simple description so that volunteers will know what is expected.

It is important that when volunteers join us, they are introduced as soon as possible to our organisation – our aims, values, guidelines etc., and also to some of the challenges faced by asylum seekers.

New volunteers will participate in group induction sessions within the first few weeks of joining us. It is important to provide a consistent introduction to all volunteers.

Maintaining volunteer interest in the early weeks: Where the volunteer role requires references, DBS checks, or specific induction or training, this sometimes causes delay. It is important to find ways of helping new volunteers to find ways of being involved while they wait. For example some of the more straightforward tasks.

Development opportunities: SASS will provide opportunities for volunteers to share experiences and feedback on their roles, to discuss how each volunteer finds the volunteer experience, what new roles they might like to try, a chance to increase – or decrease – their commitment over time. We will also welcome comments on the organisation as a whole.

We do not have a large training budget but will try to provide appropriate external or online training, suitable for specific roles, in some cases accredited. Important informal in-house workshops and training are also provided.

Out of pocket expenses, to reimburse incurred costs to do *an agreed voluntary role*, are available to all volunteers subject to SASS approval.

We are not able to pay expenses for people to simply attend a drop-in session, even if they might offer informal help while they are with us.

A safe environment: SASS has public liability insurance which covers accidents to anyone on the premises. The organisation does not insure the volunteer's personal possessions against loss or damage.

Everyone in SASS has a commitment to follow our **policies**. www.sass.wales.

Membership of SASS: We hope volunteers will enjoy being part of the SASS community and feel able to bring their ideas, feedback and enthusiasm. Anyone who is committed to our values and attends or helps regularly is encouraged to become a member of SASS.

References: For those who may be involved with 'lone working', in line with SASS' safeguarding policies and to ensure volunteers are willing and able to behave according to our values and follow our guidelines we will require two references. These could be two professional references or one professional reference and one character reference. Not all SASS roles involve lone working.

DBS Checks: We take up DBS checks for volunteers and staff working with children or vulnerable adults.

**NO VOLUNTEER OR STAFF MEMBER WORKS ALONE
WITH CHILDREN OR YOUNG PEOPLE.**

Making a Complaint

If a volunteer has a complaint against the organisation or someone in it, we first ask them to talk with the VDW, informally at first. If this does not resolve the matter, they can approach the chair of trustees, in writing if possible. **Concerns regarding any form of abuse or aggression** must be brought to the attention of the VDW.

WHAT WE EXPECT FROM SASS VOLUNTEERS

- To work within SASS aims, values and guidelines.
- To treat everyone equally and with respect
- To avoid controlling or patronising behaviour and to respect the autonomy of each and every individual
- To respect confidentiality and privacy
- Not to ask intrusive questions – e.g. about an asylum seekers case or journey
- To avoid promoting any religious or political views on others
- To be willing to co-operate with safeguarding and training needed for particular roles
- To offer support and signposting if trained to do so, but never advice - especially legal advice
- To comply with relevant policies and procedures
- To respect the work of the organisation and not bring it into disrepute
- To do what they have promised to do, or to let us know if they can't
- To give SASS constructive feedback and ideas for improvement

OUR VALUES IN INVOLVING VOLUNTEERS

- Equal opportunities in recruitment and support of volunteers
- Involving those seeking sanctuary and local volunteers on an equal footing
- Consulting our membership on new roles and activities for volunteers
- Clear expectations of volunteers – what we ask them to do, and the standards needed
- Two-way benefit: SASS should benefit from the help given by volunteers and volunteers themselves should benefit. (Volunteers are not paid for their work, but, for example can gain satisfaction from a good job done; gain new skills and experience and have references.

