

Volunteer Handbook



“The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don’t wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope.”

[Barack Obama](#)

Purpose of the Handbook

This Handbook has been produced to help you become better volunteers. This book will share with you a little of our history, philosophy, practices, and policies, as well as all the benefits we will provide to you as a valued volunteer.

We hope this Handbook will allow you to feel comfortable with us. No volunteer handbook can answer all the questions you might have about our work and your relationship with us. Please don’t hesitate to ask questions. We will gladly answer them.

We ask that you read this Handbook carefully and refer to it whenever questions arise. We also suggest that you take it home so your family and friends can become familiar with Blesma and our policies.

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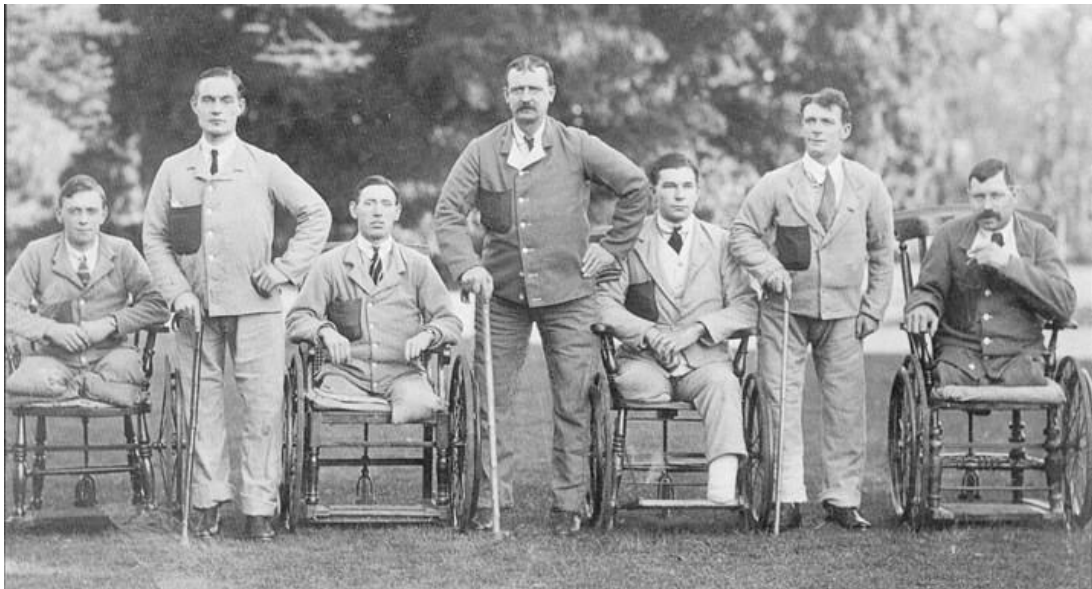
Welcome

Thank you for choosing to volunteer and for helping us to reach and improve the lives of our Members. We hope that you will enjoy volunteering with us. Not only are we a Charity, we are also a Membership Association and our focus remains very much on meeting the needs of our Members, and ensuring real quality of life – **for life!**

Volunteers are an essential asset to us and we rely heavily on their invaluable work and assistance to achieve our aims - you are the life blood of the voluntary sector. Volunteers bring a fresh perspective and add value to the organisations they support whilst themselves gaining new skills and experience.

Who we are

Forty thousand Service men lost limbs or eyes during the First World War and lived to return to a “land fit for heroes” which unfortunately was not the case. Amputation techniques were in their infancy, artificial limbs primitive and, with mass unemployment the order of the day, 90% of the nation’s war limbless could not find work.



However, the comradeship of the trenches lived on. During this period the limbless gathered together in groups determined that if society would not help them, they would help themselves. So the Limbless Ex-Service Men’s Association was born and grew, finally achieving national status in 1932 as the British Limbless Ex-Service Men’s Association – Blesma.

