

YOUR VIRTUAL INDUCTION GSL SUPPORT



session 7: flexible
volunteering



scouts.org.uk/gslsupport

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to session seven of *Your Virtual Induction*. This session looks at flexible volunteering opportunities for adults within a Scout Group. We will look at a definition of flexible volunteering and how traditional roles in a Scout Group can be broken down into tasks and fit round an individual's circumstances.

Research has identified that the largest barrier to volunteer recruitment is the time pressure on adults coupled with concern over the demands placed on new recruits. Nearly 60 per cent of non-volunteers say 'lack of time' is the main reason they do not volunteer.

Scouting therefore must approach volunteering in a flexible way.

What is flexible volunteering?

Flexible volunteering is any opportunity for an adult that fits around their availability, skills and circumstances. It applies to all roles and levels of experience, whether adults are new to Scouting or have been a long-standing Member.

Flexible volunteering makes the most of our volunteers to benefit local Scouting.

New volunteers

Whilst it may be tempting to focus on filling vacant roles within your Group, it is important to remember that roles should be tailored to fit the individual, rather than pushing an individual into an existing role. You may therefore need to look at the vacant role and reallocate existing resources or consider whether two or more people might be needed to undertake the tasks.

Different people want different things out of volunteering. For example a student may want to improve their CV but have limited time to give, whereas a retired adult might have much more time to offer but want to volunteer in a totally different way.

It is critical that for each potential volunteer, you:

- find out their skills
- find out their availability
- discover what they want from a volunteering role
- ask them what they want/are able to give to the role.

Research shows the main reason new volunteers leave Scouting in the first 12 months is that they realise the scale and scope of the role they had taken on was too much. It is therefore critical that we are honest about what we expect from a volunteer and balance any role we ask someone to take on with the commitment they are able and willing to give.

Existing volunteers

Are those adults who already volunteer in your Scout Group happy in their role? Would making their role more flexible motivate them again and encourage them to remain involved? It is crucial that our current volunteers are happy in their roles and that we do all we can to make their experience rewarding and enjoyable.

Formal review meetings must be held at the end of each appointment period. However, it is also important to hold informal reviews more frequently than this. These informal reviews don't have to take a long time or mean lots of paperwork.

An informal review presents a good opportunity to discuss how each adult is getting on with their role, whether they are still enjoying it, any aspirations they have or realisations since taking on the role. It is an opportunity for you to praise the work they have done. It could be your chance to find out the adult is unhappy in their role and reassign them before they leave Scouting altogether.

Making volunteering flexible

Adopting a flexible attitude to volunteering can open up lots of opportunities for new adults to join your Group. The more adults you have in your Group will mean placing fewer demands on each person, spreading the tasks to be done.

Just as individual circumstances are unique, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to volunteering. Each role in Scouting can be tailored to fit around individual motivations, skills and time commitment. Thinking flexibly about what an individual wants to get out of volunteering, and the skills they have or want to develop will mean that a role is more suited to them.

A few circumstances you may be faced with are detailed below. The solutions given are just a few examples of the many ways flexible volunteering can be implemented.

'Sometime Steve'

Adult who can give limited or irregular time each week

For adults like Steve, who can only commit to limited or irregular time each week, there are several options available.

Section Assistant

A Section Assistant:

- can be based in a Colony, Pack or Troop
- is a Member or Associate Member of The Scout Association
- does not need to make the Promise
- does not have to wear uniform
- is not a trustee
- only has to do Modules 1 and 3 of the adult training scheme
- does not have the responsibility of leading the section, and is not required to attend every section meeting.

However, if they wish, Section Assistants can:

- make the Promise
- wear uniform (even if they don't make the Promise, but they would not wear the World Membership badge)
- be on the Executive Committee (elected, nominated or co-opted)
- have access to as much training as they wish to undertake.

A Section Assistant can also have the responsibility of being the one in charge of the section on an occasional basis, with your agreement. In order to do this they must be capable and have had relevant training.

No specific time commitment is required to hold the role of a Section Assistant; the responsibilities and commitment required should be drawn up as part of a joint agreement between you and the individual.

Occasional Helper

Occasional Helper is another way that adults can get involved on an occasional basis.

An Occasional Helper:

- can be based in a Colony, Pack or Troop
- does not wear uniform
- does not take the Promise
- is not a Member of The Scout Association.

Scout Active Support

Scout Active Support is another way for adults who can offer a limited or irregular weekly commitment to volunteer to support Scouting. The membership requirements are the same as a Section Assistant except there is no minimum training requirement. In addition:

- a Scout Active Support Unit can be based at Group, District or County level
- units can support Scouting in whichever way is required by you as the Group Scout Leader or the responsible commissioner to fulfil elements of the Group, District or County Development Plan. This could include supporting the programme, fundraising, property and maintenance and other service needs
- Scout Active Support Units often have social elements to their programme too also.

'Weekend Wendy'

Adults who can't make a week day commitment

If there are adults that wish to volunteer with young people and can't attend weekly section meetings, one or more sections in your Group might consider changing their meeting days and times. In saying this, young people and parents should be consulted, as young people often take part in many activities in addition to Scouting and changing the meeting day could affect whether they continue.

A section could meet once a fortnight or once a month (evenings or weekends). If you change the meeting frequency of the Scout Troop for example, this does not necessarily mean you have to change the other sections if they are working well.

It is also worth bearing in mind that you might be more likely to find other adults willing to volunteer for a section that meets once a month on a Saturday, than an adult who can regularly give two hours on a weekday evening.

