



# Volunteer Handbook

This Handbook outlines the main aims and organisational framework of Tyneside Welcomes (TW). It also identifies areas of particular importance in the form of a Volunteer Contract between TW and its volunteers.

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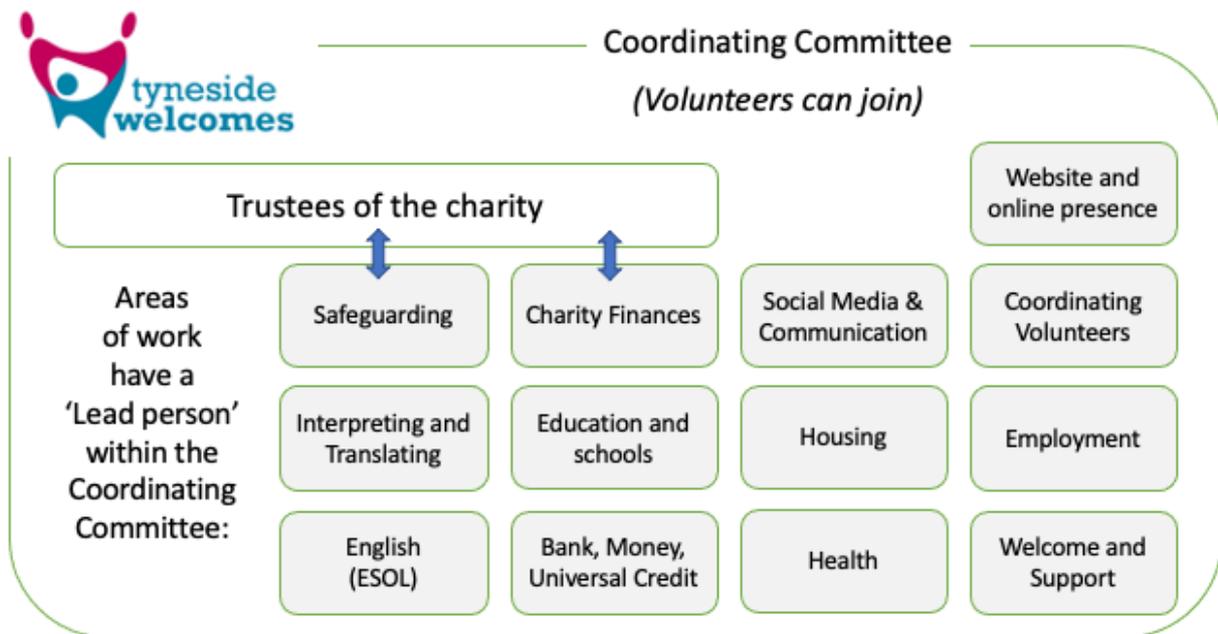
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**Mission Statement:** Encouraging the community sponsorship of refugee families from the Middle East, principally Syria, so that they may resettle successfully in the North East of England.

**Objectives:** Initially, to support families through Community Sponsorship under the UK Government Refugee Schemes (VPRS/UKRS) for a period of 12 months to help them through the crucial transition phase and enable them to become independent, self-sufficient members of society in Forest Hall/Longbenton, North Tyneside.

In the medium term to draw on that experience to encourage and support similar groups elsewhere in Tyne and Wear to resettle refugee families in their locality.

**Organisational Chart:** TW is a registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (“CIO” – a charity) with a Board of Trustees, one of whom is “Lead Sponsor” with legal responsibilities to the UK Home Office. Day to day operational responsibility is undertaken by a steering group of around a dozen committed volunteers (the “Coordinating Committee”) some of whom are also trustees. Several of these volunteers have been assigned the “lead” responsibility for specific elements of a successful resettlement process. Most will involve personal contact with the refugee family. These elements of the process are shown in this chart:



**Role Description:** All volunteers who have contact with members of the Refugee Family, including “leads”, may expect to support family members across a wide range of issues and activities, subject to guidance from the relevant “lead”. They will be required to adhere closely to TW’s Safeguarding Policy, which will entail securing DBS Enhanced Certification, and to provide two character references. A Code of Conduct exists to ensure that volunteers know what is expected of them in terms of safeguarding issues and other aspects of good practice.

