

# VENTURE SCOTLAND VOLUNTEER POLICY

## 1. Introduction

Venture Scotland runs a personal development programme based in the outdoors for young people on the margins of society. Our participants are aged between 16 and 30 and face a range of issues including homelessness, leaving care, drug and alcohol misuse, learning disabilities, racial discrimination, caring for others, mental health problems and offending.

Our overall aim is to empower the young people we work with to take positive action to achieve personal goals including employment, education, training, volunteering and independent living.

Volunteers are essential to Venture Scotland and make a vital contribution to the above mission. The main areas where volunteers are currently active are:

- Leading our residential weekends, during which young people take part in challenging adventure and conservation activities in a wilderness setting.
- Supporting city-based day and evening activities for young people.
- Contributing to our conservation programmes and efforts to maintain and develop the bothies (mountain huts) we use.
- As members of the Management Committee that governs the organisation.
- In office roles e.g. on projects relating to fundraising and PR.

Venture Scotland believes strongly in the value of volunteering and seeks to involve volunteers in what it does in order to:

- Provide its participants with a diverse range of positive mentors and role models from throughout society.
- Contribute a wide variety of skills, experience and perspectives to our programmes.
- Offer an opportunity for Venture Scotland programme graduates to take on a role in which they can support other young people.
- Help increase knowledge and understanding about the causes of social exclusion.

## 2. Venture Scotland's commitment to volunteering

Venture Scotland:

- Recognises that voluntary work brings benefits to volunteers themselves, the young people we work with and to paid staff.
- Will ensure that volunteers are properly integrated into the organisational structure and that mechanisms are in place for them to make a real contribution to our work.
- Will not introduce volunteers to replace paid staff.
- Expects that staff at all levels will work positively with volunteers and, where appropriate, will actively seek to involve them in their work.
- Recognises that volunteers require satisfying work and personal development and will seek to help volunteers meet these needs, as well as providing the training for them to do their work effectively.
- Will endeavour to identify and cover the costs of involving volunteers.
- Recognises that the management of volunteers requires designated responsibilities within specific staff posts. To this end, the Director takes primary responsibility for the management of volunteers with support from the rest of the staff team.
- Will ensure volunteers are represented at board level by ensuring that at least one member of the Management Committee is an existing volunteer. One Committee member is also specifically tasked with overseeing the organisation's volunteer development strategy.
- Will review this policy on an annual basis to ensure that it remains relevant to the organisation and takes account of new legislation.

### **3. Recruitment & selection**

Recruitment of volunteers will be from all sections of the community, and will be in line with Venture Scotland's Equal Opportunities Policy. We endeavour to promote our volunteering opportunities to a diverse audience and in particular to encourage former participants to take on the challenge of volunteering where this is appropriate.

All volunteers are asked to complete a simple application form and to supply the details of two referees. Once they have made an application, people interested in becoming volunteers with Venture Scotland will be invited for an informal interview with the Director, Programme Coordinator or Participant Development Worker depending on their location and the role they are interested in.

During this session, they will be talked through an induction presentation and given an information pack including general information about Venture Scotland and specific information on the volunteer role in which they are interested. They will also be talked through this Volunteer Policy and asked to sign a Volunteer Agreement if they are ready to commit to volunteering.

Volunteers who are taking on roles, which mean they will be supervising vulnerable young people or be in any other position of trust, will be asked to provide information about any criminal convictions through a Self-Disclosure Form. This information will be dealt with in the strictest confidence and will not necessarily prejudice the person being accepted for voluntary work. Volunteers in all such roles will also be required to complete a Disclosure Scotland check of the relevant level.

In addition, the suitability of all volunteers taking on the roles involving contact with young people will be assessed through the course of their induction training, which forms part of the selection process for these positions.