Boundaries and Volunteer Guidelines

Boundaries - “Drawing a line” between volunteering and the rest of our lives

When we volunteer it is important that we don't let volunteering take over too much of the rest of our life. Consider these questions; we need to be clear about the following:

- What about our mobile numbers?
- How much time are we prepared to commit?
- Are we prepared to give or lend money?
- What is the boundary between our personal life and being a volunteer?
- What parts of our personal life do we want to keep private? From whom?
- What are we prepared to do and what for us is “too much” – whether this is in terms of the time we give or the pressure or responsibility we are willing to take on?

SASS is a friendship organisation and therefore has fewer “set boundaries”. Many decisions you make on your own personal boundaries will be your own.

Volunteer Guidelines

- Don't ask people why they have sought asylum – this is often very personal and painful to talk about. If people want to tell you they will.
- Keep any personal information shared confidential - as it could affect someone's case. If you are given information that worries you, contact our *Volunteer Development Worker
- SASS discourages lending money to SASS community members and **SASS certainly cannot take any responsibility for this.**
- NEVER give legal advice. If you are asked for specific advice, only provide if factually correct. Consult the VDW if unsure.
- If you are concerned about boundaries or if you want to talk about your volunteer role, or an activity you want to run, contact our *Volunteer Development Team. If you want to volunteer with the children, talk with Welcome to Play's Coordinator. Volunteering with children must always be within the Welcome to Play room unless authorised otherwise by the coordinator.
- Our safeguarding policy says that you need to talk with our Coordinator if you have concerns over a child's safety.
- If you are giving people lifts, talk to the *Volunteer Development Team first.
- If you see an adult personally away from the drop-in, that is your responsibility. **However** if you plan to give a lift or visit a family with children or young people, please talk with the *Volunteer Development Team" first.
- For any issue relating to language teaching, please talk to our *ESOL Coordinator

Contacts

Wayne – Volunteer Development Tel: 07853 717017

George – Volunteer Development (ESOL) Tel: 07719 876193

Ruth - Welcome to Play Coordinator Tel: 07762 929754

Important Information for Asylum Seekers

THE HOME OFFICE DISTINCTION BETWEEN “VOLUNTEERING” AND “VOLUNTARY WORK”

We have copied below the distinction the Home Office makes between volunteering and voluntary work.

To summarise:

- We stress that asylum seekers, and those who write references for them, should refer to their volunteering as ‘volunteering’ - not ‘voluntary work’
- In our policies, procedures and the way we organise volunteering, we avoid ‘work language’: terms such as “contracts” and “obligations” etc.
- Volunteers are under no obligation to do particular tasks for us or at particular times

Volunteering

Volunteers are those who give their time for free to charitable or public sector organisations without any contractual obligation or entitlement. They are not employees or workers as defined by various statutory provisions.

Volunteering can be undertaken at any stage of the asylum process but such activities must not interfere with scheduled events such as a substantive asylum interview, regular reporting event or re-documentation interview. These events will not be rescheduled to accommodate volunteering. Organisations offering such opportunities will need to allow some flexibility so that volunteers can attend interviews or appointments around their volunteering. Volunteering must also not undermine the effective removal of those who do not need protection and do not qualify to remain in the UK on any other basis.

Asylum seekers can volunteer whilst their claim is considered without being granted permission to work. It is Home Office policy to support asylum seekers volunteering for charities or public sector organisations. However, this must not amount to engagement as an ‘employee’ or a ‘worker’ and it is the responsibility of the individual and the organisation they are volunteering for to check that such activity does not mean they are working in breach of conditions. The organisation should also undertake all relevant safeguarding checks required. Any personal details provided by the claimant as part of the immigration process cannot be confirmed by the Home Office for use in any other context other than immigration matters.

Key elements in establishing whether someone is a volunteer rather than an employee or worker are whether there is an obligation on the individual to perform the work, and an obligation on the organisation to provide it; and whether the individual is rewarded for the work, through money or benefits in kind.

Volunteers may be reimbursed for expenses incurred whilst volunteering, for example, for travel and food but should not receive any other payment. If any other payment is received the role may be classed as an employee or worker.