There are two main areas of support for the family:

1. Under the supervision of a “lead”, accompanying Family members to important meetings/consultations/interviews.
2. Helping them with everyday life in the UK – at home, shopping, going to entertainment venues, family outings etc.

## **Volunteer Agreement**

In return for the time and energy which volunteers devote to supporting us, TW undertakes to respect their contribution by setting out the basis on which it will act responsibly to the mutual benefit of both TW and its volunteers. This covers the giving or receiving of gifts and money. We also provide backup and support including Training; Policies on Safeguarding; Communications; Ongoing regular support sessions (see below) and **Emergency Telephone Contacts** (Appendix 2). See "**Working Agreement for Family Members and Volunteers**" via link on p.5

We require you to sign to say that you have read and will abide by these agreements and policies.

**Training:** TW is keen to ensure that all volunteers are well prepared for the roles they expected to play. Accordingly, all volunteers having personal contact with the Refugee Family will be expected to attend and complete any induction/training provided by TW. They may also be asked to attend local training days given by RESET, the Government-funded agency which supports Community Sponsorship resettlement. These will give useful insights into the detail of the official Resettlement Scheme timetables as well as the cultural and other challenges the family may face.

**Insurance:** TW holds public liability insurance that covers your work as a volunteer, provided you stay within the guidelines we set out.

**Confidentiality:** It is important that volunteers appreciate the significance of respecting the Family's right to confidentiality. Everything which family members say to or in the presence of a volunteer must be treated as confidential within TW. This means it may be shared with other TW Trustees, "leads" and volunteers but not with friends or family outside TW. Exceptionally, this rule may only be breached if safeguarding concerns are involved. In such instances this should be reported immediately to the Safeguarding "lead", who will decide if other agencies should be alerted. This aspect is covered in more depth by the **Code of Conduct** and the associated **Safeguarding Policy** via link on p.5.

**Communications:** Volunteers will be given information about TW's presence on social media, which is explained fully in the **Social Media & Digital Communications Policy**, via link on p.5. There is a further **Protocol on Communications with the Family** on the arrangements for online contact between volunteers and the Family, particularly in the first weeks after their arrival. You must read and understand these policies as there are many risks around social media.

**Dress:** The Family may be surprised by the relaxed way in which many people dress in Britain. But volunteers are asked to be sensitive to such perceptions and therefore to dress conservatively themselves when with members of the Family as they adjust to Western ways. This will be covered more fully in the Code of Conduct.

**Absence through sickness:** If a volunteer feels too ill to fulfil an engagement with the Family, they are asked to notify the relevant "lead" as soon as possible so that alternative arrangements can be made. It is important that neither the Family nor fellow volunteers should be put at risk by someone with symptoms of a cold or influenza. TW has a responsibility to protect both groups from avoidable infection. This is even more critical as long as the Covid-19 pandemic requires maximum vigilance. This is expected to be the case at least until widespread vaccination has significantly reduced the public health risk, and likely for longer. Please see the latest version of **Volunteers and Covid-19** via link on p.5.

**Language:** As the Family become more proficient speaking English, volunteers will be expected to speak clearly, using a simpler vocabulary than they might normally employ and avoiding undue use of slang. They should be happy to explain words which puzzle Family members and to decipher some of the initials in common parlance within Britain. At first, tools such as Google Translate can help to bridge the gap – guidance on using this effectively is at:

<https://training-resetuk.org/toolkit/working-with-refugees/addressing-language-needs/tips-using-google-translate-effectively>

**Contacts with the Family:** Make sure you have read the *Code of Conduct* before a contact with the family. Think about and avoid risks to yourself and the family. As a new volunteer, it will be helpful to discuss your planned contact in advance.

