



***Volunteer Handbook***



# ***Welcome to Gay Men's Health***

This handbook is intended as a brief guide to volunteering at Gay Men's Health. You may already have been accepted onto the programme, or you may be thinking about becoming a volunteer, but need more information. Either way, it will outline who's who within the organisation, and where you fit in. Hopefully it will answer any 'what if' questions you have, but we can arrange for you to speak to a member of staff or an experienced volunteer if you wish. Also, copies of any of our policies and procedures documents are available on request.

***For me volunteering at  
GMH is not just about the  
work that I do, which is  
important, but it is also  
what I get from it.***



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## ***What is Gay Men's Health?***

Gay Men's Health is a charity that promotes the health and wellbeing of all men who have sex with men in Scotland, including those living with HIV. Involving and empowering gay and bisexual men at every level of our work is fundamental to our ethos, although men and women of any sexual orientation can and do work within the organisation to achieve our aim.

We distribute free condoms, lubricant & safer sex literature, as well as organising events both on and off the commercial gay scene. We play an active role in working with commercial establishments in the promotion of physical and emotional wellbeing amongst gay and bisexual men. We also have a team of highly trained outreach volunteers who talk to men in both gay venues and on the internet.

Our Testing and Support project directly involves gay and bisexual men living with HIV in resource development, HIV prevention initiatives and support provision. We also facilitate a number of groups and courses including: Prime Time, a group for older gay and bisexual men; Stop Smoking courses; and skills based workshops and training events for gay and bisexual men, including men living with HIV.

We provide both one-to-one and couple counselling for gay and bisexual men, and this is free and confidential. Each of these services, plus many others that we provide form an integral and essential part of the holistic approach that the organisation takes.

Gay Men's Health believes strongly in a process of peer education, which simply means that people with similar experiences and understanding of life are the best-placed people to educate each other.

# ***What can I do as a volunteer?***

There is a range of things you can do as a volunteer for Gay Men's Health and it is generally up to you to decide what is best suited when you attend your initial interview. It may be that you have special skills that you would like to offer the organisation, or perhaps you want to develop new skills. Whatever you decide, you will be fulfilling an important role within the organisation.

There is a lot of room within Gay Men's Health to 'move around' as a volunteer - perhaps you may ask to change your volunteer roles every once in a while. This is an excellent way of getting to know about all different areas of the work we do, and we are more than happy to let you do this if you want to. >>



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**Gay Men's Health seeks to involve volunteers in all levels of its work. There are various areas in which you can become involved as a volunteer. We rely heavily upon the wide range of tasks undertaken by volunteers, which includes:**

- **Planning and running events. e.g. safer sex nights, volunteer recruitment nights, fundraising activities, Pride, etc.**
- **Production of printed and other resources, e.g. writing, graphic design, photography, artwork, topic research**
- **Assisting with the production of digital media, for example, making short films, podcasts, animations etc.**
- **Putting together training courses and workshops and delivering these to others within and outwith GMH**
- **Direct work with men on the gay scene and/or the internet**
- **Office support: helping out with administration work such as typing, telephone reception, meeting and greeting visitors, filing and photocopying**
- **Assisting with groupwork**
- **Volunteer recruitment**
- **Fundraising**
- **Young Men's Work**
- **Helping with deliveries of condoms, lube, printed materials etc. to venues and other organisations**



A young man with blonde and brown hair, wearing a dark blue t-shirt, is holding a large white sign. The sign contains text in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The text is arranged in six lines, with yellow square highlights on the first and last lines. The background is a light blue, textured wall.

**I've gained a greater  
awareness of the  
gay community, got  
involved with many  
different types of  
work and picked up  
several useful new  
skills.**



## ***The role and value of volunteers***

The policies for volunteers and the work put into the volunteer system demonstrate the commitment Gay Men's Health has to its volunteers, and the importance that the organisation places upon them. Volunteers fulfill an important role in decision-making and fulfillment of ideas. The amount of time dedicated to volunteer work is solely the decision of the volunteer, and is as little or as much as you wish. Your decision over how much time you can commit should help determine the amount and nature of the work you take on.

Because you will not be paid any money to motivate your voluntary work, we know that you have to be getting something else out of it. Maybe you are volunteering because you want to meet new people, maybe you want to improve your employment prospects with experience and training, or perhaps you want to play a more central and worthwhile role in the gay community. Whatever the reason, we will do everything we can to make sure you get what you're looking for, so don't be afraid to ask!

It's important that you enjoy your volunteer work and that you don't at any point feel put upon or used.





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# **Training**

All volunteers, regardless of the area of work they intend to work in, must attend induction training. This will familiarise you with the systems, who's who within the organisation, the ethos, policies and philosophy of Gay Men's Health, and will be fun too. It will last for 3-4 hours.

Beyond that, further training is provided. This may sometimes be dependent on which job you decide to do. For example, if you are working on producing a newsletter we can arrange training on our in-house desktop publishing packages.

Gay Men's Health takes pride in having a well-trained and highly skilled team of volunteers, who are confident and competent in dealing with a wide range of situations. As such, we recommend that you take advantage of any training opportunities that arise.



