



VETERANS OUTREACH SUPPORT

Volunteer Handbook

updated April 2022

To be reviewed April 2024

Dear VOS Volunteer,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and staff, I would like to thank you for your interest in volunteering with Veterans Outreach Support (VOS).

Ever since 2008, volunteers have been invaluable in enabling VOS to offer the best possible provision to our Service Users and the wider veteran community.

VOS provides Welfare, Wellbeing and Clinical support to UK Armed Forces & Merchant Navy Veterans, as well as to spouses/partners. As a VOS Vol, you are central to that support. Whether it be via social groups, activities, events or general ambassadorship; the camaraderie, community and fun we can provide to others is a precious thing.

This handbook is designed to give you all the information you need to be a VOS volunteer.

Thank you for your time, passion, and support; I hope that you will find volunteering with VOS both rewarding and enjoyable.

Philippa Clare
Wellbeing and Volunteers Manager

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION TO VETERANS OUTREACH SUPPORT (VOS)

VOS is a charity that provides Welfare, Wellbeing, and Mental Health support services to former members of the British Armed Forces, Reserves, including the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the Merchant Navy – and to spouses/partners.

1. **Veterans Outreach Support (VOS) is an award-winning, UK registered charity** that provides a welcoming and relaxed setting where UK veterans and family members can drop in for confidential social or psychological support. VOS serves those who served their nation and, in recognition of its Falklands War-related origins, members of all three services of the British Armed Forces and Reserves, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the Merchant Navy are welcome.

Initially set up in 2008, financial support in 2013 facilitated its UK charity registration and enabled it to expand its services to families, deliver weekly therapy, as well as to embrace offenders and those with alcohol and substance abuse problems.

2. **The VOS Mission Statement** is, 'To meet the welfare, wellbeing and mental health needs of veterans', including spouses and partners. The charity's HQ and main delivery venue is the Royal Maritime Club in Portsmouth – a familiar, safe and welcoming place for veterans.

3. **Over the last 4 years**, VOS has significantly expanded its range of peer-supported wellbeing activities and social groups and has seen increasing demand for its mental health services and support, as well as its work in support of alcohol and substance addiction and dependency recovery.

4. **AWARDS:** In 2021 VOS was the first recipient of the Shaping Portsmouth Armed Forces Covenant Award and in 2022 the charity was awarded the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award. Our quality delivery has also resulted in VOS being selected as one of only 10 national portfolio leads in the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust's programme to improve the wellbeing and mental health of veterans across the SE of England. All VOS support and services are enriched and strengthened by very close cooperation and collaboration with local and national delivery partners, such as other charities and statutory services, including the NHS.

5. **VOS is a local charity with national impact.** Its operating model is recognised by Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo) as a template of best practice and exemplar for a collaborative and efficient approach to delivering veteran-specific services at a local level.

7. **Values.** VOS embraces and seeks to live the following values:

- **Accessible.** We are there for anyone who needs us.
- **Together.** We are stronger in partnership.
- **Responsive.** We listen, we act.
- **Reflective.** We learn, we develop.
- **Recovery oriented.** We can make a difference.
- **User centred.** Our service users define us

Where is VOS located?

8. The VOS office is located within the Royal Maritime Club in Portsmouth, PO1 3HS. The VOS office is open Mon to Fri 0900-1600. We offer support on the IOW, but in multiple locations and through an IOW Manager who operates from home/flexibly

VOS Service Delivery

9. VOS provides support in the form of:

a. **VOS monthly Drop-Ins:**

Monthly VOS Drop-Ins provides a welcoming and relaxed place where veterans and family members can come for confidential welfare advocacy or psychological support, or simply to meet socially. Drop-Ins offers one-stop assistance including legal, housing, financial, employment, spiritual, alcohol and mental health support. The attending agencies benefit enormously from VOS, giving them access to clients in a non-threatening environment alongside complementary services.

