

The resource for those who manage, lead and co-ordinate volunteers in the British Red Cross

# Making **it** happen

**Issue 2** Supporting, supervising and developing volunteers



**Welcome** to the second

issue of Making it happen. This issue challenges some of the myths about what supporting and supervising volunteers really means.

Supervision sounds like a scary word, doesn't it? It has an association with someone sitting behind a desk telling you what you should and shouldn't do.

But it doesn't have to be like that. Support and supervision are about having some time to talk and bring any issues out into the open. It's also a time where honest feedback and praise can be given, and training and development needs addressed.

No one is a born supervisor. It takes skill, which like any other, can only be developed over time. But with

the right kind of support and supervision, the British Red Cross will be filled with motivated volunteers.

As Helen Barton, international message and tracing volunteer, says: "The support I receive is great. I find my supervisor hugely encouraging – she always supports my development."

Many volunteers in the Red Cross are properly supported, supervised and developed – some aren't. If you practise good support and supervision in this way, you'll keep volunteers motivated.



**Do your volunteers want to get in contact with other British Red Cross volunteers to exchange ideas and stories?**

Volunteers now have the opportunity to do just that through a new members only section of the British Red Cross website – created just for volunteers.

Volunteers can now access resources such as policy documents, find out about news and events and join in discussion by logging onto the new site.

Volunteers can access the site at [www.redcross.org.uk/myredcross](http://www.redcross.org.uk/myredcross). They simply need to key in their name and volunteer ID number.



**British Red Cross**  
*Caring for people in crisis*

## Don't throw it away!

This is the second in a series of eight issues of Making it Happen. Please do keep your copies – by the end of the series you will have collected a 'mini' practice guide in how to lead, co-ordinate and manage volunteers... so hang on to your copies for future reference.

## What am I going to get from reading this?

- ✓ An understanding of what support and supervision mean
- ✓ A range of ideas from managers and volunteers across the UK
- ✓ Thought-provoking case studies
- ✓ Tips on giving and receiving feedback
- ✓ Suggestions on how to develop your volunteers' potential
- ✓ Confidence to support and supervise your volunteers effectively

## Should I be supporting and supervising my volunteers?

The answer is yes if you:

- ✓ are co-ordinating day-to-day volunteering activities
- ✓ are delegating work to volunteers
- ✓ are the main point of contact or support for volunteers
- ✓ are responsible for supervising volunteers to ensure that standards are met.

If you have answered yes to any of the above, have a think about the following: do your volunteers get an opportunity to talk to you on an individual basis? Do you know how they feel about what they do?

You may or may not be appropriately supporting and supervising volunteers at present. If you aren't sure – don't panic! This resource will guide you in the right direction.

## What are the benefits of support and supervision?

By making time for support and supervision, you can:

- ✓ receive and give feedback
- ✓ help a volunteer feel motivated and involved
- ✓ say thank you for the contribution they make
- ✓ identify training and development
- ✓ give time to deal with issues
- ✓ ensure that required standards are met
- ✓ help build relationships
- ✓ stop a volunteer from leaving
- ✓ help develop volunteers

## Did you know?

**The Samaritans**  
The Samaritans has 20,000 volunteers spread across 200 branches in the UK, with a paid workforce of just 80 people. In the Samaritans, volunteers are supported and supervised by other volunteers. Call centres are covered 24 hours a day and two volunteers will cover each shift. The volunteers are supported by a volunteer shift leader who can be contacted by phone if advice or support is required. At the end of each shift, the volunteers phone the shift leader and talk through any issues that came up during the session. The aim is to ensure that when volunteers leave the call centre, they feel OK.

**Women's Royal Voluntary Service**  
Every volunteer with Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS) has someone, either a volunteer or a paid member of staff, who can give them support and supervision. Among the things volunteers can expect from WRVS are appropriate training, consultation on decisions that will affect them and reimbursement of expenses. WRVS has group meetings, one-to-one sessions and social gatherings where they update volunteers.

