



Volunteer Screening Guidelines

UPDATED 2014

This document is provided for general guidance only. Organisations should use the information contained in this resource as reference material and should interpret in the context of their own organisation or program. The information should not be relied upon or be a substitute for professional advice.

Introduction

Why screen volunteers?

Finding enough tutors to meet the needs of students is a constant struggle for many homework clubs, however it is important not to take on 'just anyone' who wants to volunteer. All volunteers should be adequately screened before commencing in your program for two important reasons:

1. To ensure volunteers have the necessary skills and attributes required for the role, AND
2. To protect the safety of the children and young people attending your program

Ensuring volunteers are 'right' for the role

Screening is important to ensure volunteers have the skills, experience, values and other personal attributes required to provide effective learning support to students in Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs. For example the following may be important or useful attributes for volunteers in your program:

- Good communication skills and ability to explain things clearly
- Competency in spoken and written English
- Long-term commitment and willingness to attend on a weekly basis

The Centre for Multicultural Youth is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.

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CMY acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government

- Skills or experience in teaching English as a Second Language
- Knowledge of specific VCE subject content
- Open-mindedness and flexibility
- Understanding and valuing of diversity
- Willingness and capacity to work as part of a team
- Ability to work independently

Protecting students in the care of the organisation

According to Childwise, Australia's leading international child protection charity specialising in the prevention and reduction of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, "Child sex offenders will target organisations that are unaware of the risks and dangers of child abuse. They will also be attracted to organisations that conduct little or no screening and those that provide opportunities to make contact and be alone with children" (Childwise: 'Choose With Care: A handbook to build safer organisations for children' 2004).

While it is not possible to completely eliminate all risks to children in the program, there are a number of important procedures you can undertake to minimise the risk of a child offender becoming involved in your organisation.

Promoting the position: Advertisements and Role Descriptions

It is important that Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs have role descriptions for each of the roles that volunteers take on (see Appendix 1: Sample Role Description). You can use this role description in advertising volunteer vacancies, but also to make clear to volunteers their responsibilities and boundaries.

You should encourage 'self-selection' as much as possible, i.e., providing information about the requirements of the role so that only suitable applicants apply. Make clear what is required in all material promoting the position – the hours and location of work, the commitment required, and the skills and attributes required by volunteers. This will save you time later as it will mean less time spent processing applications from people not suited to the role.

From a Child Safety point of view, this is also your first opportunity to screen out any potential child offenders. ***Remember, child offenders deliberately target organisations with less stringent screening procedures.***

You should make your screening process clear in advertisements. You should also emphasise the organisation's commitment to child safety by prominently displaying your Child Protection Statement (see box below) in:

- Job advertisements
- Volunteer Role Descriptions, and
- Volunteer Application Forms

Child Protection Statement

A child protection statement should clearly state the organisation's commitment to child protection and should be included in all material promoting the position.

Example 1: XYZ Homework Club's recruitment and selection procedures reflect our commitment to the safety and protection of children in our care.

Example 2: XYZ Homework Club is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people accessing our service. We support the rights of the child and will act without hesitation to ensure a child-safe environment is maintained at all times. We also support the rights and wellbeing of our staff and volunteers and encourage their active participation in building and maintaining a secure environment for all participants.

Application Form

The Volunteer Application Form is a key tool to conduct preliminary screening – it can be used to assess volunteer motivations, relevant knowledge, skills and experience, and written communication skills. In addition to being asked about the reasons for volunteering, the form should ask applicants to detail employment and relevant training and experience – both formal and informal. It should also ask for at least two referees, at least one of which should be a professional referee. For an example see Appendix 2: Sample Volunteer Application Form.

Interview and Identity Check

Interview: The interview should be used to make sure the applicant is right for role but also to ensure their expectations match the role. Good communication is paramount to this process. You should be clear in your objectives and knowledgeable of the selection criteria.

Tips for interviewing volunteers:

- Decide on key questions before the interview – use open questions and avoid leading questions.
- Plan questions around the selection criteria mentioned in the job description.
- Identify the kinds of answers you want.
- The interview should feel professional but not overly formal. You should aim to make the applicant feel as comfortable as possible.
- Make sure you have read the application form. It can be used as a conversation starter at the start of the interview – encourage the applicant to talk more about experiences mentioned on their application.
- Use the interview as an opportunity to explain the role in greater detail. You should be honest about the challenges of the role to ensure the applicant has realistic expectations.
- Keep notes on each interview.

