

Volunteering for all including

Young People, Disabled and Vulnerable Individuals

The Cotswold Canals Trust has a long and successful history of volunteering built up over a long period. As we increase our overall volunteering opportunities it is essential that we extend such opportunities further to younger, disabled and vulnerable persons when and where we are able.

At the same time CCT must ensure that the works being undertaken to restore the canals are not unduly compromised.

Rationale

why we need this policy

To protect

- Young, disabled or vulnerable persons from danger, abuse (physical, mental, sexual, financial) and exploitation
- CCT managers, team leaders and general volunteers from inadvertent negligence / malpractice and other inappropriate claims
- The general public, other volunteers, the environment, the site, plant and equipment from injury, damage or misappropriation.

To include, encourage and advance

- Young, disabled or vulnerable individuals in pursuit of greater achievement and self-esteem

General Safeguarding Principles

what we need to consider

Where at all practical, CCT should endeavour to welcome and accommodate volunteers from across the diverse community. There are however, a number of scenarios where the capacity and/or capability of an individual to volunteer with our organisation needs to be responsibly considered before they start on any activities. Individuals may also belong to more than one category. We need to consider:

- Children under 16
- Youths 16-18
- Physically disabled
- Learning disabled
- Behaviour disabled (autism, mental illness, substance abuse/dependency etc.)

CCT managers and team leaders are not, and cannot be, expected to assess the capability of any individual young, disabled or vulnerable volunteers. This is the responsibility of the competent disabled volunteer (one who has normal capacity for decision making and consent) or formal guardian (parent, guardian, carer, support worker, teacher or youth leader etc) who will be required to make an appropriately full declaration. The declaration should include all physical, learning, social and behaviour disabilities along with any known medical conditions, prescribed

treatments, and/or substance dependency issues. Such a stipulation is required to optimise the health & safety of the individual, the general public and other volunteers.

CCT personnel will NOT be required, or expected to supervise or assist with changing room and /or personal care matters. They will also not be expected to deal with unmanageable anti-social behaviour.

Such health and capacity declarations must be treated as confidential, and only disclosed to those appropriate persons as agreed.

Each CCT manager or team leader organising activities must review and make themselves familiar with the most recent generic **Young people, disabled and vulnerable individuals risk assessment**.

In addition, the task leader must also assess the specific tasks and local environment as suitable for the volunteers' capability. If necessary, task related risk assessments and formal method statements may require further updating.

The competent adult or formal guardian and potential team leader will then discuss and agree the type of activities which might be suitable for the individual youth, disabled person or vulnerable individual.

At this stage also, after all the risks have been assessed, the team leader will decide whether or not the child, youth, disabled or vulnerable person requires accompanied supervision. This will often depend additionally on the numbers of new volunteers in the work party, the number of additional CCT experienced volunteers to assist and/or the availability of DBS vetted supervisors.

In all cases where it has been agreed that individual volunteers included in the above categories do NOT require to be accompanied:

- The activity team leader should be comfortable that he/she can safely and effectively manage the required activity alongside supervision of youths, disabled persons and/or vulnerable individuals.
- a suitable signed health & capability disclosure and an activity authority must be provided by the competent disabled adult or formal guardian
- an appropriately DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) vetted CCT volunteer must be on site for the duration of the volunteer activity (this may also be the activity leader)
- the CCT activity leader or nominated deputy must be on site
- there must always be a minimum of two CCT volunteers at any one time on a work activity where there is a child or vulnerable individual present
- CCT volunteers or staff will not handle money or financial affairs belonging to children or vulnerable adults
- CCT volunteers or staff will not engage in changing-room or personal care activities associated with children or vulnerable adults
- The CCT activity leader should be encouraged to appoint a trusted buddy or two for each unaccompanied youth or vulnerable individual who will oversee the individual's safety on site

Young People

Children under 16 *school and other organised groups, cubs, brownies, scouts, guides, cadets, work-experience etc.*

As a general rule all children under the age of 16 must be accompanied on volunteering tasks by a formal guardian, who would be required to take full responsibility for his/her protégées.

CCT volunteers may organise or assist with organised activities for children over the age of 8 years.

Children under 12 will not normally be volunteering themselves, but rather participating in sport or education activities eg walks and talks, wildlife observation, photography, canoeing etc. organised by a leader.

Certain low risk volunteering opportunities however, do exist for these groups eg fundraising activities (helping at events, car washing, making craft objects for sale etc), towpath litter picking and clearing, conducting surveys, helping with visitor information, running competitions, sponsored events and so forth.