**Interesting statistics from the 1997 National Survey of Volunteering**  
Of the 1,486 volunteers asked:

- 73% said there was someone in their organisation to whom they could go for advice and support
- 83% were satisfied with the advice and support they received from their organisation
- only 22% said that there was someone who checked the quality of their work
- only 2% said they would mind checks being carried out on the quality of their work

## Support and supervision – dispelling the myths

### What is support and supervision?

Supporting volunteers is about giving them the help they need to perform their role well. Supervising volunteers is about directing and overseeing their performance. These two elements go hand in hand in making the relationship with a volunteer a productive one.

Arranging time to talk to volunteers is essential. A support and supervision session is a time to listen to volunteers, give feedback, build relationships and involve them. It's also a time to deal with any issues, ensure that service standards are being met and identify any training and development needs. Whether it's a 15-minute phone conversation or the manager taking the time to talk alone (in a one-to-one) with a volunteer after a group meeting, if it involves these things, it's support and supervision.

### How can you support and supervise volunteers?

- Support and supervision can be done "on the job". For example, first aid volunteers can receive feedback and raise issues with their public duties leader at events.
- In other services, such as home from hospital or transport and escort, where "outreach" work is the norm, telephone support and supervision is essential.
- Group support and supervision is also a valid way of meeting the needs of volunteers. It can help people feel supported and encourage them to learn from each other. However, group members should also be given the option to talk to you in private.
- Where the team leader does not meet the volunteers on the job, it's important to ensure that on-site visits are made every so often.

Managers have the responsibility to support and supervise volunteers and our volunteers should expect to receive and take an active part in it. How, as a manager, you go about this depends on the situation. For example, the type of role, the frequency of volunteering and the

experience of the volunteer would need to be considered. The rule of thumb should be – the greater the risk, to volunteers, service users and the Society, the more regular the support and supervision.

### Who supports and supervises volunteers?

The support and supervision must come from a named manager, leader or co-ordinator. Every volunteer should know who this person is. Read "Should I be supporting or supervising volunteers?" on page 2 to find out if it is you.

### How often should it take place?

There is no definite answer to this question. In some activities, it may happen when the volunteer is on duty or at the start of a shift.

### 10 ways to support and supervise volunteers

1. Phone volunteers and have a chat.
2. Take the time to visit volunteers where they carry out their volunteering.
3. If there is a meeting, arrange for one or two volunteers to come early/ stay late and take this opportunity to talk one to one.
4. Invite a volunteer to join you for tea.
5. Arrange a specific time and location for a one to one.
6. Share a journey to an event or an activity with a volunteer and use the time to talk about their volunteering.
7. Hold open discussions with volunteers in group meeting.
8. Stop and talk for five minutes when you pass volunteers in the corridor.
9. Have a 'private time' session at the end of a volunteers' meeting.
10. Arrange an 'open day' every month, for volunteers to come and spend time with you in private.

## Developing volunteers

Volunteers will want and need different things at different stages of their volunteering with the Red Cross. Development is important. Discussions about a volunteer's development should take place during support and supervision sessions. As a manager, you need to ensure that time is given to focus on development needs in order to sustain the motivation and commitment of volunteers.

### 10 ways to develop volunteers

1. Give volunteers feedback on how they're doing.
2. Delegate tasks to volunteers effectively (the right stuff, to the right people).
3. Identify what volunteers want to learn and make sure this learning takes place.
4. Give volunteers opportunities to try new and interesting things (such as getting involved with the Volunteer Forums and Councils).
5. Involve volunteers in decision-making (for example activity reviews).
6. Use opportunities (such as group meetings and one-to-ones) to talk about development.
7. Empower volunteers to make decisions and control their work within certain authority limits.
8. Give additional responsibilities to volunteers where relevant.
9. Consider holding yearly one-to-ones and take this opportunity to review volunteers' development needs and priorities.
10. Provide opportunities for volunteers to work together and learn from each other.

## Volunteers' voices



"My manager, Pat, is very hands on. She shows you what to do, instead of telling you, so you know you're on the right track.

"She phones me regularly and we see each other at training sessions. Occasionally, we work together and during our lunch breaks, we have a chat.

"I feel very comfortable bringing up any issues. Pat is a leader, not a boss. People listen to her because they want to."  
**Jean Milton, therapeutic care and skin camouflage volunteer, Somerset**

"In terms of supervision, there is nothing formal in place but I do have regular supervision with my manager over the phone.