In some instances it may be determined through the interview and training process that an applicant may not have the suitable skills, experience or personal qualities required for a particular volunteer role. In these circumstances, Venture Scotland will endeavour to find an alternative role suitable for the applicant. If there are no suitable roles available, we will communicate to the applicant the reasons for our decision and decline their offer of help. Where relevant, Venture Scotland will signpost the applicant to more suitable volunteering opportunities at other organisations.

### **4. Induction and training**

Bothy Venture Volunteers will be invited to attend a training evening and residential weekend in preparation for volunteering. The purpose of this training weekend is to give new volunteers an introduction to skills for working with young people, to key health and safety considerations and to the types of activities that will take place on residential weekends.

Volunteers in other roles will be offered an individual induction session and training relevant to their role. For example, Conservation Team Leaders will be offered induction training at the bothy where they will be working and new members to the Management Committee will be given an individual induction by the Chair of Venture Scotland.

In addition to offering induction training, Venture Scotland is committed to providing volunteers with a programme of ongoing training with a view to volunteers continuing to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence. For example, Bothy Venture Volunteers will be offered further training in topics such as First Aid and managing difficult situations. Venture Scotland also welcomes proposals from individual volunteers who would like financial support to help them complete specific external courses e.g. Mountain Leader training.

### **5. Volunteer Agreements and role profiles**

Each volunteer will be given a role profile and a Volunteer Agreement containing full information about their chosen area of work and a clear idea of their responsibilities and Venture Scotland's responsibilities to them.

## **6. The volunteer's voice**

Volunteers are encouraged to express their views about matters concerning Venture Scotland and its work. To this end, volunteers will be asked for written feedback at the end of each residential weekend. At the end of each six-month programme, Venture Scotland will also actively seek feedback from volunteers on the success of the course. Finally, Venture Scotland commits to consulting volunteers with regard to the planning of all major new projects.

## **7. Expenses**

Venture Scotland will reimburse volunteers for all agreed out of pocket expenses incurred while volunteering for Venture Scotland, including items such as travel, car parking and food. Volunteers should contact the Administration and Finance Officer in order to process their expenses. Receipts or proof of purchase should be provided in all instances.

## **8. Equipment**

Venture Scotland has an extensive store of outdoor equipment. Volunteers involved in outdoor activities can borrow items from this store when they need them. All items borrowed must be signed in and out using an equipment form. Volunteers must not use any item of their personal equipment if its use will directly involve it in the safety chain (e.g. harnesses, karabiners, ropes, belay devices etc) of an activity. Other personal equipment may be worn, subject to the individual accepting responsibility for their own property (helmets, buoyancy aids, etc.).

## **9. Support for volunteers**

All volunteers will have a named person as their main point of contact. This member of staff is tasked with assigning work to the volunteer, planning their training and development and responding to their ideas and concerns. For Bothy Venture Volunteers this will be the Director of Venture Scotland, for Conservation Volunteers this will be the Participant Development Worker and for office-based volunteers this will be a staff member based in the relevant office.

Bothy Venture Volunteers will have the opportunity to ask for support, air their views, discuss personal development goals and ask for feedback during the planning meetings and review meetings that take place before and after each residential trip. During the course of a residential weekend, the staff/volunteer team will provide ongoing support and feedback to each volunteer.

In addition, volunteers will be offered additional support in the form of action planning sessions aimed at structuring their volunteer involvement with a view to them acquiring particular knowledge, skills or experience. This may be of particular relevance to volunteers who have recently participated in the Venture Scotland programme.

## **10. Insurance**

All volunteers are covered by Venture Scotland's insurance policy whilst they are on the premises or engaged in any work on the organisation's behalf. Policies held include public and employer's liability as well as personal accident cover for all volunteers. Venture Scotland does not provide motor insurance for volunteers using their own vehicles. Voluntary work is normally covered as 'social domestic pleasure use' but volunteers are advised to check this with their insurer.

## **11. Health and Safety**

Venture Scotland has two key policies relating to the health and safety of its operations. Full copies of these policies are available on request.