Examples: Interview Questions

- Why do you want to volunteer?
- What is it that attracts you to this particular role?
- What have you enjoyed most about previous work opportunities (both paid and unpaid)?
- What are the most important things you can offer the program and the students attending it?
- Can you tell me about a time when you worked with a child you found difficult and how you dealt with it?
- Can you tell me about a time when you worked with a child you particularly liked and how you dealt with it?

Identity Checks: Identity checks are important to ensure that the applicant is who they say they are. You could ask applicants to bring identification to the interview: you should check two forms of identity, one with a photo.

Reference Checks

This is a fundamental step in the screening processes – at least two reference checks should be conducted for all volunteers before they are accepted into the program.

Tips for conducting reference checks on volunteers:

- Checks should be always conducted by phone
- Take the time at the beginning to make the referee feel comfortable – try to build rapport
- Ask about relevant key dates and make sure they correlate with the volunteers' application form and resume

- If the referee sounds doubtful or hesitant, follow up with probing questions
- Pause and leave enough time for the referee to think about and answer the question
- Develop a standard list of questions to ask all referees – use open questions and avoid leading questions
- Explain the role carefully to referees – ask about the person’s suitability in relation to specific aspects of the role

Examples: Reference Check Questions

- How long have you known X and in what capacity?
- What would you say are X’s strengths?
- What would you say are X’s weaknesses?
- (after describing the role) How strongly would you recommend X for this role?
- Would you have any reservations in engaging X in this role?
- Is there anything else you think we need to know when considering X for this role?

Working With Children Checks and Police Checks

It is a legal requirement that all volunteers over 18 years of age in Out of School Hours Homework Support Programs over 18 years of age have a valid Working With Children Check. An organisation that engages a volunteer without a current Working With Children Check faces a maximum penalty of \$143,352 (financial year 2010-11). Many homework clubs also choose to screen volunteers with Police Checks, as there are a number of offences covered by a Police Check that may not be covered under a Working With Children Check.

For more information see Appendix 3: Working With Children Checks, Police Checks and Volunteers.

Induction

The induction is an important process in adequately preparing new volunteers for their role, and in further minimising the risk of abuse in your organisation. Apart from providing an opportunity to provide relevant information concerning the operation of your homework program, the induction also allows you to instil volunteers with an understanding of the organisation’s values and attitudes related to the children and young people in its care.

See Appendix 4 – Volunteer Checklist – a tool which can be used to track volunteer screening and induction processes for each applicant.

Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct is used to make volunteers aware of the responsibilities and boundaries associated with their role. It is also fundamental in ensuring the safety of children and young people attending the program, as well as protecting volunteers and the organisation in general. It is not enough to simply provide volunteers with a copy of the Code of Conduct and ask them to sign it. You should go through the code with volunteers as part of their induction and ensure they understand each condition.

For an example Code of Conduct, see Appendix 5: Volunteer Code of Conduct.

Acknowledgements and further information

The material in this document was sourced from the following locations:

- Childwise: 'Choose With Care: A handbook to build safer organisations for children' 2004
- Volunteering Australia: 'Tips for Involving Volunteers' 2006
- Volunteering Australia: 'Screening and the Volunteer Recruitment Process' 2005

For more information

Childwise. <http://www.childwise.net>

Volunteering Australia. www.volunteeringaustralia.org

Learning Beyond the Bell Resources: www.cmy.net.au/OSHLSPResources

Appendix 1

Volunteer tutor role description (sample)

XYZ Homework Club

Program description. The XYZ Homework Club provides learning support to secondary school students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The club assists in developing young people's confidence and helping them socially and academically to participate in school in a more meaningful way. In particular, the program focuses on literacy, numeracy, homework support and study skills.

Position focus. Tutors at the WMHC provide after school tutoring individually or to small groups of students, focusing on literacy development and assisting students to complete homework and assignments.

Responsibilities

- Tutoring students individually or in small groups to develop literacy, numeracy and study skills
- Assisting students to complete homework and assignments
- Keeping records of student attendance
- Keeping records of tutorial sessions and monitoring student progress over time
- Participating in relevant training

Skills, experience and attributes

- Understanding and valuing of diversity
- Willingness and capacity to work as part of a team
- Good communication skills and competency in English

The following are desirable but not essential:

- Skills or experience in teaching English as a Second Language
- Knowledge of VCE Science subject content (Chemistry, Biology, Physics)
- Experience tutoring VCE Science subjects

Hours and location of work. The XYZ Homework Club operates on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4pm until 6pm at the XYZ Community Centre. Volunteer tutors are expected to attend one session each week during school terms, and to commit to the program for a minimum of 6 months.