***I have made new  
friends and have been  
able to develop a wide  
range of skills.***





## ***Support***

Gay Men's Health has a strong commitment to support you as a volunteer. When starting your volunteer work with Gay Men's Health you will be assigned a line manager, which will normally be the Community Development Manager.

Your line manager is responsible for ensuring that you enjoy your voluntary work, and will arrange line management meetings with you to discuss your progress and any needs or concerns. You will be informed in advance when one of these meetings has been arranged for you, but also, you are free to request a line management meeting at any time.

***It's a unique privilege  
when a guy who is  
struggling in life trusts  
me enough to lean on  
me for a while.***



# ***Confidentiality***

Gay Men's Health has a strict confidentiality policy that must be accepted and observed by everyone involved within the organisation. Breaches of the policy may be regarded as gross misconduct.

When you apply to become a volunteer you sign a form which states that you agree to abide by the rules of the organisation, including the confidentiality policy.

The confidentiality policy states that you should not reveal any personal information (by definition, as defined by that particular individual) to any other individual. It should always include terms such as HIV status, name, address, sexual orientation, personal lifestyle and relationship information, and financial situation.

There may be occasions however when you need to share confidential information with someone within Gay Men's Health, for example your line manager, and our confidentiality policy allows for this on a need-to-know basis only. You may for example need to inform your line manager or another member of staff if you are given reason to believe that someone you have spoken to through volunteering is in danger of harming themselves or others.

You should read the confidentiality policy so that you are clear about what it includes. Everyone who works with Gay Men's Health is expected to take the utmost care in protecting each other's rights regarding confidentiality. This includes staff, other volunteers, clients and any other person or organisation with whom you come into contact through Gay Men's Health.



**I have met new  
people and gained  
awareness of  
diversity in gay  
men's lifestyles.  
I've gained  
knowledge of  
sexuality and  
dispelled some  
worn out notions  
I had.**



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## ***Expenses***

**Volunteering for Gay Men's Health should not cost you any money. Any reasonable expenses incurred during your time volunteering will be met by the organisation, provided your line manager has previously agreed them.**

**Reasonable travel costs to and from the Gay Men's Health office (or any other place your volunteering may take you) will be reimbursed as long as you have a valid receipt (e.g. bus ticket). For those using a car, mileage will be paid - the latest mileage rate is printed on the volunteer expenses form.**

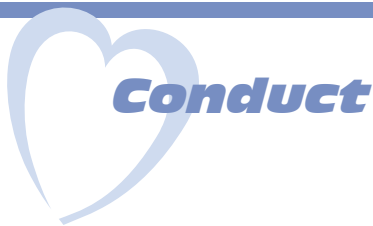
**Travel costs will be reimbursed to a maximum of £10 per day unless previously agreed otherwise with your line manager.**

**Any volunteer working for 5 or more hours in one day is entitled to claim back a meal allowance. The current rate for this is included on the volunteer expenses form.**

**You should always submit any expenses claims within three months of the expense being incurred.**

**If you have any doubts or questions about expenses, ask your line manager.**

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# ***Conduct***

It is important to remember that the way you conduct yourself as a volunteer will have an impact on the organisation's image as a whole. If someone meets a Gay Men's Health volunteer who is respectful, pleasant and professional, they are likely to think that we are a respectful, pleasant and professional organisation. This works equally (if not more-so) in reverse. If you give someone reason to think poorly of you when you are volunteering, they are likely to think poorly of Gay Men's Health.

You should always remember the organisation's sex-positive, gay-positive, non-judgemental ethos and apply it to your work wherever appropriate.

Think also about how you present yourself physically - a scruffy, smelly, slouching volunteer with a miserable look on his or her face is never going to show Gay Men's Health in a positive light.

Whilst it is natural that you won't agree with everyone 100% of the time, please try to avoid arguments and never raise your voice in anger or treat someone in a way that could be considered disrespectful. This applies to your fellow volunteers, staff, and above all, members of the public. If difficulties should arise, remember that your line manager is available to support you, and refer to the grievance procedures outlined on page 20 if appropriate. >>

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You should never use (or be under the influence of) alcohol or recreational drugs whilst volunteering, with the exception that you may drink alcohol at volunteer parties. If you are working in bars or clubs and decide to have a drink when you have finished your shift, you should try to make it clear to other customers that you are no longer volunteering - for example, remove any GMH branded clothing, ID badges etc.

Please also bear in mind that if you are in public on your own time, and are known as a Gay Men's Health volunteer (for example you might be on the gay scene with friends but not volunteering), it is still possible for what you say and do to create a good or bad image for the organisation, based upon your association with it.

***I was amazed how  
many different jobs  
volunteers at Gay  
Men's Health can do.  
There really is  
something for  
everyone!***



## ***Equal Opportunities Policy***

At Gay Men's Health we take our equal opportunities policy very seriously. Equality of opportunity is about recognising differences, celebrating diversity and treating people with respect.

