

# Groundswell

Out of homelessness

## Volunteer Handbook

### Groundswell's Mission

Groundswell exists to enable homeless and vulnerable people to take more control of their lives, have a greater influence on services and play a fuller role in the community.

### Our Vision

Groundswell is working towards a world where homeless and vulnerable people are able to make their full contribution to our society for the benefit of all.

### Our Core Beliefs

**Inclusive solutions!** The only way to genuinely tackle homelessness and social exclusion is by utilising the knowledge and expertise of people affected by these issues.

**There is no Them & Us – only Us!** Groundswell brings everyone together to create effective solutions

**Involvement works!** When everyone is involved, the process creates more effective services and enables people to regain their independence.

**We believe in people!** People are society's most valuable resource, and everyone has the capacity to make a contribution.

**The whole community benefits when we effectively tackle homelessness and social exclusion.**

## Introduction

Welcome to Groundswell! This handbook will tell you a little bit about the organisation, who we are, and what we do. It will cover some of our key policies and procedures and explain what you can expect from us and what we expect from you in return.

Volunteers have always been vital to Groundswell and are key to our success as an organisation. The huge range of skills and experience they bring to the organisation mean we can offer the best possible service and can constantly develop and adapt what we do to meet the needs of the people we work with.

We hope that you enjoy your time with us, this Handbook should give you all the information you need to get going, but if there's ever anything you are confused about or want to know more about please just ask!

## 1) About Groundswell

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### 1.1 Groundswell's People Policy

**We Believe in People!** Groundswell is an organisation that operates from a set of core beliefs, and one of Groundswell's core beliefs is:

*'We believe in people - People are society's most valuable resource, and everyone has the capacity to make a contribution.'*

**Groundswell is People- Powered!** Since our creation in 1996 Groundswell has consistently delivered a large amount of high-quality work – with a relatively small team. We are greater than the sum of our parts. We punch above our weight. This is due to the commitment and passion from our staff, volunteers and beneficiaries. The aim of this policy is enshrine our successful working practices to ensure our continued high levels of team collaboration and keep alive our 'give a lot – get a lot' ethos.

**'Give a lot - Get a lot'.** This policy lays down a clear and consistent framework that enables people to make their contribution to Groundswell, as staff, volunteers or clients, in a way that maximises the benefits to both the individual and the organisation.

**An 'Asset Based' Approach.** Groundswell values the experience and skills people gain through their lives. We acknowledge that lived experience of homelessness and using services brings with it a unique insight that is essential if we are to tackle homelessness effectively as a society. When looking at someone's suitability for a role –we take an asset-based approach, this means starting with the skills, experiences and knowledge that someone already has gained.

## 1.2 A Bit of History

**Beginning:** Groundswell's journey started as a campaigning project inside a larger homelessness agency the National Homeless Alliance in the mid-1990s. Our aim being to support homeless people themselves to be at the heart of creating and delivering solutions to homelessness. A series of networking events such as the legendary Forums in Sheffield, were held to bring together homeless people from all around the UK who were using their experiences of homelessness to make positive social change.

**Speakouts:** We were instrumental in developing the Speakout technique. These events brought homeless people in direct dialogue with policy makers to use their experiences to inform and influence policy at local, regional and national level. The Speakouts evolved into the Homeless People's Commission, using new techniques to enable homeless people to use their experiences to meaningfully engage with policy makers and service providers.

**Grants and Research:** We also ran a Grant Award Scheme for twelve years – giving over £250,000 to more than 500 homeless led self-help groups. Giving people the resources and support to "do it yourself" and create their own solutions to homelessness. In 2003 we began developing our own peer research work involving homeless people in all aspects of the research process, going on to involve hundreds of homeless people in their Local Authority Homelessness Strategies across England.

**Thames Reach:** In April 2012 we formed a partnership with Thames Reach - a provider of high quality services to homeless and vulnerable people. Groundswell remain an independent charity, but the formal partnership means that we now get support with governance and back office functions and are coordinating on business development – helping both organisations achieve our missions more effectively.