Supervision and Support. Tutors will be supervised and supported by the XYZ Homework Club Coordinator.

Other requirements of the role

- All volunteers must complete a satisfactory Working With Children Check
- Volunteers must attend an initial induction at the XYZ Homework Club
- Volunteers are expected to attend ongoing training as relevant to their role

XYZ Homework Club is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people accessing our service. We support the rights of the child and will act without hesitation to ensure a child-safe environment is maintained at all times. We also support the rights and wellbeing of our staff and volunteers and encourage their active participation in building and maintaining a secure environment for all participants.

Referees. Please provide the name and contact details of at least two referees:

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Name: | <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Female |
| Phone 1: | Phone 2: | |
| Relationship to you: | | |
| Name: | <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Female |
| Phone 1: | Phone 2: | |
| Relationship to you: | | |
| Name: | <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Female |
| Phone 1: | Phone 2: | |
| Relationship to you: | | |

Experience and qualifications. Please provide details of experience relevant to this role

Please tick any of these skill areas if they relate to you:

- Training or education in teaching or tutoring
- Experience teaching or tutoring school students
- Experience teaching English as a Second Language
- Speciality knowledge in a particular VCE subject area
- Experience working with young people
- Experience working with people from refugee or migrant backgrounds

Please elaborate on these experiences in the space below:

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Languages spoken | |
| Other voluntary work | |
| Hobbies / Interests | |

Why are you interested in becoming an OSHLSP volunteer tutor?

Please indicate your availabilities in the space below

Where did you hear about this program?

| Personal Information: | |
|--|---|
| Age | <input type="checkbox"/> <18 <input type="checkbox"/> 18-25 <input type="checkbox"/> 26-35 <input type="checkbox"/> 36-45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46-55 <input type="checkbox"/> 55+ |
| Gender | <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female |
| Language spoken at home? | |
| Highest education | |
| qualification achieved? | |
| <p>Privacy statement:</p> <p>The personal information on this form is being collected for the purposes of recruiting and selecting volunteers wishing to work in XYZ Homework Club. The information may also be required for evaluation purposes. Any evaluation reports developed will not identify individual volunteers by name. This information may be shared with Out of School Hours Learning Support Program partner organisations and funding bodies.</p> | |
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> Please tick if you would like to receive regular newsletters for tutors working in Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs.</p> | |
| <p>By signing this form I attest that the information supplied is true and accurate.</p> <p>I understand that submitting this application form does not automatically register me a volunteer tutor but that there is a selection process including completion of a satisfactory Working With Children Check and participation in training. I confirm that I am willing to volunteer as a tutor for at least a six month period and to attend XYZ Homework Club a minimum of one evening each fortnight.</p> | |
| <p>Signature:</p> <p>Name: _____ Date: _____</p> | |

XYZ Homework Club is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people accessing our service. We support the rights of the child and will act without hesitation to ensure a child-safe environment is maintained at all times. We also support the rights and wellbeing of our staff and volunteers and encourage their active participation in building and maintaining a secure environment for all participants.

Appendix 3

Working With Children Checks, Police Checks and Volunteers

Information for Homework Clubs

This document is provided for general guidance only. Organisations should use the information contained in this resource as reference material and should interpret in the context of their own organisation or program. The information should not be relied upon or be a substitute for professional advice.

Working With Children Checks, Police Checks and Homework Clubs

The Volunteer Application Form is a key tool to conduct preliminary screening – it can be used to assess volunteer motivations, relevant knowledge, skills and experience, and written communication skills. In addition to being asked about the reasons for volunteering, the form should ask applicants to detail employment and relevant training and experience – both formal and informal. It should also ask for at least two referees, at least one of which should be a professional referee.

For organisations working with children, the Working with Children Act (2005) and the Working with Children Regulation (2006) stipulate that any person working or volunteering with children regularly (a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18), and who is not directly supervised, needs to obtain a Working With Children Check (WWCC).

This means that in a homework club setting (where a volunteer does work with children regularly and is not directly supervised by another person) it is a legal requirement that all volunteers obtain Working With Children Checks. An organisation that engages a volunteer without a current Working With Children Check faces a maximum penalty of \$143,352.

While volunteers are not legally required to undergo Police Checks, many homework clubs chose to include Police Checks as part of their screening procedures – see below for information and advice.

The difference between Working With Children Checks and Police Checks

- Police Checks identify and release relevant criminal history information relating to convictions, findings of guilt or pending court proceedings.
- The purpose of the Working With Children Checks is to make an assessment of the level of risk an individual poses to children's safety. As such:
 - » WCCs are more extensive than Police Checks, gathering information from additional sources.
 - » WWCCs monitor card-holders in an ongoing manner – organisations/employers are informed of relevant new offences.

