

## AVOIDING & RESOLVING PROBLEMS AMONG VOLUNTEERS

How do you manage a situation where in a voluntary organisation, people are giving up their time for free and then, when they are supposed to be working, they don't turn up or don't complete their tasks?

How do you handle this when it occurs on a regular basis? It is a situation that requires a delicate balance between being sensitive to the volunteer and managing the needs of the organisation.

The person (or sub-committee) who is responsible for the work of volunteers needs to be informed of all issues and should make a decision to meet with the volunteer.

The following format can be used as a basis for that meeting:

- Ask the person to meet you at a place and time that would suit them
- Explain you realise they have been absent or behind in their tasks (but do not quantify it)
- Acknowledge their contribution to the club and ask them about ways in which they could still volunteer themselves but in a way that is more convenient to them e.g. rescheduling the time that they give
- While acknowledging their contribution, explain that it is necessary for the club to be able to rely on the people that volunteer as they have to be able to deliver the services that they provide
- Allow the person time to digest what you have said (if they felt defensive coming into the meeting, they are now having to recalibrate their feelings and thoughts)
- If they are still feeling defensive, allow them to speak without interruption
- Do not feel that you have to provide a solution
- Ask questions to ensure they clearly understand what was said
- If the problems they describe to you are internal to the club (conflict with another volunteer or someone on the committee) acknowledge the issue and explain you will need to speak to other members to decide the next course of action
- If the issues they describe to you are personal, (external to the club), ask what, if anything, the club can do to support them. Acknowledge their contribution again and ask if they may need some time to sort through their issues
- Finish by asking them how they feel now. Check if the volunteer is looking for an 'out' or perhaps your club needs to consider replacing them.

### **Letting a Volunteer Go**

There could be a number of reasons why you would decide to let a volunteer go; reliability, dependability, honesty, sobriety, time keeping

It is never easy when you have to ask a person to leave your club, but it can be made easier if you have a policy or procedure to follow. It might be an idea to have a written policy on the topic, keeping in mind the following suggestions:

- Never confront someone when you are angry or upset
- Prepare what you are going to say and then stay on track
- Focus on the issues around the persons performance - not the person

- Discuss other possible volunteering jobs
- Inform the other volunteers before the issue becomes gossip, accepting that due to confidentiality, you cannot give details.

### **Conflict Resolution**

It is always important to have a policy around procedures to take when conflict arises in an organisation. This ensures that everyone is treated in an equal and fair manner. Quite often, the best scenario to deal with conflict between two people is to structure a meeting with both parties plus an independent arbitrator. The arbitrator could be someone already involved in the club or it could even be someone from outside the organisation.

The arbitrator would have pre-meetings with both parties individually before they each meet to ask them to put forward their point of view and to ask them what can, in their view, be done to resolve the issue. When the actual meeting with both parties and the arbitrator takes place, each person with the grievance will, in turn, put forward their point of view and idea for resolution. When this is done, the other party will be asked for any refutation and idea for resolution. This will continue until both parties can agree to some sort of compromise to finally resolve the issue and move forward.

In order for conflict resolution to work all parties must:

- Want to find a solution
- Be willing to talk rationally to each other
- Be willing to listen to each other
- Be willing to explore a range of solutions, not just their own
- Be willing to accept a solution even if it does not meet all their needs

### **Problem Solving**

Problems are a part of life that we deal with everyday. Every person and club will have to face (and solve) problems when they arise. There are a number of different theories regarding how to solve a particular problem, which theory you choose to follow will ultimately depend on the type of problem that you have. However, when faced with a problem, there are a number of questions that you should ask yourself that will help you to define the problem.

The reason for this is that it is a common mistake to focus on the effect of the problem rather than the cause of the problem. An example of this would be that if you continually have volunteers resigning, are you focusing on the fact that you don't have enough volunteers to run the service or are you going to focus on why the volunteers keep leaving?

Questions to ask yourself are:

- What is the problem?
- How is it a problem?
- Why is it a problem?
- Why solve it?
- How will it be solved?
- What will be solved?

### **Bullying and Harassment**

Bullying is defined as repeated inappropriate behaviour direct or indirect, verbal, physical or otherwise. The conduct complained of must be such that it could reasonably be considered as undermining the employee's right to dignity.

Harassment refers to behaviour which is intended to disturb or upset or which is found to be threatening or disturbing by the victim. Both bullying and harassment are not acceptable and it is very important that a club works quickly to get rid of it if it arises.