**Health Peer Advocacy:** A key finding of our research was uncovering that physical health was a bigger priority for homeless people than many services acknowledged. In 2010 this led to us developing our current Health Peer Advocacy project. The Project started in 2010 and in the first year we worked just in Westminster, recruiting 6 volunteers who supported people to attend 100 appointments. Since then the project has grown and grown. Last year 22 Peer Advocates worked across 6 boroughs to over 1000 appointments

## 1.3 What do we do?

**Homeless Health Peer Advocacy:** Groundswell's Homeless Health Peer Advocacy service works to address the health inequalities faced by homeless people by improving their access to healthcare - primarily through volunteers accompanying people to their health appointments.

**Engagements:** one-to-one support service for homeless people to enable them to make and attend health appointments. In addition to providing practical support, such as travel fares, reminders and accompaniment to appointments, peer advocates also focus on building the skills, confidence and knowledge to enable clients to continue to independently access health services.

**Health Promotion In-Reach:** Peer Advocates facilitate regular events at homelessness services – building relationships with clients, putting health issues on the agenda doing the preliminary work

that is ultimately aimed at supporting people to access and attend mainstream health provision. These would range from informal discussions on broader health and well-being issues, including substance misuse, hygiene, sports and physical activities to more formal sessions bringing health professionals into hostels and day centres.

**Insight and Action:** through their work our Peers gain an enormous amount of knowledge around the barriers that homeless people face to accessing healthcare and what health service could do to make their services more accessible. The project actively seeks ways of feeding this knowledge back to health services so that they can improve what they do.

## 2) Volunteering at Groundswell

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### 2.1 What is volunteering?

Volunteering is when you choose to give your time and energy to benefit other people without being paid for it. It is important that volunteering is something that you freely choose to do. We hope that you want to keep volunteering for us, but if you are not enjoying it, or have other things you need to do, you can choose to stop at any time.

### 2.2 Volunteering while you are on benefits

Volunteering will not affect your benefits as long as the only money you get from us is an exact reimbursement of your expenses (lunch, travel and phone). Sometimes your Benefits Advisor will want to know more about what you are doing so they can check it is a legitimate volunteer role. We can write to them and explain what you do for us, and answer any of their questions.

If you are on JSA you will be expected to be actively seeking work. Sometimes you might be called in for a meeting or interview at short notice. If these clashes with a time you are meant to be volunteering with us let us know as soon as possible and we can arrange for someone else to cover your work.

### 2.3 Why do we involve volunteers?

Volunteers are very important to Groundswell. Our research with people who have moved on from homelessness (*The Escape Plan*) showed that being able to volunteer and give something back is an important part of a lot of people's journey away from homelessness. All our volunteers (and a lot of our paid staff) have personal experience of homelessness and their knowledge and insight are key to us providing services that really work. Involving people as volunteers allows us to extend what we do and help more people, but we hope it also provides the people who volunteer for us with a way of developing skills, using their experience to help other people, and increasing their personal resilience.

## 2.4 Volunteer Agreement

This handbook is our Volunteer Agreement, outlining what we expect from you, and what you should expect from us. Some things in your Agreement will be specific to your role, but there are some things that are there for all volunteers:

### What we expect from you:

1. Attend as arranged. If you are going to be late or cannot attend, you need to let us know
2. Stick to Groundswell policies and procedures
3. Be honest with us (and yourself) and let us know if you are stressed or struggling
4. Treat everyone – clients, volunteers, staff, and partners - everyone with respect.

### What you can expect from us:

1. That we will provide you with the support you need to carry out your role
2. That we will provide you with the training you need to carry out your role
3. Reimbursement of expenses as outlined in the expenses policy
4. Opportunities to input into the development of the project and help shape how it is run
5. To be treated with respect
6. Materials/equipment necessary to perform the role.
7. That your work with us is covered by our insurance policy
8. Coaching to help you meet your personal goals
9. An up to date reference.

## 3) Key Policies and Procedures

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### 3.1 Expenses

We think it's important that volunteering doesn't cost you anything, so we will reimburse what you spend on travel, phones and food while you are working for us. However we have to be very careful about how we pay expenses and keep records of what the money was spent on. It is important that everyone understands the importance of collecting receipts. These help prove that any money received is in fact 'reimbursement' and not 'payment'. This is for three main reasons:

- **Protect Benefits.** Ensure volunteers receive expenses safely – to ensure that welfare benefits are not threatened.
- **Legal.** Ensure expenses are paid in a way that does not imply someone is 'employed.' As this would open up complicated tax and employment legislation implications for the volunteer and the organisation
- **Value for money.** We need to be able to show the people who fund us that we are using the money they give us well. We have to be able to justify every single penny we spend and show that it is necessary.