Since its creation Blesma has lobbied successive governments to achieve improvements in pensions, in standards of artificial limbs and in the provision of suitable motor transport and employment opportunities. Residential homes have been opened, wide ranging health and well-being services initiated, sporting activities undertaken and innovative research commissioned, all helped by the ceaseless fund-raising activities of devoted Members and supporters.

Today, Blesma, The Limbless Veterans is one of only ten charities that still exist from the 18,000 that were born out of the First World War. Since 1932, we have been the only national service charity that supports limbless veterans for the duration of their lives. Modern medicine has transformed the physical injury, but the complicated process to treat the emotional trauma and related lifelong health problems remains.

Why volunteer?

People choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons. For some it offers the chance to give something back to the community or make a difference to the people around them. For others it provides an opportunity to develop new skills or build on existing experience and knowledge. Regardless of the motivation, what unites them all is that they find it both challenging and rewarding.



For some it provides an opportunity to:

- Give something back to an organisation that has impacted on a person's life, either directly or indirectly
- Make a difference to the lives of others
- Help others less fortunate
- Feel valued and part of a team
- Spend quality time away from work or a busy lifestyle
- Gain confidence and self-esteem

For some, volunteering can be a route to employment and can be a way of:

- Gaining new skills, knowledge and experience
- Developing existing skills and knowledge
- Enhancing a CV
- Improving one's employment prospects
- Gaining an accreditation
- Using one's professional skills and knowledge to benefit others

For others, volunteering appeals because of its social benefits. These include:

- Meeting new people and making new friends
- A chance to socialise
- Getting to know the local community

What Blesma asks of you

As a volunteer we would ask that you work with us to achieve our aims and objectives. We value the time that you give to volunteering, however small that time may be and we encourage your individualism.

Code of Behaviour

Please comply with our code as in doing so it safeguards both you and the reputation of Blesma.

- Volunteers represent Blesma and as such we would ask that you maintain a high standard of conduct at all times
- During your volunteering activity you may have access to personal or sensitive information and we ask that you maintain a professional approach to such information by treating it confidentially
- Do not express personal views that could be misinterpreted as the views of Blesma and may contradict our ethos
- Blesma is a non-political organisation and we ask you not to engage in any political activities on our behalf without our prior agreement
- Avoid any personal activities that might bring Blesma into disrepute whilst working with us
- Account for funds held in the name of Blesma if collecting on our behalf
- Do not disclose information that is confidential in relation to the Association, any of its Members, staff or volunteers
- Avoid matters that may result in a conflict of interest

Reliability and commitment

It is very important to both us and you that you are reliable and stick to any arrangements you have made with us. If your circumstances change, please let your Blesma contact know as soon as possible.



Boundaries

Clear boundaries are important for staff, volunteers and service users. They enable us to carry out a service according to agreed expectations and ensure that everyone receives the same quality of service.

We realise that staff and volunteers may sometimes have contact with clients in a personal capacity such as friends, family or colleagues. In this situation, please take care to avoid any apparent conflict of interest.

Confidentiality

Volunteers are asked to maintain confidentiality during their time with Blesma. For this reason, when you complete an application form we ask you to please sign a confidentiality declaration.

Car drivers

It is important to note that if you are involved in an activity for Blesma that involves using your car, you must inform your own insurers. Most insurance companies agree to cover car journeys at no extra charge – check this with your own insurance company first.

If you drive a Blesma vehicle as part of your volunteering activities, you will be asked to provide evidence of your entitlement to drive and you will then be insured under the Blesma policies for driving one of our vehicles.

What you can expect from Blesma

Blesma is committed to maintaining the highest standards in best practice and volunteer support.