Working or being employed by a charity or voluntary organisation is subject to the same restrictions as employment in other sectors. Genuine volunteering roles are not subject to these restrictions.

To summarise, the principal difference is that volunteering must not amount to unpaid work, or job substitution. In particular:

- there should be no payment, other than reasonable travel and meals expenditure actually incurred (not an allowance for the same)
- there should be no contractual obligations on the volunteer and they should not enjoy any contractual entitlement to any work or benefits
- the volunteer is helping a registered voluntary or charitable organisation, an organisation that raises funds for either of these, or a public sector organisation
- volunteering is not a substitute for employment, that is fulfilling a role that a salaried worker would normally fulfil

Organisations need to be clear about the legal status of volunteering roles they create before they recruit people to such roles. The guidance above is to help organisations understand the distinctions. However, if in doubt about whether a specific opportunity constitutes engagement as an employee or worker or volunteering, organisations should seek independent legal advice before taking on volunteers who are asylum seekers and who do not have permission to work.

Working for a charity

Asylum seekers or failed asylum seekers awaiting the outcome of an asylum claim or further submission cannot work as an employee or a worker, even for a voluntary organisation, unless they have been granted permission to work under Paragraph 360 of the Immigration Rules.

Link: [Volunteering for Asylum Seekers – Home Office Guidance - Version 12.0 – October 2023](#)

Rules concerning the media and others seeking information.

(made pursuant to clause 26 of the SASS Constitution). Adopted September 2023

Introduction.

An asylum seeker is someone alleging “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” UN Refugee Convention 1951. A refugee is someone whose asylum claim has been accepted by the UK government.

Many asylum seekers and refugees are people who have suffered experiences (actual persecution) which they do not wish to re-live or recount. They and/or their family may also be at risk of further persecution or may be in danger if their identity or whereabouts are published. For one or both of these reasons, such people are vulnerable. These rules are designed to protect them.

SASS does not seek to discover, explore or judge the claims of any asylum seeker or refugee. Quite the contrary. The objects and aims of SASS are set out in paragraph 3 of its Constitution. They include humanitarian help and support for asylum seekers and refugees, and advancing the education of the public about issues relating to them. In carrying out the latter task, care must be taken not to increase stress or danger to those SASS intends to help. When dealing with the media or others seeking information there is a balance to be struck.

The rules.

1. For the purposes of brevity the use of the word “media” in these rules includes not only a person or organisation to whom the expression would commonly be applied, but any other person or organisation seeking or purporting to seek information for research or any other purpose that may be published in any way.
2. No member of SASS or anyone acting for SASS should facilitate or allow any enquiry to be made by the media of any asylum seeker or refugee. Nothing in the following rules is intended to restrict the scope of this rule.
3. No member of SASS nor anyone acting for SASS should ...
 - (i) facilitate the attendance of any media at events where asylum seekers or refugees are likely to be present.
 - (ii) take part in or facilitate the media producing photographs or making any other visual or audio recording of asylum seekers or refugees.
 - (iii) take part in any action likely to reveal to the media the identity or whereabouts of any asylum seeker or refugee.
4. Nothing in these rules is to prevent or discourage the trustees, through an authorised person or persons, releasing information to or discussing with the media any information about the work of SASS in furtherance of its aim to educate the public in accordance with the Constitution of SASS. Such discussion may include anonymised case histories.
5. Nothing in these rules is to prevent or discourage any asylum seeker or refugee raising awareness of their own case.

Additional information for SASS trustees, workers, volunteers and other members:

Requests for information from the media, journalists, and other researchers – why SASS says No.

Introduction

In these rules, “media” means journalists, university researchers, and anybody who wants information from or about asylum seekers and refugees, in order to make the information public, on social media, news media, on tv, radio, or in print etc.

“Member of SASS” means SASS worker/trustee/volunteer or anyone else acting in the name of SASS.

