



Third Sector  
Dumfries and Galloway

## Policy Briefing No 4

### Community Work Placement Scheme

*Working together to put our sector first*

#### In this briefing:

- ◇ Background to the “Help to Work” Scheme
- ◇ National response from Voluntary Action Scotland
- ◇ Local response from Third Sector, Dumfries and Galloway

*There are significant employability benefits to be gained from volunteering.*

*Volunteering is however a free will activity .*

*Community Work Placements are not voluntary.*

*Voluntary organisations and charities will not receive additional resources to cover the cost of managing Community Work Placements.*

*Before taking part in the scheme your organisation should consider:*

- ◇ *Your ability and the resources needed to manage the placement*
- ◇ *Your reputation*
- ◇ *Your mission*

#### Background

From 28th April 2014, new intensive measures were brought in for those who have been unemployed long-term, known as the [“Help to Work Scheme”](#). The scheme includes Community Work Placements for people who lack work experience and feel this is holding them back from finding a job, who face a lack of motivation, and who have spent a great deal of time away from a structured work environment.

Community Work Placements have been described by the DWP as “a range of roles in the voluntary and community sector that will give the claimant skills and experience within the work place. This could include gardening projects, running community cafes or even restoring historical sites and war memorials”.

The placements will be up to 6 months (26 weeks), 30 hours a week, with a further 4 hours allocated for job searching, with the aim of the individual securing a job at the end of the placement.

#### National response

[Voluntary Action Scotland](#) (the network organisation for Scotland’s Third Sector Interfaces), responded to this with a [statement](#) released last month, which details how the reforms go against the very definition and values underpinning volunteering:

*“At Voluntary Action Scotland we believe firmly that volunteering must be a free will activity. It is done without coercion and not for financial gain. It is a public and civil good which is highly valued by the volunteer and those benefitting from the volunteers efforts. It is for these reasons that we are growing increasingly concerned about the introduction of Community Work Placements. Effectively, Community Work Placements could be perceived as ‘mandatory’ volunteering, by most common definitions this is not volunteering at all”.*

If an unemployed person does not take up the opportunity of a Community Work Placement where offered they will not receive their full benefit payment. According to VAS this amounts to “coercion or a financial penalty”.

## Third Sector, Dumfries and Galloway's response

Third Sector Interfaces are funded to promote volunteering and to support volunteers and voluntary and charitable organisations that have volunteer placements. For this reason we consider it important to provide our members and service users with some guidance on Community Work Placements (CWP).

There is a shared understanding that volunteering is a choice taken of one's own free will, and is motivated by a desire by the volunteer to benefit society at large, the vulnerable in their community or their environment. Volunteering also brings measurable benefits to the health and wellbeing of the volunteer, and can be a route back into employment after periods of unemployment or ill health.

Across Scotland Third Sector Interfaces are being asked by contractors employed by the Department of Work and Pensions to help identify placements; and local voluntary organisations and charities are being asked to take people on through the CWP scheme.

Community Work Placements are a six month placement at a host organisation, including voluntary organisations and charities. **These placements, even if they take place in a voluntary organisation or charity do not constitute volunteering.** They are mandated work placements. There is an important distinction to be made between volunteering and mandated work placements that should always be recognised and maintained.

If you are a voluntary organisation that is considering getting involved in Community Work Placements the issues you should consider are:

- ◇ Your ability and the resources needed to manage the placements
- ◇ Your reputation
- ◇ Your mission

Community Work Placements have the potential to create conflict within an organisation as volunteers will be there through their own choice, believing whole heartedly in the role they are undertaking, while others may be there under a "community placement" and therefore not by choice.

Community Work Placements are mandated and are backed by harsh sanctions, including loss of benefits. If you take on a person under the scheme you will be expected to manage them and to report behaviour that could result in sanctions. You need therefore to give careful thought to your ability, and the resources you will need, to manage a placement.

For the person placed on the scheme there is a four week sanction for the first 'offence' and a thirteen week sanction for subsequent 'offences'.

We understand that you will not receive any additional resources from DWP to manage the placement.

Your reputation may also be at risk. No matter what your personal view of "welfare to work" schemes might be, you should consider the potential impact on your reputation should you decide to offer placements.

Mandated work placements are controversial. Your organisation may be damaged in the eyes of your service users, your benefactors and members of the general public. Your organisation should therefore decide if offering placements is worth the reputational risk.

You should also consider whether Community Work Placements fit with your organisations mission. Put simply, think about whether a mandated scheme with sanctions sit well with the purpose of your organisation and with the values that you work to.

If you have been approached to take part in Community Work Placements and want further advice please contact Hayley McGowan, Policy Research and Community Planning Officer.

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### Sources

[Department for Work and Pensions, Community Work Placements: Provider Guidance, May 2014](#)

[NCVO 'Help to Work Contracts: What to Consider?'](#)

[Scottish Government, Volunteering Definition, 2012](#)

[Voluntary Action Scotland, Statement on Community Work Placements](#)

["Volunteering must remain a 'Free Will Activity'", Voluntary Action Scotland Press Release, 11th June](#)