Usually such volunteers will be part of a formal group or family activity.

When assessing potentially suitable volunteer tasks, activity leaders should be aware that, despite visual evidence to the contrary, under 16s are not yet fully mature and may not yet have developed the stamina and levels of concentration to match their energy, strength and enthusiasm.

Activity leaders should specifically be prepared for lots of questions, distractions / boredom thresholds, varying energy levels and awareness of danger. There will be a need for patience, coaching and to include extra breaks.

In some cases, eg a work-experience project, individual youths may volunteer unaccompanied with the express written permission from their formal guardian. Where this is the case the CCT supervisor must be DBS cleared and a specific individual risk assessment should be completed for the person and tasks.

Youths 16 - 18 *the next generation of volunteers, DofE students etc*

CCT should actively encourage volunteers from this group in order to help build up a natural succession plan of restoration resources.

Youths volunteering from this age range are generally inquisitive, eager to learn, willing, fit and strong but with a naive sense of potential risk.

16-18s may volunteer to work with CCT unaccompanied with the signed permission of their legal guardian who will have discussed and formally agreed the type of activities to be undertaken with the task team leader.

Disabled and Vulnerable Individuals *require additional consideration*

CCT should actively encourage volunteers with disabilities in order that those individuals feel included in normal society.

A CCT manager or team leader may not however, make assumptions about any individual volunteer's capacity or capability.

Under 18s may also be additionally disabled and/or vulnerable beyond just their age.

Not all disabilities or vulnerabilities are immediately obvious to the general public. Some individuals may have an obvious or declared physical impairment which they are able to handle well, while others may have hidden or complex impairments.

A vulnerable individual will lack some capacity ie they may not be aware of their own limitations or the effect that their behaviours have on others.

Disabled Persons *practical considerations*

Where an individual is generally competent, able to conduct their own affairs, make their own decisions and provide consent they should be included in the same way as any other able-bodied volunteer where at all possible.

CCT will provide disability awareness training for staff and volunteers from time to time as necessary.

CCT managers, team leaders and experienced volunteers will be encouraged to take on buddying roles in order that they might develop empathy and coaching competencies. These attributes will make it all the easier to help develop confidence in new volunteers overcoming disability or other trauma.

CCT run permanent buildings should be normally compliant with disability legislation ie our offices, visitor centres and their associated welfare facilities will be wheelchair accessible. In addition CCT buildings have hearing loops in place. CCT is thus able to accommodate disabled volunteers in certain administrative, retail and other premises based activities where suitable vacancies exist.

Temporary construction sites and depots will have first aid and welfare facilities but will not always be suitably accessible for disabled people. Similarly plant, machinery, boats and general canal side work areas may also have some physical access limitations. Each individual and location would need to be risk-assessed separately.

Where possible home-based activities should also be identified and considered for disabled volunteers eg in administration, accounting, PR, media, art, photography, IT, event organisation, fund-raising, business liaison, community engagement etc.... *the list is endless*

Talented and enthusiastic volunteers in this category may also suggest and offer their own particular skills and competencies to the organisation.

Vulnerable Individuals

at risk of abuse or exploitation

When considering vulnerable individuals as volunteers within CCT it is necessary to bear in mind that the spectrum of potential vulnerability is very broad.

Generally speaking a vulnerable individual is deemed to lack capacity ie is unable, rather than unwilling, to make decisions, give consent and requires assistance with some life tasks. These individuals vary enormously but all will require some assistance in one way or another. Vulnerable individuals may meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Live in residential or sheltered housing
- Receive domiciliary care
- Require assistance in the conduct of their affairs
- Have relevant social workers and/or housing authorities involved in the provision of assistive services
- Have welfare payments made to themselves or their representative
- Be unable to function cognitively or adequately with basic day to day functions without the help or oversight of a competent person.

People in this group must make volunteering arrangements with CCT on an individual basis in conjunction with their formal guardian who will undertake to make a full health, capacity and behaviour declaration.

There will be vulnerable individuals at one end of the spectrum who are required to bring along a competent adult whenever they volunteer, that competent adult being fully responsible for their protégée.

Others may be capable of getting themselves to and from site, bringing their own refreshments, following straightforward instructions, acquiring basic skills and completing non-complex tasks with minimal supervision.

Where a vulnerable individual becomes a volunteer and is accepted unaccompanied, the general safeguarding principles above must be understood, communicated and applied sensitively. The CCT manager or team leader must ensure that all volunteers on site are made aware of their responsibilities and constraints.