- As a volunteer, we will endeavour to assist you as much as possible in carrying out your voluntary role effectively
- We shall engage with you by maintaining contact and by providing ongoing advice, guidance, encouragement and support to enable you to develop your volunteering role with the Association
- All volunteers will be treated with the same respect and dignity as afforded to our salaried employees
- It is our aim to ensure that no volunteer receives less favourable treatment on grounds of gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, marital status, social background or sexual orientation
- We aim to promote equality and to ensure that all volunteers are treated fairly and are assessed in relation to their individual skills and abilities
- It is our intent to operate lawfully and not to discriminate against any prospective, current or former volunteers

Keeping in touch

As a volunteer we want to keep you in the loop. You will receive copy of our quarterly magazine which is jam-packed with the latest information about everything we are up to. If you do not wish to receive copy then please do let us know.



2014: a year to remember

The last 12 months have been packed with change, challenge and Channel swimming **p38**



The end for prosthetics?

Will we really be able to grow our own limbs in 25 years' time? **p14**



No ordinary work of art

Meet the artist who will paint 100 soldiers to mark the centenary of World War I **p40**

Expenses

We value our volunteers and wish to ensure that there are no barriers to volunteer involvement. All volunteers will be offered reimbursement of any reasonable out-of-pocket expenses incurred in the course of their volunteering. These include:

- An allowance for petrol if using their own transport based will be reviewed annually and will not exceed the authorised mileage rate as allowed by the Inland revenue
- Public transport costs will be reimbursed on production of receipts
- Car parking fees to the value of the time required to complete the voluntary activity will be reimbursed also on production of receipts
- Reimbursement of food costs if the volunteering opportunity is over a meal period or greater than 4 hours up to a maximum of £5.00 per day

Any other reasonable and necessary expenses will be considered.

All volunteers are encouraged to claim expenses. This is their entitlement and enables people on low income and benefits to get involved. It also helps us to measure the cost of the volunteer programme. In order to claim expenses, an expenses form must be completed and authorised by the National Volunteer Officer (NVO). Receipts must accompany any expenses claim form submitted, other than mileage. The form needs to be forwarded to the NVO by whatever means best suited to the claimant i.e. by post or by email. Claim forms can either be downloaded from our website www.blesma.org or can be requested from the National Volunteer Officer.

Insurance

As a registered volunteer you are covered by our Public Liability Insurance when carrying out your volunteer duties on our behalf. This covers our legal liability to pay compensation for injuries or illness to a third party or damage to the property of third parties, which are due to Blesma's negligence at fundraising or other events. It does not cover pure accidents (e.g. if a spectator at an event trips over their own feet, or malicious damage e.g. deliberate damage to equipment).

Disclosure and Barring Service Checks

Blesma is involved in working with young people and vulnerable adults in a wide variety of ways. If your role involves working with these people you may be required to undergo a criminal records check as part of our policy on safeguarding. Your Blesma contact will be able to provide you with more information if it's required for your role.

Data protection

The Data Protection Act is a legal act that protects people's personal information. Before we can collect, store, or use data about an individual, the law requires us to ensure that we have that individual's consent to do so. We ask you to please sign to give your consent to our holding this information.

You may, in your work with us, have access to and handle the personal information of the people you are helping. If this is required for your role please ask your Blesma contact for a copy of our policy document.

Diversity

We are committed to a policy of treating all volunteers and volunteer applicants equally and fairly. We accept volunteers based on their suitability for the role. We will not discriminate against any volunteers because of their age, disability, ethnic origin, gender, marital status, nationality, political beliefs, race, religion, sexual orientation or socio-economic background.

Problems within your role

If you encounter a difficulty with any aspect of the role, please talk to your Blesma contact as soon as possible for advice and support.

If the role isn't working out as hoped, please let us know and together we shall try to work out any difficulties. If it is agreed it can't work, this shouldn't be seen as a failure. Speak to us about finding a more appropriate role.

Dealing with complaints

Although dealing with complaints can be difficult, it can provide a positive opportunity to improve the way we operate. At Blesma we define a complaint very broadly, as 'a statement of dissatisfaction'. This covers any kind of comment – spoken or written – which relates to dissatisfaction, whether or not it's labelled as a complaint, and whether or not it needs a formal response.