Depending which nights your sections meet, you may be putting off a whole group of adults from a particular community. For example, if you have a section meeting on a Friday, this might mean that Jewish adults who strictly observe the Sabbath (not travelling or doing anything 'work-like' on a Friday from sundown until nightfall on Saturday) would not be able to get involved, even if they have all the skills you need. In saying this, just because they couldn't attend a section meeting on a Friday doesn't mean they couldn't support the section in another way, eg with the administration.

'Sharing Shilpa'

Adults who can't commit to all the requirements of a conventional role

Any role can be divided between two or more volunteers.

Role sharing

Role sharing can open volunteering opportunities to adults unable to make a regular commitment to Scouting.

Splitting role requirements immediately makes Scouting more accessible to volunteers unable to make a regular commitment such as shift workers or single parents. Having two or more adults filling the requirements of one role increases the capacity for adults to be involved and in turn the skill sets being applied to the role. This can mean better results.

One example is a leadership team of four run on a rotational basis. Each of the leaders takes it in turns to:

1. Plan and lead the meeting
2. Assist with the planning and running of the meeting
3. Attend and assist with the meeting
4. Babysit for the other leaders' children who are too young to attend the meeting.

All four are section leaders. Rotating the roles means that each volunteer only has to be involved in the planning for two out of every four weeks.

Role sharing can be done with many other roles. An adult may be able to commit to coming to a weekly meeting, but a disability may mean they are sometimes unable to attend meetings, and at short notice. There is no reason why they cannot be a Section Assistant or even a Section Leader with support. Take the example of an adult who suffers from back pain. Most of the time she will be fine, but occasionally she is bed bound. Role sharing would allow her to use her skills with young people, while allowing her time off if she needs it.

Parent power

A parent or adult rota is another great way for sections to benefit from the increased adult support parents can offer, without requiring them to make a weekly commitment.

Over 40 per cent of new volunteers recruited to section roles come from the parents of youth Members (or prospective youth Members). Parent or adult rotas are a particularly effective method of getting parents initially involved in Scouting

‘Holiday Hywel’

Adults unable to make a term time commitment

Traditionally, Scout Groups only meet during the school term; however, there is nothing to say that Groups can't meet in the school holidays. Teachers have many of the skills needed to be section leaders; however they may be unable or unwilling to commit to volunteering during term time. Scouting in the school holidays gives these adults the opportunity to volunteer and gives us the benefit of their skills. School holiday Scouting could be a week-long camp, an all day meeting, or a one hour meeting, whichever commitment fits the volunteers you have.

‘Behind-the-scenes Bob’

Adults who would like to volunteer supporting other adults

Not all adults who want to volunteer in Scouting will want to work ‘up front’ with young people.

In a recent study, 80 per cent of the Department of Health's London staff that were surveyed said that they would be interested in using their professional management skills in a volunteer capacity.

There are many roles that can accommodate this and many of them are excellent ways to develop management skills and enhance a CV.

Committee roles

A position on the Executive Committees might be something they are willing to consider.

- Committees tend to meet roughly every quarter. The fact that meetings are planned way in advance means that they can be put in the diary in plenty of time to allow the person to attend.
- Volunteers could also take up roles on sub-committees, such as fundraising, maintenance or adult recruitment
- Being part of the Group Executive is a great opportunity for volunteers to really help a Group, socialise and meet new people whilst using and developing new skills, which can benefit them in their professional life (CV enhancing).

Appointing and training adults

Appointments to support adult training or appointments teams focus on supporting adults and can be very flexible. For example an appointment as a Training Adviser could require as little commitment as a meeting once a month while still providing valuable support to an adult leader.

'Skilful Suzanne'

Adults with specific skills to offer

Adults with specific skills should be offered a role where their skills can be of maximum benefit to Scouting. This doesn't necessarily have to be a role within a Section, or even a Group.

By talking to parents or other adults linked to the Group, you could form a skills database or talent pool. If individuals have water activity qualifications that they wish to use again, then they can be offered roles as skills instructors. This has the same requirements as a Section Assistant (see page 3).

The skills pool does not have to be activity based. For example, if there is a parent who works in sales or marketing, utilise their sales skills and techniques to promote and sell Scouting.

If you identify a common skill or interest that could be a useful resource for your Group, then Scout Active Support could be a good way to harness this support. For example, if you have five adults who work in or are interested in catering, then a Scout Active Support Unit could be focused around catering for all Group events such as camps and meetings.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

As a GSL how can I encourage flexible volunteering?

- Ask a potential volunteer what they would like to do rather than telling them what you would like them to do.
- Talk to parents about what their interests are and see if there is a way you can get them involved to make the most of that interest or skill.
- Create an adult rota for supporting each of the sections involving parents or other adults.
- Set up a Group Scout Active Support Unit based around the skills of those interested in supporting the Group.
- Promote the personal development opportunities of the adult training scheme including external recognition by the Open College Network and Institute of Leadership and Management.
- Invite parents to a camp or trip – www.scouts.org.uk/bigadventure
- Promote local examples of flexible volunteering from local Groups or neighbouring Districts at:
 - Annual General Meetings
 - leader meetings
 - recruitment events
 - fundraising events
 - meetings with external bodies
 - Executive Committee meetings.
- Review process – Rather than lose an adult, offer them a flexible volunteering opportunity.
- Keep the Appointments Advisory Committee updated of all volunteering opportunities and discuss with them how they can be made flexible.

FINALLY

If you take the skills of new volunteers into account, and respect the level of commitment they are willing and able to make, you will find yourself with a motivated team of adults. This, in turn, will mean better Scouting for young people.