

# Our Volunteer Policy

## **Contents**

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Code of Behaviour
3. Confidentiality and Volunteer Boundaries
4. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

## 1. Introduction

### **Who we are**

We are SSAFA. We believe that the dedication of the whole Forces family deserves our lifelong commitment.

### **Who we help**

We provide practical emotional and financial support to anyone who is currently serving, anyone who has ever served, and their families.

### **How we help**

A network of regional branches and local service committees support highly trained volunteers in offering practical and emotional support to those in need. Our volunteers assist with requests for financial assistance, signpost to other organisations or are just a friendly face.

### **Recruitment**

SSAFA offers a wide range of volunteering opportunities within the veteran and serving communities including casework, fundraising and assisting with projects such as the children's Short Breaks Scheme. The recruitment process depends on the nature of volunteering you wish to undertake.

#### 1.1 What you can expect from us

### **Support and guidance**

SSAFA is committed to maintaining the highest standards in best practice and volunteer support. As a volunteer, we will endeavour to assist you as much as possible in carrying out your role effectively.

Your branch or volunteer network support & liaison manager (VNSLM) should maintain regular contact with you, providing ongoing advice, guidance and encouragement. Additional support is also available from the Volunteer Support Department at Central Office.

### **Training and induction**

Before embarking on formal training, our volunteers *must* complete a local induction process which gives an overview of SSAFA and the work we do.

The volunteer role you choose will determine which training course you attend and whether it is mandatory.

Volunteers who wish to work directly with clients as caseworkers<sup>1</sup> or community volunteers, or to become treasurers or other office holders, *must* attend an appropriate course either regionally or at Central Office. However, all volunteers are

---

<sup>1</sup> Active caseworkers are required to attend refresher training every five years and an annual training day.

encouraged to attend some training to assist them in their role, in addition to attending local training days annually, and offering support at local events wherever possible.

### **Information**

You will have access to a number of resources that are regularly updated. These include the SSAFA extranet (the internal part of the website); *SCOPE* (a quarterly information publication); and *News and Views* (the SSAFA magazine). In addition you will receive information from your branch or VNSLM.

Volunteer information can be found on the extranet and hard copies can be obtained from the Volunteer Support Department.

### **Expenses**

SSAFA maintains that no volunteer should be out of pocket when undertaking voluntary activities. All reasonable expenses will be reimbursed, either locally or by Central Office where appropriate (i.e. when attending training).

Please refer to the Volunteer Expenses Policy, available on the extranet, for further information.

### **Insurance**

Our volunteers are covered by SSAFA's public liability insurance policy while engaged in SSAFA activities.

### **Health and safety**

The safety and well-being of volunteers is of utmost importance. SSAFA has a duty of care to adhere to health and safety legislation to ensure that any significant risks concerning volunteers are assessed and reduced. Volunteers also have a personal responsibility to take reasonable steps to ensure their own safety and that of others around them. There is guidance on health and safety for volunteers available on the extranet, which details the reporting procedure that should be followed in the case of any incidents or accidents. SSAFA's Health & Safety Policy is available from the Head of Administration at Central Office.

### **Data protection**

SSAFA will treat any information we hold about you in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. We also expect volunteers to comply with the Data Protection Act when dealing with client information.

### **Resolving problems**

SSAFA is dedicated to resolving any complaints or difficulties promptly and fairly. In the unlikely event that you encounter a problem, our *Complaints Policy & Procedure for Volunteers* and *Complaints Policy & Procedure for Clients* documents explain the process.

## **1.2 What we expect from you**

### **Volunteer ethos**

Our volunteers are the lifeblood of SSAFA, without whom assistance could not be given to our clients. We pride ourselves on supporting volunteers through principles rather than rules and our strong volunteer ethos which has developed over the years and served us well.

Our ethos includes:

- helping clients to help themselves;
- respecting the dignity of individuals;
- being non-judgemental; and
- looking for reasons why we should, rather than shouldn't, help clients.

### **Commitment and professionalism**

SSAFA values the time you give to volunteering, however small. It is important that you are realistic about the time you can offer, and we ask that you keep your local branch or VNSLM informed of any changes to your availability.