"I find her very accessible, always supportive and helpful. Although she is very busy, she makes time for me. I find that this informal type of supervision works very well because my manager knows what I'm up to and I know what is expected of me."  
**Edwina Bahar, refugee and asylum seeker project volunteer, Manchester**

"I find the current shop manager very approachable and easy to talk to. I have

regular one-to-ones and any issues are resolved at this stage. "If it hadn't been for the regular supervision I receive, I wouldn't have continued to volunteer as it forms a great support mechanism."

**John Jenkins, shop volunteer, Birkenhead**

"We meet with our manager every fortnight, unless we have training or a duty to attend to. This type of support works well for me. There can be a few hiccups with the supervision as sometimes too much is expected of the volunteers. Other times, our manager is so busy herself I feel that questions and issues are not fully answered.

"However, I do have a good working relationship with my manager and I do feel listened to and supported emotionally."  
**Public duties volunteer, Northern Territory**

"My current contact person looks after services across the area and is therefore quite difficult to get in contact with. The other volunteer I work with has become my main source of support.

"It sometimes feels like the project we're running is not supported at all.

We don't know who to contact and nobody really knows we're here. It would be nice if someone phoned every so often to check that things are fine and to ask if we need to get together for a supervision session.

"I also don't hear about other volunteering opportunities and what's going on in the Branch."  
**International youth volunteer, Wales and Western**

### What kind of support and supervision do volunteers want?

- Someone to contact or talk to on a regular basis
- Someone to deal with issues
- Someone to be interested in their work
- Someone to check service standards
- Someone to help them develop their skills

## Managers' voices



Jenny Bailey, service co-ordinator for community and hospital support services, Cheshire

"I phone my volunteers as often as I can and sometimes send out newsletters or updates to keep people informed of our services. Periodically, we have group meetings.

"I bring volunteers together so they can network and support one another, such as at an Open Gardens event. I get them to swap numbers if they got on well and I try to pair up volunteers who wouldn't meet each other often. The team spirit at these events is great and it's good PR!

"When I'm out for the day with a volunteer, we make sure to stop for lunch or talk during our lunch breaks if we are with clients. Chatting in the car is another good time to discuss issues. I also attend the volunteers' training sessions so I can get to know them better. This helps make the support and supervision I give over the phone easier. They get to know me and they're also more likely to call me."

**Pat Douglass, therapeutic care and skin camouflage co-ordinator, Wiltshire, Avon and Gloucestershire**

"It's important that volunteers feel they can phone me whenever. I actively encourage volunteers to bring issues forward, as ignoring them won't solve problems!

"I think, for anyone involved in what I call "outreach" work, it's essential to encourage contact between the volunteers by letting them work together. Volunteers can bounce ideas off one another and help support each other. I invite volunteers to work together on cases and we all meet several times a year.

**Pat Smith, service manager for refugee and asylum seeker services and international tracing and message services, West Midlands**

"I always phone volunteers after they have been to visit a client. Any concerns they have about the client can be raised at this stage. It's also a great opportunity for me to find out what tasks they have carried out and whether they have enjoyed the visit. It helps me to check that the information I provided was accurate and useful to them.

"We use a volunteer report form after each visit. This form asks volunteers whether they received enough support, how they found the visit and if they feel any additional training would have helped them to deal with that particular client."

**Jenny Bailey, service co-ordinator for community and hospital support services, Cheshire**

### Top Tips

- Keep in regular contact by phone, email, letter or face-to-face
- Keep your communications personal, honest and relevant
- Delegate the support and supervision to others if you have too many volunteers to keep in contact with. Some of your volunteers may make splendid supervisors
- Work alongside volunteers where possible
- Deal with any issues immediately
- Encourage peer support

"We meet as a group every week. We talk about how a particular duty has worked and any incidents or casualties we have dealt with. It gives everyone an opportunity to debrief and talk things through. We also discuss things we could have done differently.

"We have an open policy – no question is a silly question if you don't know the answer! If the chat needs to be private, we just step into another room. We also use this time to review development needs and organise sessions on a range of topics from personal safety to resuscitation support. If someone can't come, another volunteer will phone them and talk through what was discussed, before the next meeting.

