

Volunteering Whilst in Receipt of Benefits

The Volunteering Together 4 Health service is delivered by a partnership team of volunteering experts across the five boroughs of North Central London. Whether looking for volunteering advice and guidance at a system wider or local level, you will find dedicated and expert support.

Can residents volunteer while claiming benefits?

The short answer is yes, however, this depends on meeting certain conditions depending on what benefits the volunteer receives. It also generally won't change the amount of money received.

However, there are a few simple rules to follow to make sure everything stays on track with the volunteer's benefits. Share those rules with your volunteers:

The 'Golden Rules' of Volunteering

- **Keep them in the loop:** Always tell your work coach or the office that pays your benefits before you start.
- **Stay available for work:** If your benefit requires you to look for a job, you must still be able to attend interviews (usually with 48 hours' notice) and start a job (usually within one week).
- **Out-of-pocket expenses only:** It is fine to have your travel, food, or childcare costs paid back to you, but you shouldn't receive any other 'payment' or 'perks' like gift vouchers, as these could be seen as earnings.
- **Keep your receipts:** If an organisation pays you back for travel or lunch, keep the receipts or tickets to show your work coach if they ask.

Making Volunteering Inclusive

We want volunteering to be open to everyone, especially those in our Core20PLUS5 populations - this includes people living in the most deprived 20% of our communities and groups facing the greatest health challenges.

Often, people in these groups worry that volunteering might be a 'risk' to their financial security. By providing clear information, we can remove these barriers. For example, some people wrongly believe there is a 16-hour weekly limit or that they can't volunteer if they receive disability benefits – neither of which is true.

How it works for different benefits

- **Universal Credit (UC):** If you are required to search for work, you can usually count your volunteering for up to half of your search time (e.g. if you must search for 30 hours, 15 of those can be spent volunteering).
- **Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA):** You can volunteer for as many hours as you like, but you must remain available for work and keep actively looking for a job. This means you must be contactable, able to attend an interview with 48 hours' notice and be ready to start a job within one week. You can also take part in residential volunteering for up to 14 days.
- **Disability or Sickness Benefits (ESA/PIP):** You can definitely volunteer. While the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) might occasionally check if your health has improved because of the type of volunteering you are doing, volunteering itself is officially classed as 'exempt work'.
- **Carer's Allowance:** You can volunteer as much as you want, provided you still spend at least 35 hours a week in your caring role.

Tips for Organisations Supporting Volunteers

To make volunteering more accessible, organisations can:

1. **Pay expenses in advance when needed:** People on low incomes may not have the cash to pay for travel upfront.
2. **Provide a 'Support Letter':** Give your volunteer a letter to show their work coach that explains the role is flexible, unpaid, and different from a 'job'.

You can get updated information around benefits and volunteering at the [NCVO website](#).

Top Equality, Diversity and Inclusion TIPS

- To support a diverse range of volunteers, organisations should proactively debunk myths about benefit limits and offer to pay out-of-pocket expenses in advance so that no one is priced out of helping.
- Providing clear, written role descriptions helps volunteers explain their activities to work coaches, ensuring their contribution is recognised as a positive step toward health and employment goals.

For further support contact your local volunteering experts:

Bridge Renewal Trust (Haringey)

CBPlus (Barnet)

Enfield Voluntary Action

Haringey Community Collaborative (Public Voice)

London Plus (Lead Partner)

Voluntary Action Islington

Volunteer Centre Camden (Operational Lead)

Volunteering Barnet (Groundwork London)