- The **VOS Drop-In in Portsmouth** takes place on the first Wednesday of every month, from 1400 to 1700 in the Royal Maritime Club, with new registrations commencing at 1330.
- The **VOS Drop-In in the Isle of Wight** takes place on the third Wednesday of every month from 1200 to 1600 Congregational Hall, Pyle Street, Newport.

b. **Clinical Provision:**

- We improve our service users' mental health through holistic provision of care, as well as deliberate and extensive collaboration with multi-agency professionals and organisations. We continue to improve our clinical mental health support to the local veteran community by undertaking commitments to standards such as those set by QNVMHS. We offer access to mental health triage at monthly Drop-Ins; provision of weekly clinics for psychiatric assessment and medication review; psychological assessment; therapeutic intervention; and support offered by a substance misuse recovery worker.

c. **Wellbeing Provision:**

- VOS offers a wide-ranging peer supported schedule of wellbeing activities, across a significant number of locations and at different times of day. These opportunities are set up indoor, outdoor, and online -- in order to provide a high quality and varied chance for our service users to experience **camaraderie, community and fun**. This schedule complements the larger monthly Drop Ins which again offer the chance to meet other veterans, family members and carers in a positive and supportive veteran-aware environment

Who works for VOS?

10. VOS is a registered charity, so it is governed by a Board of Trustees and a Chair person all of whom are volunteers. Some of the Board of Trustees are founding members of the charity.

11. VOS has a staff of paid employees. These are as follows;

- a. The Chief Executive
- b. The Operations Manager
- c. The Wellbeing and Volunteers Manager
- d. The Clinical Manager
- e. The Office Manager
- f. The IOW Project Manager

Chapter 2 BECOMING A VOS VOLUNTEER

Who can become a volunteer with VOS?

1. Although VOS is a military based charity and some of our volunteers are veteran volunteers, our volunteers come from all walks of life with very different backgrounds and experience. VOS actively encourages this to create a diverse perspective and input.

What roles do volunteers carry out at VOS?

2. The roles for a VOS volunteer are:
- a. To facilitate at one or both of our two monthly Drop-Ins
 - b. To run or support a social group
 - c. To attend or lead at wellbeing activities
 - d. To support outreach activities in the community
 - e. To attend or help at stalls for events
 - f. To become a telephone befriender
 - g. To be an ambassador for VOS
3. When applying to volunteer with VOS the above options can be discussed to establish which role is suitable.

What is the VOS volunteer recruitment and application process?

4. VOS is committed to equal opportunities and believes that volunteering should be an opportunity for all regardless of sex, disability, ethnicity, marital status, religion, community or social background.
5. There are no upper age limits for volunteers if they can and continue to make a useful contribution to VOS. An assessment will be carried out if it is considered that volunteering is becoming detrimental to individuals or other people's health and safety. The minimum age is 18.
6. The VOS Wellbeing & Volunteers Manager is responsible in all respects for VOS volunteers. If you would like to volunteer with VOS please make, contact with the VOS Volunteers Manager via:
- a. e-mail at philippa.clare@vosuk.org

7. The Wellbeing Manager will then make contact and arrange an informal interview to talk about what you'd like to achieve through volunteering and to see if VOS has the right roles to fit your skills and time-available. This is a two-way process; we pride ourselves on offering a top volunteering experience which is valuable to all our VOS Vols team. Equally, there are things VOS needs from its volunteer cohort.

8. After the informal interview, arrangements will be made for you to observe a Drop-In. Observing the Drop-In gives any prospective volunteers a great insight into the business of the charity and an opportunity to meet other volunteers.

9. Once the Drop-In has been observed and both you and VOS are happy to continue with your application, arrangements will be made to meet with the Wellbeing Manager to discuss your volunteering options and complete paperwork, carry out an induction and arrange for training to be undertaken.

10. All new volunteers will be required to complete a 3-month probationary period with VOS. This will be reviewed by the Wellbeing Manager.

Volunteer application paperwork – to be held by VOS

12. The Wellbeing Manager will give you the following paperwork to complete, and policies to take away. These forms can be found at Annex A of this document.