"If someone has dealt with a casualty and needs to talk they can phone us, no matter what time of day. This gives them the opportunity to talk through what has happened and de-stress.

"We also have an annual general meeting every year to get feedback from volunteers, discuss issues and talk about what has been good or not so good throughout the year."  
**Steve Coppenhall, centre organiser and first aid group leader and trainer, Willesden centre**

## Feedback



### Receiving feedback

Volunteers must have the opportunity to give feedback on the work they do. Think about the volunteers you support or manage. Do you encourage them to give feedback? Do people feel comfortable being honest with you? If you're not sure, try asking your volunteers.

It's important that you acknowledge volunteers' feedback and thank them for their contribution – this will encourage them to give it again in the future. More importantly, whether the feedback is positive or negative, if you need to act on any information received, ensure you do.

### Giving feedback

It's important to ensure that feedback is given in a helpful and supportive way so that the recipient can act on the information without feeling demeaned or attacked.

Whether the feedback you are giving is positive or negative, try using the following guidelines:

1. Consider the needs of your volunteers. The purpose of feedback is to help the other person grow and develop in their role.

2. Focus on behaviour. Behaviour can be changed, whereas someone's personality, values or attitudes are more difficult to change.

3. Be specific. To provide insight, the volunteer must clearly understand what behaviour is under discussion. Always give an example.

4. Ask for permission to give feedback. Your wish to give feedback may be greater than their desire to receive it! Try and select one specific area for giving feedback. Ask for their consent before you share the feedback.

5. Give feedback as soon as possible after the event. Most feedback can and should be given immediately after the event. If the feedback is positive, giving it immediately will result in the person being aware of exactly what it was they did well and they are more likely to repeat it in the future. If the feedback is negative, deal with it there and then. Behaviour cannot be changed if no feedback is given.

6. If you are giving difficult feedback, try and create a feedback sandwich – alternate between positive and negative feedback.

## Delegation

Remember that delegation is a great motivational opportunity – you just need to be aware of what makes each team member tick.

It's OK to delegate tedious tasks but try and delegate some fun ones as well. Initially, it may take you twice as long to delegate a task as it would to do it yourself. However, if you add up all the time you would have spent on that task and think about what the volunteer will gain, a few hours of your time is worthwhile.

Delegating work to volunteers will require careful support and supervision. The volunteer must have a clear understanding of their role, clear accountability and objectives. You may also need more regular one-to-one sessions.

### Seven steps to effective delegation

1. Explain exactly what needs to be done and agree specific timescales to check progress.

2. Explain the background and the larger context. This is crucial for developing pride in high standards of work.

3. Break down the task into small chunks with the volunteer, creating a step-by-step approach.

4. Check each step to ensure the volunteer taking on the task has the necessary skills and knowledge to carry it out successfully.

5. Give them the opportunity to carry it out with an experienced person first.

6. When confident that they are able to take on the task successfully, hand it over fully but remain on hand to help or reassure if needed.

7. Use progress updates as an opportunity to receive and give feedback, encouragement and reward.

Source: Beverley Williams from *Effective Delegation*

## Case studies

Here are some situations that may well occur when managing volunteers



### Things are not always as they seem

Anita has been a first aid volunteer for a year. She gets her day-to-day support from Paul, another volunteer, who is the public duty officer. Although Paul is Anita's manager, they don't often have dedicated time to talk about her volunteering.

Recently, Paul has noticed that Anita often turns up at duties a bit flustered and very late. The other volunteers feel she isn't pulling her weight and it's affecting the team spirit. Paul is fairly sure that Anita is losing interest in volunteering so he decides to bring it up at their next session.

During their one-to-one, Paul talks Anita through some new procedures that are being introduced and proceeds to ask her if she's enjoying her volunteering. Anita says that she is and asks if there's a reason for Paul asking. He tactfully goes on to explain that she has seemed a bit distracted and that her time keeping has been poor.

Anita explains that her partner has lost his job and they are struggling to pay the bills, let alone buy the petrol for the car. This has meant that she's been begging lifts to duties from an unreliable neighbour. So when she arrives, often

late, she feels embarrassed and stressed. Paul had no idea that Anita's circumstances had changed and that she isn't claiming her travel expenses. They go through the expenses policy, Anita gets her claim form and both are relieved that they sorted it out.

