

TOGETHER WE CAN

A GUIDE TO FAMILY SUPPORT VOLUNTEERING

TOP TIPS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN MATCHING FAMILY SUPPORT VOLUNTEERS TO FAMILIES

Together We Can is a collection of resources for organisations developing a service where volunteers support families of a child with a life-limiting or life-threatening condition. The resources were developed and tested specifically for this purpose with volunteers working in the homes of a child with a life-limiting condition, but might be useful for any organisation developing volunteer services.

TOP TIPS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN MATCHING FAMILY SUPPORT VOLUNTEERS TO FAMILIES

When you have recruited volunteers and families or other service users wanting support, the process of allocating volunteers to work with families can begin. This is sometimes known as 'matching' a volunteer and family. It is called matching because you need to match what a family wants with what a volunteer is able to offer, geographic location and any other factors such as allergies to pets or available time slots. This document contains some tips and things to think about when matching volunteers and families.

Collect information early on about people's preferences

- It is important to ask families what type of support they most want. This can be done with a simple registration form when families express an interest in receiving support. The registration form could also ask about any preferred times for visits, whether there are any pets and other things that might help with matching. An example registration form is part of the Together We Can resource kit.
- Volunteers should also be asked the types of support they are able and willing to offer. It may be that some volunteers are able to offer regular support in range of ways, perhaps with housework or supporting children with homework. Alternatively, it may be that a volunteer is unable to commit a regular amount of time, but would still like to make their skills available to a family who might benefit once in a while.
- Detail helps. Get as much detail as possible from volunteers about their availability and what they want to do.

Consider people's personalities

- Another key feature in enabling successful matches is having an insight into the volunteers available. An understanding of the personalities, motivations and circumstances can help to make effective matches, whether they were long or short term. During training for volunteers, Volunteer Coordinators often build up knowledge of people's motivations and personalities, so be on the lookout during training for information that will later help with matches.
- Knowing people helps. The most successful matches come from knowing your volunteers and families really well, so be sure to listen and ask questions.

Consider allocating more than one volunteer

- Along with matching the offer of support with the family's needs, successful matches will be informed by an understanding of the times when the family are able to receive support and the availability of the volunteer. It may be that a family needs regular support that need not be provided by a single volunteer. For example, some volunteering services have organised a rota where different volunteers provided transport for hospital visits for one family. There can be benefits to taking this sort of a flexible approach when creating matches.

It's ok to make changes

- Allow a volunteer and family time to get to know each other before confirming a match. A number of organisations who set up volunteering services only considered a match as being agreed after the family and the volunteer had met face to face and talked through expectations and hopes. There were cases where the family felt, for a variety of reasons, that the particular volunteer was not quite the right fit for them and an open and honest process enabled this view to be expressed without concern about hurting feelings or being seen as difficult. Another example is where a volunteer found that the journey to the family home was very difficult for them, and so had to decline the match.

Recognise that matches take time

- Initial meetings between volunteers and families can be hard to arrange. Coordinating diaries for volunteers and families can take considerably more time than might initially be thought, so do build this into planning.
- Winter pressures may have a significant impact on the ability of families to engage with volunteers. Be aware and plan accordingly.

Consider practical issues

- Routine can be useful. Where appropriate, arranging support on a regular day and time (with flexibility where required) enables everyone to build the visit into their routines and lessens the calendar coordinating for admin teams.
- Turnover is inevitable. Expect some volunteers and families to withdraw from the service. This is normal and there are benefits in planning for it.

Make sure safety is a priority

- Volunteers need to be helped to operate in a safe and informed way. They could be asked to provide updates on each visit, letting a contact person based at the service know when their visit has ended and providing a record of their visit to their supervisor. Volunteers will also require regular supervision sessions to help them work safely and effectively in their placements.
- Encourage volunteers to communicate well with families, within boundaries. There are times when volunteers may be unable to make an arranged visit, or might want to check some details before arriving. In order to ensure they do not share their personal telephone number with families they should be reminded to dial '141' before making the call. This will withhold their number.

Focus on good communication

- Keep families, volunteers and staff updated about what is happening regularly. When there are delay people may be confused and frustrated if they don't know what is happening. Sharing success stories can also keep people motivated.