Our equal opportunities policy states that all staff and volunteers can expect equality of opportunity irrespective of their gender, marital status, colour, HIV status, race, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, responsibility for dependants, age or disability.

Due to the nature of our work, on rare occasions a volunteer's gender or sexual orientation may mean that they are not able to undertake certain areas of work. However no such limitation is ever put in place without good reason, and we try to avoid it wherever possible. Your line manager will be happy to discuss any questions or concerns you may have with regard to this.

Nevertheless, there is no requirement for our staff or volunteers to be gay or male, and Gay Men's Health recognises and is proud of the fact that women and people who are not gay have always played a central role in the work of the organisation.

Please contact any member of staff if you would like to see our equal opportunities policy.





## ***Criminal Record Checks***

Depending upon your role as a volunteer, you may be required to allow Gay Men's Health to carry out criminal record checks upon you. This means that in order to volunteer in certain roles you will have to give us permission to obtain a report containing information held by the police and government departments, including information on convictions, cautions and reprimands. These checks are carried out under the Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme.

We are only likely to carry out a criminal record check if your chosen volunteer task makes it likely that you will come into contact with vulnerable groups as part of your normal duties.

We have a responsibility to ensure that we have taken the utmost care in ensuring support of vulnerable groups. Performing checks of this kind gives a further degree of respect for volunteers working with vulnerable groups in that that they are not only highly trained, but that they have undergone thorough checks.

If you do have any outstanding convictions, this does not necessarily mean that you may not volunteer for Gay Men's Health. However, depending on the nature of your conviction, you may not be able to carry out certain types of work. Information about convictions will only be shared with relevant Gay Men's Health staff members on a 'need to know' basis.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding criminal record checks, please contact one of the Community Development Managers.

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# ***Disciplinary Procedure***

At Gay Men's Health we believe that having a clear disciplinary policy in place helps us avoid most disciplinary problems, and when problems do occur those policies can help resolve them more effectively, more fairly and more quickly.

Please remember, the vast majority of volunteers involved in Gay Men's Health over the years have never been involved in any kind of disciplinary action with the organisation, and we hope that you will not be.

The following is a brief outline of the policy, full details can be found in your policies handout given to you at induction, and you can obtain further copies from the community development manager if necessary.

There are four stages to our disciplinary procedure. These are:

- Stage One:** a formal verbal warning
- Stage Two:** a formal written warning
- Stage Three:** a final written warning
- Stage Four:** disciplinary hearing (which may result in dismissal) >>

In cases of more serious breaches of discipline, the first one, two or three stages may be bypassed, depending on the severity of the breach. In the event of any disciplinary action being taken, the issuing member of staff will always aim to ensure that you understand the following:

- what disciplinary action has been taken and why
- what will (or might) happen as a result
- what you must do to avoid further disciplinary action

At each stage of the disciplinary procedure you may appeal against any action taken against you (including dismissal). This should be made in writing to the Chief Executive of Gay Men's Health.









## ***Complaints/Grievance procedures***

If you are unhappy with someone, whether they are a staff member or a volunteer, it is usually best to try and resolve things with that person. Remember to remain calm and rational - some things can seem important to one person but trivial to another. They may even be unaware that they've done anything to offend you.

If for some reason you feel you can't talk to this person about your grievance, or you have tried to and it hasn't worked, the next step would normally be to speak to your line manager, who will look into the matter. (If your grievance is about your line manager, you should approach that person's line manager.) If the grievance/complaint needs to go further, it will be discussed with the Chief Executive of Gay Men's Health, where the appropriate action can be agreed and subsequently taken.

If after this, the person making the complaint is still not happy, or the action agreed by your line manager and the Chief Executive of Gay Men's Health has not worked, the Chief Executive will bring the matter to the attention of the organisation's Board of Directors. They may decide to hold a formal inquiry.

Any grievance you have will be taken seriously by Gay Men's Health. Full copies of our complaints and grievances procedures are available on request from any member of staff.



## ***A Final Word***

As a volunteer, your contribution to Gay Men's Health is valued, and we welcome any ideas that you may have on improving our services and initiatives. If it is possible to implement your idea then you will have the full support of the organisation and its staff. We understand that volunteers do become experts in their area of work, and as such your thoughts and ideas are highly valued.

For further information on any aspects covered in this handbook, please don't hesitate to contact your line manager or any other member of staff. As a volunteer with Gay Men's Health you can expect to be treated with respect, patience and without prejudice, and we would ask that you treat fellow volunteers, clients, the staff team and anyone else you meet through your work with us with the same way.

We hope that volunteering for Gay Men's Health will prove to be one of the happiest and most rewarding periods of your life.

***I enjoy it; I like the work;  
I like the people and I  
like the idea that the  
other volunteers and  
I are really making a  
difference.***



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## ***NOTES***

# **CONTACT**

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Gay Men's Health is a  
charity registered in  
Scotland, No. SC023479.



***Becoming a  
volunteer for Gay  
Men's Health is one  
of the wisest choices  
I ever made. I only  
wish I'd got involved  
years sooner!***