#### What's the message?

Issues are not always what they seem to be. Make sure you take time to talk to your volunteers and look at things from their perspective, not just your own. Supervision is a great opportunity to get all the facts.

### Help develop your volunteers' potential

Joanne joined the Red Cross as an administration volunteer, giving time twice a week. While at work, Joanne learns about the other services the Red Cross provides and realises that she is interested in doing first aid. Joanne speaks to her manager, John, and explains that she'd like to undertake a first aid course. John books a place for her. Once she has completed the training, they meet again and John asks her if she'd be interested in becoming a public duties volunteer. Joanne says she needs some time to think about it and goes to a centre meeting to try it out.

At the meeting, she talks to the other volunteers and feels she'd like to do it. Joanne speaks to John and arranges with the centre to become a first aid volunteer. Joanne has now been volunteering for the Red Cross for three years and still loves every minute of it.

#### What's the message?

Developing your volunteers' potential is important. Although it's really tempting to hang on tight to a volunteer, it's important for them and the Red Cross that they're encouraged to try different things if they are keen to do so!

### No room for bad behaviour

Bob has been with the Red Cross for five years. Sam, the manager, has heard Bob making negative comments about the organisation for a while now. At a group meeting, Sam overhears Bob saying that refugees and asylum seekers don't deserve to be supported by the Red Cross. Sam calls Bob in for a chat and discusses his behaviour. Sam explains the standards of behaviour expected and the reasons why, and checks that Bob understands. As there is an Ideals in Action course running the next week, it is agreed that Bob will attend. Sam also gets in contact with his volunteering adviser to seek their advice on how best to deal with the issue.

A few weeks later, Sam again overhears Bob making comments not in accordance with the fundamental principles. Sam calls Bob into the office and revisits their previous conversation. and talks to Bob about the fact that his behaviour has not changed, explaining that any further repeat of his the unacceptable behaviour will result in disciplinary action. Sam then checks that Bob understands and gives him a copy of the fundamental principles, the volunteer staff and delegate charter (which includes an explanation of the Society's expectations of volunteers) and the disciplinary procedures. After

the meeting, Sam contacts her line manager to discuss the course of action she has taken.

#### What should Sam do if it happens again?

If you say you're going to do something, you need to do it. Everyone in the Red Cross has to behave in a way that upholds the fundamental principles, and if this isn't the case, action must be taken. Sam should seek advice from her volunteering adviser and then inform Bob that he'll be called in to a disciplinary interview.

#### What's the message?

As a manager, you can contribute to a problem if you don't tackle it. Don't be afraid to raise something that you haven't felt able to do before. You may feel overloaded, unsure how to approach the issue or sorry for the volunteer as you see them as a friend. These feelings are very common. However, you're letting the Red Cross, service users, donors and volunteers down if you ignore it. Additionally, any poor behaviour will be noticed by other volunteers and it's important not to send out the wrong message. It's best to deal with it as soon as possible. You can get support in doing so from your line manager or volunteering adviser.

### Tips on dealing with difficult behaviour or unsatisfactory performance

1. Don't put it off – if you are unhappy with someone's performance, you need to do something. Letting it fester will only make matters worse.
2. Deal with it there and then – don't save up lots of criticisms and 'drop them' on a volunteer.
3. Be specific – explain the gap between what they are doing and what they need to achieve.
4. Make sure they have a clear understanding – simply nodding agreement does not necessarily mean that they have understood. Discuss and check.
5. Don't make assumptions – it is important to discover the reasons behind the behaviour. Keep an open mind and ask questions, rather than assuming you already know what the cause is.
6. Put the issue in perspective – if the volunteer has done good work in other areas, remind them of that. Help them to understand how they contribute and how you value them.
7. Don't repeat yourself – discuss the area that needs improvement, agree the future course of action and move on.

In many cases, a simple honest discussion of the problem can achieve positive results, but it is important to consider the possibility that just by airing the problem, you may not solve it. If problems do continue, you need to develop a case history. This will be necessary both in tracking what you are doing to correct the problem, and in developing a record in case disciplinary measures become necessary.