The general welfare of all volunteers is covered by Venture Scotland's Health and Safety Policy. All volunteers are given health and safety information relevant to their location and role as part of their induction.

Volunteers involved in delivering the Venture Scotland programme should be aware of the organisation's Programme Safety Policy and make every effort to work to the procedures it contains. Key parts of this policy relevant to volunteers are covered in induction training sessions, in volunteer planning meetings and are also available for reference in the Safety File, which is

taken on each trip. All outdoor activities are run to the requirements of the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority, with which Venture Scotland has a license.

## **12. Equal opportunities**

Venture Scotland is committed to equal opportunities for staff, volunteers and participants in all aspects of its recruitment, support and training. Volunteers are expected to be open minded, sensitive and respectful of people, values and experiences and should expect to be treated in the same manner. Venture Scotland has a separate Equal Opportunities Policy. Copies of the full policy are available to volunteers on request.

## **13. Confidentiality**

Venture Scotland strives to create an atmosphere of trust, where young people are able to speak with confidence and know that information concerning them is handled and stored in a safe manner. It is Venture Scotland policy that information about participants can be shared within the staff/volunteer team but not outside of the organisation in normal circumstances. This policy is in place to protect individual staff members and volunteers from feelings of stress or isolation that could be caused by disclosures made by participants. It is also aimed at enabling staff/volunteers to provide support appropriate to each young person's needs.

Where a volunteer breaks Venture Scotland confidentiality policy, without authorisation, the incident will be investigated. This may result in the volunteer being the subject of disciplinary action. Copies of the full Confidentiality Policy are available to volunteers on request.

## **14. Protection of Children and Young People**

Volunteers involved in the delivery of the Venture Scotland programme should be aware of the organisation's policies relating to The Protection of Children and Young People. This policy will be covered in detail as part of induction training. In particular, volunteers should be aware of Venture Scotland's Code of Conduct relating to working with children and young people.

The above policies reflect Venture Scotland's belief that all young people have the right to freedom from abuse and are aimed at providing young people with appropriate safety and protection whilst in the care and supervision of Venture Scotland staff and volunteers. As part of these policies, volunteer recruitment is designed to include appropriate vetting procedures.

## **15. Drug and Alcohol Policy**

Venture Scotland is committed to offering a service where participants can explore their personal and social development in a safe environment free from the influence of drugs and alcohol. For this reason, the drinking of alcohol or the use of drugs is not permitted:

- By any young person, while under Venture Scotland supervision
- By any volunteer or member of staff, while on duty
- By anyone on Venture Scotland premises

In the event that a volunteer is discovered or suspected of alcohol and/or drug use, action will be taken by the Director to investigate the incident. If there is reasonable evidence to indicate that the individual has been in breach of the policy, s/he may be subject to disciplinary action, which in turn may lead to the termination of their involvement with the organisation.

Awareness of drug and alcohol issues forms part of Venture Scotland volunteer training. In addition, volunteers can access the full Drug and Alcohol Policy on request.

## **16. Data protection**

Venture Scotland abides by the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. Personal information about volunteers is stored securely and access is limited only to those staff members and volunteers who are authorised to use it for volunteer management purposes.

## **17. Problems**

Venture Scotland is committed to dealing with any grievances volunteers may have. In line with this policy volunteers have the right to discuss any concerns they may have with their named contact at any time. If the contact person is unable to resolve the problem they will refer the matter to the Director and ultimately the Management Committee, with the permission of the volunteer.

Venture Scotland has a Disciplinary Policy on how it will deal with any disciplinary issue regarding a volunteer. Copies are available to volunteers on request.

## **18. Moving on**

Volunteers are asked to inform Venture Scotland when they are no longer wish to volunteer. Volunteers will have the right to request a reference on the basis of their voluntary work and will be supported to move on to other options.

*Please contact Venture Scotland on 0131 475 2395 if you have any queries relating to this policy.*