Important Note: A Working With Children Check is a mandatory precaution but should not be relied upon as the sole strategy for volunteer screening. Comprehensive screening procedures, including interviews and reference checks, are essential in ensuring the person is right for the role.

- Essentially this means that a Police Check is only valid at the time it is issued, while a WWCC screens volunteers over several years.
- At the same time, WWCCs target information that is related to the harm or mistreatment of a child. Information about other convictions (not related to working with children) may be released under a Police Check, but not under a WWCC.

Do volunteers need both checks?

While all volunteer tutors should undergo a Working With Children Check, it is up to you whether you ask your volunteers to do Police Checks as well. It really depends on the duties that the volunteer will be carrying out and, accordingly, the types of convictions that might be relevant. For example, if the volunteer is dealing with money or confidential files, a Police Check is probably a good idea (as offences related to theft, fraud, etc., may not be identified in a Working With Children Check).

More information about volunteers and WWCCs

Can a volunteer start before we receive their WWCC?

Volunteers may start volunteering once they have submitted their WWCC application. When a volunteer submits their WWCC application at the Post Office, they will receive a receipt - you should to see their receipt before they start volunteering. Also, the volunteer should not work unsupervised until you receive the actual check, which normally takes several weeks.

What if a volunteer already has a Working With Children Check?

If a volunteer already has a current Working With Children Check they do not need another one. However it is NOT enough just to see their card. The volunteer must complete a Change of Details form, to nominate your organisation/school. This ensures that if any new information related to harm or mistreatment of a child is detected, your organisation will be notified. The form is simple and available online:

<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/justlib/working+with+children/home/maintaining+your+check/wwcc+-+change+of+personal+details+form+%28pdf%29>

What about teachers and Working With Children Checks / VIT Registration?

Legally, registered teachers do not need to apply for Working With Children Checks. As long as the teacher is registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), they are monitored in a similar way to those with a WWCC. However, it is the responsibility of the organisation to ensure that their VIT registration is up-to-date, which you should do at least annually. (For this reason, some organisations ask teachers to do WWCCs so that they do not have to follow up on its currency.) To check whether a VIT registration is current:

- Go to the VIT website: http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/content.asp?Document_ID=959
- Click 'Search the register', then 'Search'
- Enter the VIT registration number. If the teacher is registered, it will come up as 'Registered' in the Registration column.

Do volunteers who are aged under 18 need these checks?

- Volunteers who are the age of 18 do not need to apply for Working With Children Checks.
- Volunteers can get Police Checks from the age of 17, however this up to your organisation.

Are there any other exemptions?

There are also a couple of other 'types' of volunteers who are exempt from applying for a Working With Children Check. For more information:

www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/Working+With+Children/Home/Application+Process/Who+Needs+to+Apply/WWCC+-+Exemptions+from+Applying+for+a+Check

More information and finding the forms

Working With Children Checks: Department of Justice, WWCC Unit. 1300 652 879

www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/Working+With+Children/Home/

Police Checks: Victoria Police, National Police Record Check. 1300 881 596

www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=274

Important Things to Remember!

- Screening procedures should always include WWCCs, interviews and reference checks
- A volunteer should not start until you have seen a receipt of their WWCC application; they should not tutor unsupervised until you receive the WWCC.
- VIT registered teachers: you need to check that their registrations are current, at least once per year.
- Remember to respect confidentiality and adhere to privacy principals when storing information on employees/volunteers.

Appendix 4

Volunteer Checklist (template)

Application and Induction

To track the application, screening and induction of volunteers.

Volunteer Name: _____

| Application / Screening: | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| <i>Process</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Notes</i> |
| Application form received | | |
| Interview / meeting with volunteer | | |
| Reference checks | | |
| Working With Children check | | |
| * Police check (if relevant) | | |
| Induction Complete | | |
| Tutor Training complete | | |

| Induction / orientation: | |
|--|-----------------|
| <i>Process</i> | <i>Complete</i> |
| Introduction to org/school and OSHLSP | |
| Daily procedures / program operation | |
| Tour of area, facilities, emergency procedures | |
| Role and expectations of tutor | |
| Volunteer Agreement explained and signed | |
| Tutor Training discussed | |
| Role of coordinator / communication | |
| Student Code of Conduct | |
| Computer / Internet policy | |
| Documenting student progress | |
| Confidentiality | |
| Accident and illness reporting | |
| Grievance procedures | |
| Orientation pack provided and discussed | |
| Volunteer Policy provided and discussed | |
| Child Protection Policy provided and discussed | |
| Other Policies and Procedures discussed | |

Appendix 5

Volunteer code of conduct (sample)

XYZ Homework Club

This document is provided for general guidance only. Organisations should use the information contained in this resource as reference material and should interpret in the context of their own organisation or program. The information should not be relied upon or be a substitute for professional advice.