## Self study suggestions (30 mins)

1. Make a list of what you need in terms of support and supervision from your manager in order to be effective and enjoy your role.
2. Then have a think about what your volunteers need from you. Are their needs the same as yours?
3. Have a look at your lists – are your volunteers getting everything they need in terms of support and supervision? Is there anything you need to do more of, less of or differently?

## Books to read

### What We Learned (the Hard Way) about Supervising Volunteers – an action guide to making your job easier

by Jarene Frances Lee with Julia M. Catagnus  
Published by Energize  
Price: £9

ISBN 0-940576-20-1  
Packed with the advice, wisdom, and the experiences of 85 supervisors of volunteers, this guide shows what works and what doesn't in supervision. It also includes comments from volunteers about what they need in terms of support and supervision and a self-assessment survey covering the attitudes and actions necessary to be an effective supervisor.

### Essential Volunteer Management

by Steve McCurley and Rick Lynch  
Published by the Directory of Social Change  
Price: £14.95  
ISBN 1-900360-18-7

This is a great book covering a wide range of topics. The section on supervising volunteers looks at everything from long-distance support and supervision to dismissing a volunteer.

## Message from Philip Rosser, head of volunteering

The volunteering department at UK Office works to support volunteers and their managers throughout the British Red Cross. The team keeps in touch with volunteers and staff, and offers advice and guidance on all volunteering issues.

Our team is responsible for defining policies and procedures that draw upon best practice in volunteering. One of the key initiatives for 2003 has been to define the skills and behaviours we expect of our managers of volunteers.

Our team relies on the professional expertise of 21 volunteering advisers, based in the areas. They are supported by four volunteering support managers, based in the territories. As managers of volunteers, if you need advice and support, you should contact your volunteering adviser in the first instance. Their role is to help you to manage your volunteers.

The team is currently working on a number of different projects, ranging from reviewing the age policy to project managing volunteer representation and governance. The suggestions and ideas in this issue are being developed into a support and supervision policy and good practice guide, which will be published in the near future. Our aim is to make life easier for you and keep your volunteers inspired and motivated.

**Philip Rosser**  
head of volunteering

**Alison Smith**  
UK volunteering officer

**Flora MacLeod**  
team administrator

**Stan Fitches**  
volunteer representation and governance adviser

**Have you paid your volunteers' expenses? Do your volunteers receive their money promptly? Remember that expenses can**

**be very important to volunteers. Check that an effective system is in place to pay expenses and where it is not raise this with your line manager.**

## Competency

### Support, supervise and develop

1. Support and supervise the work of volunteers appropriate to the volunteer and situation. Give regular, accurate and balanced feedback.
2. Obtain feedback from volunteers and address any concerns or issues promptly.
3. Ensure volunteers are empowered to undertake their role and that responsibilities are delegated appropriately.
4. Consult, share and liaise with others to clarify individual support and supervision requirements and share good practice.

5. Maintain any necessary records and ensure volunteers' expenses are quickly processed and reimbursed.
6. Discuss and address the training and development needs of each volunteer.
7. Identify and take action to resolve problems arising during volunteering activities, using Red Cross' policies and procedures as relevant.
8. Promptly address any situations where volunteers' actions or behaviour are not in line with organisational objectives, policies or the fundamental principles.

We are working on developing a support, supervision and development policy for volunteers which could contain many of the ideas on page 2. What do you think? Let us know by contacting Philip Rosser on 020 7201 5168 or [prosser@redcross.org.uk](mailto:prosser@redcross.org.uk)

We hope you enjoyed this second edition of Making it happen. You will have noticed that once again there are contributions from Red Cross people across the UK. We would like to say a big thank you to everyone who shared their thoughts and ideas.

As the aim of this resource is to share good practice and knowledge about managing volunteers, it would be great to know what you think. Give us your ideas by contacting your volunteering advisor or the volunteering department at UK Office. Alternatively, post your thought on [my:redcross](http://my:redcross) ([www.redcross.org.uk/myredcross](http://www.redcross.org.uk/myredcross)).

The next issue will focus on leading, communicating and involving volunteers.

If you would like to be added or removed from the circulation list, please contact your volunteering adviser.

We would also like to thank the people who contributed to this edition.