- a. VOS Volunteer Induction
- b. VOS Volunteer Personal Image Consent
- c. The VOS Confidentiality Agreement
- d. The VOS Data Protection Policy
- e. The VOS Safeguarding Policy
- f. The VOS Code of Conduct Policy

Disclosure and Barring Certificates (DBS)

13. Some Volunteer roles will require a DBS check. Please confirm with the Wellbeing Manager if this is applicable.

Conflict of Interests

14. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to inform VOS of any conflict of interests as a result of volunteering for VOS.

Chapter 3 VOLUNTEERING WITH VOS: IN PARTNERSHIP WITH VOS

VOS Commitment to Volunteers

1. VOS is committed to ensuring that all volunteers are treated fairly and will therefore ensure that:
 - a. They are provided with a clear description of their roles and responsibilities.
 - b. They are aware that in the first instance the VOS Volunteers Manager has been employed to look after their interests whilst they volunteer, and will offer them appropriate induction, training and support and regular supervision.
 - c. They are assured that any information shared with the organisation is kept confidential and any data supplied is handled to comply with the data protection act.
 - d. They will receive the same protection under health and safety regulations and public liability as paid workers.
 - e. They will be offered opportunities for training and skills development, appropriate for their role and tasks as a volunteer.
 - f. They will not be asked to do something which is against their principles or beliefs.
 - g. They are paid suitable travel expenses when conducting voluntary work. Volunteers who live on the IoW will be funded to attend Drop-In.
 - h. They be given the opportunity to take a break from or cease to volunteer.

Volunteer Commitment to VOS

2. When committing to volunteer with VOS it is expected that an individual must:
 - a. Do what is reasonably requested of them, to the best of their ability.
 - b. Treat information obtained whilst volunteering in an appropriate, confidential manner and adhere to the organisation's confidentiality policies in the VOS Confidentiality Agreement.
 - c. Recognise that they represent the organisation and therefore need to act in an appropriate manner at all times.
 - d. Be willing to undertake appropriate training as necessary for the voluntary work undertaken.

- e. Recognise the right of the organisation to expect quality of service from its volunteers.
- f. Share suggestions for changes in working practices with the Volunteers Manager.

Volunteer Development and Training

- 3. Volunteer training is delivered as follows:
 - a. Induction on recruitment
 - b. Individual training as required
 - c. Mandatory specialist external training as required
 - d. VOS delivered training events usually two per year
- 4. Volunteers may be invited to attend VOS seminars and other events and may have the opportunity to represent VOS at external events and meetings.
- 5. Our volunteers are an integral part of the VOS team and welcome to participate in all planned social events to show appreciation of their commitment. We will also seek to recognise key milestones of volunteering service.

Volunteer Dress Code

- 6. As part of your induction process you will have been issued with VOS polo shirt and name badge. The initial polo shirt is gratis but subsequent items are likely to be on a purchase-basis; depending on the circumstances and at the discretion of the Wellbeing Manager.
- 7. It is requested that polo shirts be worn when attending VOS events, activities, social groups etc. This demonstrates a team image and helps volunteers be identified at Drop-In. Name badges must also be worn.
- 8. We ask our volunteers to avoid extremes of fashion and to dress respectfully.

Chapter 4 CODE OF CONDUCT

What is the VOS Code of Conduct?

1. The VOS Code of Conduct is a summary of policies which sets out the standard of behaviour expected from all its volunteers. The service of a volunteer at VOS means they become part of a charity that has a high degree of responsibility and duty of care for its service users. It is therefore essential that volunteers maintain a high level of personal standards and professional conduct, avoiding behaviour which may bring VOS into disrepute. This includes behaviour outside of VOS which may impinge on voluntary work at VOS.

2. Compliance with the Code of Conduct is one condition of volunteering with VOS. It is the minimum standard that volunteers should work to. It is important that VOS demonstrates a caring, compassionate, helpful and patient attitude when interacting with service users.