During your volunteering activity, you may have access to personal and/or sensitive information. We ask that you maintain a professional approach to such information by treating it confidentially. More information on confidentiality can be found in Section 3 of this policy.

### **Policies and procedures**

SSAFA maintains a high standard of service delivery and best practice, as demonstrated through set policies and procedures. We ask that volunteers adhere to these policies, and have a broad understanding of the Data Protection Act. Our volunteer policies are available on the extranet.

## **2. Code of Behaviour**

The Code of Behaviour applies to all SSAFA volunteers. It provides an ethical framework for achieving high standards of conduct and best volunteering practices. In so doing, it safeguards both our volunteers and the reputation of SSAFA. SSAFA is an equality, diversity and inclusion organisation fully committed to treating volunteers equally, and to embracing diversity and inclusion in all areas of our work.

Volunteers are SSAFA's ambassadors and as such are expected to maintain a high standard of conduct at all times. We encourage your individualism but ask that you maintain impartiality when carrying out activities on our behalf. Personal views could be misinterpreted as the views of SSAFA and may contradict our ethos.

### **2.1 Unacceptable conduct**

#### **2.11 Behaviour that could undermine SSAFA's non-political stance**

SSAFA is a non-political organisation that enjoys an excellent working relationship with a number of government departments and other agencies. This is essential for us to conduct our work both in the UK and overseas. Volunteers must not engage in any political activities on behalf of SSAFA. This includes communicating opinions to Members of Parliament and external organisations using the SSAFA logo electronically or in hard copy.

#### **2.12 Any personal activities that might bring SSAFA into disrepute**

This includes inappropriate behaviour or personal activities that may reflect on us or lead to adverse attention i.e. activities that may be unlawful and result in a conviction or caution, or behaviour that may compromise our public image.

As a SSAFA volunteer, you must not use or share any inappropriate material that could bring SSAFA into disrepute either electronically or in hard copy. This includes visiting inappropriate websites or internet sites that contain illegal and/or offensive material.

#### **2.13 Online communications and social networking**

You should adhere to the same high standards of conduct and behaviour online as elsewhere in your capacity as a volunteer. This includes personal websites, blogs, or social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. When posting comments online, do not compromise SSAFA's reputation or public image by making inflammatory or defamatory comments about people or organisations (including SSAFA). Carefully consider your readership and the wider impact your opinion may have. The internet is accessible to all, and such views may reflect negatively on us.

#### **2.14 Matters that may result in a conflict of interest**

This includes support for, or membership of, any organisation whose ethos is deemed incompatible and/or contrary to that of SSAFA. This also includes deriving a financial benefit from work with SSAFA and using the name of SSAFA to start up companies and/or events (including fundraising events) without the permission or guidance of Central Office.

#### **2.15 Accepting gifts**

If a client wishes to show their appreciation or support for the work of SSAFA by making a donation, they may decide to do this via a volunteer. This should be recorded by the branch or service committee treasurer and a receipt given to the client. Under no circumstances should the volunteer treat this donation as a personal gift.

## 2.2 Further breaches

The following points (which are not exhaustive) will also be considered a breach of our Code of Behaviour:

- 2.21 Bullying, harassment or acts of physical violence, or acts tantamount to a breach of SSAFA's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- 2.22 Entering into contracts on behalf of SSAFA without first gaining the agreement of the Controller at Central Office.
- 2.23 Failure to account for funds held in the name of SSAFA. Theft or fraud, including falsifying expenses.
- 2.24 Breaches of the Rules and Regulations which are considered to give rise to a serious risk to the reputation of SSAFA or financial loss.
- 2.25 Inability to carry out tasks due to alcohol or illegal drugs misuse.
- 2.26 Using abusive and offensive language or behaviour.
- 2.27 Wilful or negligent disruption of the work of staff or other volunteers.
- 2.28 Uncooperative attitude or rudeness to fellow volunteers, staff or clients, and consistent failure to carry out reasonable instructions.
- 2.29 Disclosing information that is confidential in relation to the organisation, any of its clients, volunteers or members of staff.
- 2.30 Consistent poor performance in carrying out volunteering activities, poor timekeeping and unreliability.
- 2.31 Any other illegal activity not mentioned above.