I _____, in undertaking to volunteer for the XYZ Homework Club, hereby agree to:

- Support students' learning, wellbeing and participation in accordance with the aims/goals identified by the student and/or program coordinator
- Attend the XYZ Homework Club at the designated time once a week for at least two terms.
- Notify the coordinator as early as possible if unable to attend
- To work in a supervised or public area and to notify the coordinator if there is a need to leave the area unattended
- Attend ongoing training and meetings
- Assist with documentation of student progress, as directed by coordinator
- Work co-operatively with coordinator including by seeking guidance and being receptive to support and advice
- Develop positive relationships with students and behave as an appropriate role model by showing respect for students, volunteers, staff and all other people, and by engaging in friendly, positive, polite and helpful interaction
- Understand and value diversity amongst students, staff and volunteers
- Respect the rights of the students and their families to confidentiality, unless there are concerns regarding a student's wellbeing
- Report any concerns about a child's wellbeing to the coordinator and to ensure these concerns are acted upon
- Read, understand and abide by the XYZ Homework Club's Child Protection Policy.
- Establish healthy boundaries and only promise what is realistic
- Exercise a duty of care at all times, using common sense and exercising reasonable caution in working with clients and not placing clients/students at risk of foreseeable harm
- Not attend the program whilst under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs
- Inform the Program Coordinator:
 - » If any difficulties are experienced during an activity
 - » Of any accident or injury that occurs during an activity (to tutor or a student)
 - » Of any information provided by the student that may relate to mandatory reporting issues (such as abuse, domestic violence, self-harm, suicidal thoughts or intentions, homelessness, etc)
 - » Of any intention to leave an activity
- Discuss areas of concern with the Program Coordinator for resolution. If the matter remains unresolved, refer the matter to the Coordinator at Organisation. If the matter continues unresolved, all parties should follow the Grievance Procedure
- Avoid any inappropriate contact or conduct with students, including:
 - » Touching students inappropriately (such as stroking, hugging, kissing or caressing)
 - » Grabbing, pushing, smacking, punching or otherwise hitting
 - » Being alone with a student (such as going to the toilet or being in a separate area alone with a student)
 - » Showing favouritism or developing special relationships with students (such as by excluding students from a group, giving inappropriate gifts to students or unreasonably and overtly favouring a student)

- » Using any internet, computer, mobile phone, PDA or other audio-visual equipment with clients/students to access inappropriate content (such as pornography, sexually explicit pictures or messages, violent or unsuitable video games or movies)
- Not discuss the program with / devolve any program information to third parties (including media). All queries should be passed on to the organisation
- Be familiar with the XYZ Homework Club's rules and policies and to work in accordance with its regulations, policies, legislation and administrative requirements

I understand that it is NOT my role to:

- Discipline any students or manage their behaviour
- Meet with or contact (including by phone, email, Facebook, etc) any students outside of program activities
- Monitor the student's home life or parents' responsibilities/duties to the student
- Give personal advice, especially on matters of health, finance, relationships or legal situations
- Be involved in investigating or following up complaints relating to a student
- Displace family and extended family relationships
- Have access to the student's care or personal records or become involved in the financial affairs of the student and his/her family

In signing this agreement I agree to abide by the conditions outlined and understand that my role as a volunteer may be revoked if I am unable to meet these conditions.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

The XYZ Homework Club, in accepting this volunteer into their program, hereby agrees to:

- Establish clear guidelines and expectations for the volunteer and provide information about expected activities/tasks and behaviour
- Provide appropriate orientation, training, equipment, advice and guidance to enable volunteer to be able to safely and competently fulfil their role
- Ensure volunteer is aware of and has access to all policies and procedures related to their role
- Ensure a safe environment for the volunteer to fulfil their role
- Provide an avenue for volunteers to raise any concerns or issues and respond to these in a timely and sensitive manner
- Keep volunteer up-to-date with relevant information about the program and/or organisation
- Provide volunteer with opportunities to provide feedback
- Involve volunteers in relevant decision-making processes
- Provide supervision and feedback to the volunteer
- Value contribution made by the volunteer to the organisation

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Program Coordinator)