Confidentiality

3. VOS volunteers have an obligation to protect confidential or personal information in relation to service users, other volunteers and members of staff. As part of the induction process VOS volunteers sign the VOS Confidentiality agreement. If the agreement is breached, this should be reported to the VOS Volunteer Manager. Any reported breach will be investigated and could result in a volunteer being asked to cease volunteering with VOS.

Equality of Opportunity

7. VOS is committed to ensuring volunteers can work in an environment that is free from unlawful or unfair discrimination on the grounds of disability, colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, sex, gender (including gender reassignment), sexual orientation, age, marital status, religious or other similar philosophical belief.

Health and Safety

8. The VOS Office, clinical rooms and Drop-In are located within The Royal Maritime Club (RMC). All VOS staff, volunteers and service users are covered within the terms of the VOS and RMC Health and Safety policy. This is available from the VOS Volunteer Manager. Procedures will be briefed as part of the VOS volunteer training package. Volunteers will be expected to act in a safe manner and not to put themselves at risk.

9. VOS is committed to ensuring the mental health wellbeing of its volunteers, particularly at Drop-In. All volunteers have a responsibility to not put themselves at risk by ensuring they take a break, whether it is taking 10 minutes out during a session, or feeling that they need a more protracted period off from a volunteering role.

10. All volunteers have a responsibility to:
- a. Familiarise themselves with all Health and Safety and Emergency procedures
 - b. Co-operate fully with VOS staff at all times.
 - c. Understand the emergency plans.
 - d. Take care when lifting or carrying.
 - e. Report hazards to staff.
 - f. Contribute to a safe and healthy Drop-In.

Alcohol

11. A VOS volunteer must never access the bar at the RMC in order to consume alcohol whilst acting as a volunteer for VOS at the Drop-In. No alcohol is to be consumed anywhere when a volunteer is working at the VOS Drop-In. A volunteer who reports for a Drop-in or to represent VOS at an event smelling or under the influence of alcohol will be asked to leave. The incident will be logged and reported to the Volunteer Manager.

12. Any volunteer who witnesses a service user drinking alcohol in the bar is to report it to the Drop-In Reception Manager in order that the service user may be monitored whilst at Drop-In. No service user is allowed to enter the Drop-In area in possession of alcohol.

Insurance

13. The VOS liability insurance policy includes the activity of volunteers and liability towards them. A copy of the certificate is displayed in the VOS Admin Office

Social Media

15. There is to be a distinct line between personal social media activity and a volunteer role. Volunteers should not post anything on social media sites that could be construed to have an impact on VOS policy or reputation. Volunteers do not have the responsibility to refer to or publicise opinion on the management of VOS.

16. Volunteers are to keep clear and appropriate professional boundaries to minimise the risk of conflict, exploitation, harm or accusations of cyber bullying. It is important to be a strong ambassador to the charity and not to engage into confrontational conversation.

17. An official VOS Volunteer Facebook Group can be used for volunteer interaction. The group is managed by the VOS Volunteer Manager. All participants, however are responsible for ensuring that respectful conduct is maintained at all times.

Media Contact

18. VOS volunteers are not to speak directly to members of the media. If a volunteer is approached in any scenario for comment or to provide information by any member of the press, radio or TV they should be directed to the VOS Volunteer Manager. The VOS CEO is responsible for all media activity.

Photography/Filming

19. Only official VOS sponsored photography/filming is allowed at Drop-In.

Animals at Drop-In

20. The only animals that may be brought to Drop-In are working dogs when they are accompanied by their owner. Volunteers cannot bring animals to Drop-In.

Dependents at Drop-In

21. Volunteers are kindly asked not to bring their dependents to Drop-In.

Contact with Service Users

22. VOS volunteers must maintain a professional interaction with service users and must not:

- a. Offer lifts home on completion of Drop-In.
- b. Take a lift from a service user on completion of Drop-In.
- c. Engage in 'rogue' personal support outside of VOS support or Drop-In.
- d. Ask for, retain or record any service user's personal information.
- e. Avoid unnecessary physical contact or behave in a manner that may be misinterpreted.
- e. If you are unsure about any circumstances, please don't hesitate to raise it with the VOS Volunteers Manager