Breaches of our Code of Behaviour will be investigated by SSAFA, either locally or as directed by Council. In the first instance every effort will be made to resolve such breaches informally and where relevant in accordance with either the *Complaints Policy & Procedure for Clients* or the *Complaints Policy & Procedure for Volunteers*. When, following investigation, it is decided the seriousness of the breach requires action in the best interests of SSAFA, branch office holders may be asked to stand down in accordance with Regulations 3.4, 3.7, 3.10 and 3.12, and for service committee office holders under Regulations 3.17, 3.18, 3.19 and 3.20 or, for all volunteers, membership of SSAFA may be terminated under Article 16 of the Royal Charter as also provided at Regulation 2.2.

### **3. Confidentiality and Volunteer Boundaries**

#### **3.1 Confidentiality**

As a volunteer, it is essential you have an understanding of the concept of confidentiality, how this applies to your role as a volunteer and your commitment to it. You may be entrusted with personal and sensitive information; you have a duty to treat that information with respect.

Under normal circumstances, only the individual concerned can authorise the disclosure of personal and/or sensitive information. The following situations, however, illustrate when it is necessary to break confidentiality:

- when there is a potential threat of serious harm to the individual, or to others;
- to protect others (safeguarding vulnerable children and adults);
- to prevent a serious criminal act (where others may be endangered).

Volunteers working in a military environment should be aware of potential breaches of security that might compromise the base, or the ability of service personnel to do their job.

Confidentiality must only be broken as a last resort, if the situation is serious enough to warrant this, and after all attempts to persuade voluntary disclosure have failed. If it is necessary to break client confidentiality, you should seek advice from Director Volunteer Operations (DVO) at Central Office.

It is essential to keep accurately recorded documentation, such as contemporaneous notes of all conversations with a client. These should be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

#### **3.2 Volunteer boundaries**

As a SSAFA volunteer you will also need to adhere to our guidance on appropriate boundaries. These exist to help you maintain a professional approach to your volunteer work by protecting yourself and any clients you may be working with, helping you to understand the importance of confidentiality, avoiding any conflict of interest and preventing you from offering a service that SSAFA is not insured to provide. These include:

- advice which is regulated, such as legal (including acting as executor of a will or holding power of attorney), financial, or debt advice;
- counselling or medical (mental or physical) health diagnoses;
- advice that only a qualified social worker can give, e.g. safeguarding;
- immigration advice; and
- appeals advice.

More information on confidentiality and boundaries can be found in our *Casework Handbook*.

## **4. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

### **4.1 SSAFA Policy**

SSAFA's aim is to promote equality in the volunteer networks and to ensure that all volunteers are treated fairly and are assessed in relation to their individual skills and abilities. It is also SSAFA's intent to operate lawfully and not to discriminate against any prospective, current or former members/volunteers. SSAFA will not condone unlawful discrimination.

This policy applies to everyone who is a trustee or volunteer member of SSAFA including (but not limited to) branch or division and service committee office holders, caseworkers, fundraisers and helpers.

The principle of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity applies equally to the treatment of former and prospective volunteers, visitors and clients by current volunteers.

All members have a role in ensuring that equality is promoted when carrying out activities in SSAFA's name. Volunteers have a personal responsibility to comply with the policy and to ensure, as far as possible, that others do the same. Branch or division and service committee office holders should not only adhere to the policy themselves but should also take responsibility for implementing the policy and for taking positive steps to promote equality.

Unlawful discrimination is also a disciplinary offence and appropriate action could be taken in accordance with our Code of Behaviour.

If you have any questions regarding this policy please contact DVO.

### **4.2 Responsibility for the policy**

The SSAFA Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy and for ensuring compliance with the relevant statutory framework prohibiting discrimination. Council has delegated day-to-day responsibility for operating the policy and ensuring its maintenance and review to Director of People and Organisational Development.

### **4.3 Scope of the policy**

The scope of the policy in relation to volunteers applies to:

- recruitment and selection;
- development and training;
- health and safety;
- conduct while volunteering; and
- complaints procedures.