Should a dispute or complaint arise either by, or about, volunteers the issue will be approached and investigated in a fair and equitable manner in an effort to resolve such matters informally. If

the matter is not resolved, the complainant has the right to seek legal advice promptly so that they have a greater understanding of their legal position and can minimise any reputational damage.

If you wish to make a complaint or should you receive a complaint from someone about your service or anything to do with Blesma's work, please notify the National Volunteer Officer immediately.

Health and safety

Blesma is committed to looking after the health, safety and wellbeing of everyone who works for us, on our premises or uses our services. This commitment applies equally to our team of volunteers and you are covered by the same health and safety legislative requirements as our employees. We ask that you understand and accept your personal responsibility towards promoting and maintaining health and safety standards in order to provide a safe working environment for all.

- Volunteers with specific responsibilities for health and safety will receive training and guidance to help them to fulfil their responsibilities
- Where required risk assessment(s) are prepared for activities being carried out
- Carry out your duties without endangering either your own health and safety, or that of colleagues, third parties and/or the general public
- Comply with all relevant instructions and procedures relating to safety and follow guidance provided
- Inform your Blesma contact of any personal health and safety requirements that you have
- All accidents and incidents must be reported to your Blesma contact as soon as possible. If you feel that it's a real emergency, please contact the emergency services immediately

Ceasing to be a Blesma Volunteer

We recognise that, for various reasons, there will come a time when you are no longer able to volunteer for Blesma or you decide that you wish to do something different with your time. Volunteers are free to leave at any time, have no legal or employment status and are not under any obligation or contract to remain as a volunteer.

You need only contact us to ask to be removed from our database.

The same applies to Blesma itself if circumstances cause it to have to deregister a volunteer. Blesma has no legal obligation to provide volunteer roles and can remove a volunteer opportunity at any time.

References

Your Blesma contact may be able to give a reference where appropriate about the volunteering activities that you have undertaken on behalf of the Association. Please note that as you are not employed by Blesma, we are under no obligation to provide a reference and only basic information will be provided.

Frequently asked questions

If you are unable find the answer to a question you have that is not listed below email nvo@blesma.org

- Will it cost me to volunteer?

No. We don't want our volunteers to be left out of pocket, so we reimburse all agreed expenses (as long as we can see receipts). See page 7 of Handbook.

- Will volunteering affect my benefits?

If you get **Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance or Income Support** you are allowed to do voluntary work for anyone other than a close relative. You must not be paid for your volunteering, other than expenses reasonably incurred by you in connection with it. Permitted expenses could include travel, meals and use of a telephone. There is no limit on the number of hours you can work as a volunteer.

If you get **Job Seeker's Allowance or Universal Credit** you can volunteer but you need to be able and willing to take up paid work immediately. You must not be paid for your volunteering, other than expenses. Permitted expenses could include travel, meals and use of a telephone. There is no limit on the number of hours you can work as a volunteer.

If you have any questions please contact your local Citizens Advice (www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

- What does a police criminal record check involve?

If you work with vulnerable adults, you may have to go through a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check in England and Wales or a Disclosure Check in Scotland. We will advise you if this is necessary in your role. It is a way of checking that you don't have any criminal convictions that should stop you from working with vulnerable adults. We will pay for the checks and they should not take too long. If you want to discuss the checks with us email nvo@blesma.org

- Do you have a minimum age for volunteers?

No we don't - we really welcome young people as volunteers. If someone is under 18 then we'll make sure they're working with an adult. If they're below 16 there are certain roles that they won't be able to take on. We will also make sure we have their parents' or guardians' consent.

- What if I cannot find a role I am interested in?

Just email us at nvo@blesma.org to tell us about how you might be able to help. We are very open to new ideas.

Thank you for volunteering

The benefits of volunteering can be enormous to you, your family, and your community.

Those who can, do. Those who can do more, volunteer