Aims and risks

SASS aims to protect asylum seekers and refugees from harm. Another aim is to “educate the public” about asylum seekers and refugees. But when we do this, we must not stress them or put them in danger.

Talking to the media is a bad idea because:

1. When an asylum seeker’s “case story” is being investigated by the Home Office, telling the story to the media can result in slightly different versions of it. That can be enough for the Home Office to disbelieve it.
2. To reveal the identity or whereabouts of an asylum seeker or refugee can be very dangerous for them and others in their home country.

Many have escaped from persecution in their country. Family members in that country may be persecuted if it becomes known that they are in the UK; Especially if they are engaged in certain activities. That can include: being with people from another country or minority, or being in a mixed-sex gathering, or being in a room with religious symbols on the wall. This is why SASS has a ‘no photographs’ policy, and we only publish anonymised individual stories, with names and details changed so they can’t be identified.

3. Many asylum seekers and refugees have suffered experiences which they do not want to talk about.

SASS does not try to find out about the claims of any asylum seeker or refugee. We only offer humanitarian help and support. We listen if people want to talk as friends. Talking to media can easily become traumatic.

The rules mean that

1. No member of SASS should help any media to get information from any asylum seeker or refugee.
2. No member of SASS should:
 - (i) invite media to attend SASS events;
 - (ii) allow media to take photos, videos or audio recordings;
 - (iii) tell media about any asylum seeker or refugee: who they are, where they live, what they do, etc
3. With approval of the trustees, members can use anonymised case stories to educate the public.

4. If an asylum seeker or refugee wants to raise public awareness of their own case story, SASS can support them. For example, they may want to start an anti-deportation campaign, which means publicising some details of their personal story. Then SASS will support them. Or they may choose to publicise their story as a public speaker, or writer. SASS will support asylum seekers and refugees who take such decisions, if we know that they are fully aware of the possible risks.

SASS Monitoring and Evaluation Policy

SASS is always mindful that members of our SASS community have experienced great distress and trauma prior to and while seeking sanctuary, and that this is likely to continue in the long term. We have a general principle that staff and volunteers do not ask about people's histories or how they came to be living here because we want to avoid re-traumatisation and preserve people's dignity and respect. We also recognise that asking people to share data and keeping organisational records can be barriers to developing the trusting relationships that are central to how we want to operate.

SASS is also mindful that community members have lots to offer and have gained strengths, knowledge and resilience through their experiences as well as trauma. As a result, whenever we are undertaking research, evaluation or monitoring activity with seekers of sanctuary and other members of the SASS community, we will always...

- Place the needs, interests and safety of sanctuary seekers at the centre of all such activities, regularly asking ourselves in whose interests are we collecting and recording data
- Seek to minimize the potential for harm or distress caused by the tools we use to collect data, for example by avoiding regularly asking someone to reflect on the quality of their mental health
- Seek to maximise benefits to people's health and wellbeing when they are involved in such activities, for example by focussing on reflections that are likely to have more positive effects on wellbeing and/or using creative and therapeutic data collection tools
- Be open and transparent about why we are collecting information and what it will be used for
- Involve community members in planning, designing and carrying out these activities

From time to time, we might want to find out more about what changes happen over time for people when they are part of the SASS community, for example using one-to-one interviews or in depth focus groups. These activities have the potential to be distressing, so when we do this we will:

- Only carry out this activity with over 18s and with established SASS community members (i.e. not in the first 6 months of arriving)
- Make sure we gain informed consent for those taking part
- Make sure we know what to do if a person becomes distressed while taking part in the activity
- Always provide recompense (out of pocket expenses, refreshments)
- Sometimes provide remuneration (eg shopping vouchers) where longer term involvement or large chunks of time are needed

The SASS Trustees can agree to a request to participate in research if they are certain that the study: complies with the [Wales trauma-informed framework](#);

- complies with the SASS policy setting out our values and approach to monitoring and evaluation;
- is in the best interest of SASS and its members.

Updated November 2023