### **4.4 The legal framework**

Unlawful discrimination may result in legal proceedings against you personally and against SSAFA, and may leave you and SSAFA liable to pay compensation.

The following characteristics are protected by the Equality Act 2010:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- marriage or civil partnership;
- pregnancy or maternity;
- race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin);
- religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief;
- sex; and
- sexual orientation (i.e. homosexuality, bisexuality or heterosexuality).

There are four basic types of unlawful discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

#### **4.5 Direct discrimination**

Direct discrimination means treating someone less favourably than you would treat others because of one of the protected characteristics set out above. This will include any less favourable treatment because you *perceive* a person to have a protected characteristic (even though they do not in fact have it), or because they *associate* with a person or persons who have a protected characteristic.

Direct discrimination (whatever the underlying reason) will always be unlawful. It is not possible to justify direct discrimination in any way, *except* when it relates to *age*. Age-related direct discrimination may be justified in specific circumstances if it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

#### **4.6 Indirect discrimination**

Indirect discrimination means placing someone at a disadvantage by applying a policy or practice to them that appears to affect everyone in the same way, but in fact has an adverse effect on a group of persons who share one of the protected characteristics set out above. If a person who has that characteristic can show the policy or practice puts or would put them at a disadvantage compared to others, the policy or practice will be unlawful indirect discrimination unless the organisation can show that it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

#### **4.7 Harassment**

Harassment related to one of the protected characteristics set out above will be unlawful if it consists of unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, offensive, degrading or humiliating environment for that person. Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature is also unlawful harassment.

If you have been the subject of harassment by a colleague or by a third party while undertaking SSAFA activities please report it to DVO.

#### **4.8 Victimisation**

Unlawful victimisation is unfavourable treatment of a person because they have taken action to assert their own legal rights under discrimination law or to assist someone else to do so. A false complaint of victimisation will not be protected unless it is made in good faith.

## 4.9 Disabled persons

The term 'disabled persons' applies to a range of people that have a condition (physical or mental) which has a significant and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Such a condition may be an impairment that acts as a limitation of a person's long-term physical, mental or sensory function. Legal protection also applies to people that have been diagnosed with a progressive illness, e.g. HIV or cancer

Disabled persons have additional rights. It is unlawful to subject a disabled person to unfavourable treatment because of something arising from a disability, unless the unfavourable treatment is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Where any policy, practice or physical features of a working environment puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared to persons who are not disabled, SSAFA is required to make reasonable adjustments to the policy, practice or physical feature to prevent that disadvantage. This includes a requirement to provide certain reasonable auxiliary aids.

SSAFA adopts a 'social model' view of disability where barriers that restrict disabled persons in the working environment are to be overcome by SSAFA so far as is practicable rather than requiring the disabled person to adapt. Note that such barriers are not just physical. Attitudes found in society, based on prejudice or stereotype also prevent people from having equal opportunities to be part of society, and the display of such attitudes in the working environment will be addressed by SSAFA.

If you are disabled, or become disabled in the course of your volunteering activities, you are strongly encouraged to tell SSAFA about your condition to enable us to support you and to discuss any reasonable adjustments that might help you.

## 4.10 Complaints

Any volunteer who believes that they have been the subject of unlawful discrimination as set out above, has the right to raise the matter through our *Complaints Policy & Procedure for Volunteers*.

The following family values are at the heart of SSAFA.

### **Committed**

Our lifelong commitment to the Forces family is reflected in everything we do. We treat every task with dedication and professionalism. Our commitment inspires our supporters to show theirs.

### **Understanding**

We are empathetic and caring towards anyone in the Forces family, whatever the situation. We treat everyone as individuals, whether they work with us, raise money for us or receive our support.

### **Practical**

We take pride in finding practical solutions to problems. We do whatever is necessary to meet the needs of the Forces family, taking individual responsibility and ownership over problems so things get done.

**Finally ...**

We thank you for offering your time and commitment to SSAFA. We hope you find volunteering for us a rewarding experience, and one where you may enhance existing skills or even develop new ones.

We look forward to helping you to help our clients.