On occasions an individual volunteer might be tempted to see more of the Family than TW judges to be sensible, given the importance of them learning to become more independent over time. If this occurs, the volunteer will be expected to follow the advice of “leads” within TW. For example, it is likely that TW will progressively restrict the hours when the family may contact them.

**Car drivers:** If volunteers are asked to drive family members in their own cars, they will need to ensure that their insurance company agrees to them using the vehicle for charitable purposes, provided they are not paid for doing so. Written confirmation must be shown to a “lead” so that the family’s welfare is protected.

They may claim a contribution towards the cost of running the car at a rate agreed by TW (currently 50p per mile). However, it is not mandatory to make a claim if the volunteer prefers not to. See *Volunteer Car Transport Policy* on car use by volunteers for full details. This is available under “Expenses” via the link on p.5.

**Other expenses:** From time-to-time other out-of-pocket expenses may reasonably be incurred provided that they have been approved by the relevant “lead”. Once again it is not mandatory to make a claim. All claims for expenses should be submitted to the Treasurer. See policy on *Volunteer Expenses* for full details. This is available under “Expenses” via the link on p.5.

**Ongoing support:** TW will arrange informal monthly support meetings so that all volunteers may share experiences, compare impressions and discuss ways of improving TW’s effectiveness. It is important that volunteers attend and actively participate at those meetings as they can provide a valuable overview and foster a sense of team spirit. The meetings will normally be chaired by the Safeguarding “lead”.

**Volunteer Grievances:** If volunteers are uncomfortable with aspects of the advice or treatment they receive from TW in terms of this *Handbook*, the *Agreement* or the *Code of Conduct*, they should raise their concerns initially with the relevant “lead”. If the problem cannot be readily resolved, it may need to be referred to a Trustee. If it proves to be a serious matter which the volunteer wishes to pursue, TW’s Grievance Procedure may be invoked (Appendix 2 below)

**Protocol when ceasing to volunteer:** There will usually be mundane reasons for someone to cease volunteering with TW, such as moving away from the area or having competing domestic responsibilities. Whatever the reason, they will be asked in writing why they are leaving and for suggestions they might have to improve the experience of volunteers. It may prove worthwhile for the volunteer to meet with a Trustee to obtain a clearer understanding of their perspective.

## APPENDIX 1

TW will make available to all volunteers (normally online) the various policy documents mentioned in the Handbook, as listed below. These are available from

Google Drive by clicking on:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1it62oy1oniHgD4eD2E5hkWoI3Ky1FBhw>

### Volunteer Policies folder

1. Safeguarding Policy
2. Code of Conduct for Volunteers
3. Working Agreement for Family Members and Volunteers
4. Social Media and Digital Communications Policy
5. Protocol on Communications with the Family
6. Volunteers and Covid-19 Guidance
7. Volunteer Expenses
8. Volunteer Car Transport policy

## APPENDIX 2

### Emergency Contact telephone numbers

Welcome Team Lead	Dorothy Craw	07879874701	dorothycraw@blueyonder.co.uk
Safeguarding Lead	Sally Mitchison	07972201964	mitchison@blueyonder.co.uk
Lead Sponsor	Richard Young	07913506189	richard.young.001@gmail.com
Arabic translation	xxx	07xxx	

## APPENDIX 3

### Tyneside Welcomes Grievance Procedure (includes Grievance Policy below)

If there is a grievance by or against a TW volunteer, the Trustees will try to resolve them openly and quickly to protect volunteers and the reputation of the charity and to minimise any disruption to its support for the refugee family. Unlike employees, volunteers do not have rights in law. Nevertheless, all grievances will be treated confidentially and only discussed amongst those directly involved in trying to resolve matters.

#### IF YOU HAVE A GRIEVANCE/NEED TO COMPLAIN

##### Stage 1 Oral

Initial grievances, whether against the organisation, a trustee or another volunteer should first be discussed informally in case there is a ready means of resolving them. They should be raised with the relevant "lead". If the grievance concerns that person, you should speak to a Trustee.

##### Stage 2 Written

If you are not satisfied with the response to your oral complaint/grievance, you should make a formal statement of your grievance in writing to the Safeguarding Lead, or if it concerns that person, then to the Secretary of Tyneside Welcomes. They will invite you to a meeting to explore the issue in more detail. You may be accompanied by a person of your choice.

If necessary, following the meeting, an investigation will be conducted. You will be notified in writing of the outcome.

#### Stage 3 Appeal

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, you may appeal against the decision in writing to the Chair of the Trustees, who will nominate another Trustee not previously involved to conduct the appeal hearing. Again, you may be accompanied by a person of your choice. You will be notified in writing of the outcome of the appeal. The decision is final and there will be no further appeal.

### **IF THE GRIEVANCE IS AGAINST YOU**

#### Stage 1 Oral

The first step is for a Trustee to have an informal discussion with you about the grievance to hear your side of the story. It may try to identify possible solutions. Grievances should not be anonymous as you are entitled to know what is alleged against you and by whom. You will be given the option to be accompanied by a person of your choice.

#### Stage 2 Written

If the issue cannot be resolved by an oral discussion, it may be necessary to deal with matters more formally. This could result in you being issued with a written warning, outlining the reason for the grievance. In any event you will be given the opportunity to put your case to another Trustee before such a step is taken. Again, you may be accompanied by a person of your choice. Depending on the nature of the grievance, further options to resolve matters or offer additional support from TW could be proposed. If that is not thought to be feasible, you may be advised in writing that your volunteering services are no longer required.

#### Stage 3 Appeal

If you have been informed that you are not required as a volunteer, you may appeal in writing to the Chair of the Trustees. Two Trustees not previously involved will be nominated. Again, you may be accompanied by a person of your choice to conduct your appeal. You will be notified of the outcome in writing. The decision is final and there will be no further appeal.

#### Suspension of Volunteering Duties

In some circumstances you may be asked to stop volunteering immediately while the matter is explored. For example, there may be complaints of harassment, theft or violent behaviour or there may be safeguarding concerns. This will be confirmed in writing. It does not preclude the grievance procedure being applied at a later date after further investigation and, for example, subject to any legal proceedings being concluded.

## **Volunteer Grievance Policy**

While the involvement of volunteers is, by and large, a positive experience for everyone involved, it is important to bear in mind that sometimes things can go wrong. From time to time there may be instances where a volunteer has a complaint or grievance about another volunteer, a Trustee or Tyneside Welcomes organisation itself. Similarly, TW may find that a volunteer's performance has declined, or that someone else has complained about a volunteer's work, attitude or conduct. Please note that Tyneside Welcomes' **Complaints Policy** is solely for the handling of complaints by the Family. Complaints arising from outside the Family are covered by this **Grievance Policy** and **Grievance Procedure**.

### **If a volunteer makes a complaint**

This part of the problem solving procedure gives the volunteer the opportunity to complain if they have been unfairly treated or if they have an issue or a cause for concern within the organisation.

#### **Stage 1**

Initial complaints, whether against a Trustee, the organisation or another volunteer, should be discussed during a meeting with the volunteer and the Volunteer Coordinators. If the complaint is about a volunteer co-ordinator, then the matter should be referred to the Trustees.

During this meeting the volunteer can be accompanied by a supporter of their choice. The meeting will be recorded and signed by both parties. If the issue cannot be resolved at this stage then the volunteer should proceed to stage 2.

#### **Stage 2**

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome of the initial complaint, they should make a formal complaint, preferably in writing, to the Lead Sponsor. If the volunteer has difficulty in expressing themselves in writing then they will be advised how to obtain help. The Lead Sponsor will arrange to meet with the volunteer as soon as is reasonably practicable to discuss their grievance and again they will be given full opportunity to state their case. The Lead Sponsor will attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of both the volunteer and the organisation. The decision is taken by the Lead Sponsor and will be confirmed in writing

#### **Retention of Records**

Records from volunteering are kept for two years from the date the volunteer leaves Tyneside Welcomes.