You will have received a copy of our Volunteer Expenses Policy during your training. The policy outlines what we will reimburse for and how. Here are the key points:

- Each week you will be able to claim expenses for your weekly activities -Travel Expenses, Phone Expenses, Lunch Expenses and Advocate Meeting expenses.
- You will only be able to access cash for expenses on Monday's, Thursday's and Fridays, between 10-4. If you require cash expenses outside these times you must make arrangement with your line manager. Expenses cannot be claimed at any time when there is only one staff member in the office.
- If you have claimed for expenses in advance and do not end up doing the voluntary work — you may be required to pay back the expenses you have been allocated.
- Wherever possible your expenses money will be paid directly into your bank accounts as a bank transfer – known as 'BACS.' If you would like support in setting up a bank account then please arrange this with the Volunteer Progression Manager.
- Except in exceptional circumstance we will not pay out more than £20 in cash. If you need to purchase something that costs more than £20 and do not have a bank account then a staff member may have to buy it on your behalf
- Please be aware that receipts will be required to reclaim any expenses.

### 3.2 Equality and Diversity

Groundswell is committed to promoting equality and diversity and a culture that actively values difference and recognises that people with different experiences and from different backgrounds bring essential insights to the workplace and enhance the way we work. It is only with this diversity that we are able to develop and facilitate services that meet the needs of the diverse population we work with. You will have looked our Equality and Diversity policy in your training. These are some of the key points:

- As an employer and provider of services Groundswell has the responsibility to promote equal opportunities and challenge discrimination wherever it occurs.
- When we experience clients, trainees or staff saying or doing things that are incompatible with Groundswell's Equality and Diversity Policy we will do all we can to positively challenge such behaviour as well as acknowledge and attempt to address the beliefs that underpin it.
- Groundswell will not tolerate any behaviour from staff or volunteers which breaches our equality and diversity policy

**Each employee and volunteer is responsible for:**

- Implementing the policy in their day-to-day work and their dealings with colleagues, clients, health and homelessness service providers;
- Ensuring their behaviour is appropriate to the policy and that they treat people with respect and dignity;
- Not discriminating against colleagues or clients
- Notifying their line manager of any concerns with regard to the conduct of colleagues, clients, health and homelessness service providers.

### **3.3 Dealing with Problems**

**Problems are quite rare and we hope that you won't have to use these guidelines but it is important that you know what to do if you have a problem and what would happen if there was a problem with your work.**

- Your Line Manager will deal with day to day problems with your work as part of your support and supervision. If you have any problems or if there is anything that you are worried about make sure that you talk to them.
- If a work problem is more serious the Line Manager will make a note of it on your file and work with you to try and sort it out
- If a serious problem happens over and over again and means we may need to ask you to leave. Your Line Manager will discuss this with Kate (if your Line Manager is Kate she will discuss it with Athol). You will be able to meet Kate and/or Athol and appeal against this if you think it is unfair
- If a volunteer is violent, abusive, breaks the law or does something that might harm someone then we might have to ask them to leave straight away. Again you can meet with Kate and/or Athol to appeal against this
- If you have a problem with someone else at Groundswell you can meet with the your Line Manager to discuss it and they will take your complaint to Kate and/or Athol
- If your problem is with your line Manager then a meeting can be arranged with Kate and/or Athol.

### **3.4 Drugs and Alcohol**

Many people we work with have issues with drug and alcohol misuse. Over the years various Groundswell staff, volunteers and Trustees have been people who have tackled these issues or are still tackling them. We need to make sure that we work in a way that supports people's recovery. You will have looked at Groundswell's Drug and Alcohol Policy as part of your training. The main points are:

- That if you are under the influence of alcohol or non-prescribed drugs, you will be not be allowed to undertake work with Groundswell.
- That if you have drug and alcohol issues you will still be given the opportunity to contribute to Groundswell's work.
- That people who experience drug and alcohol issues deserve appropriate support to tackle these issues.
- Groundswell calls for honesty and encourages people who are experiencing drug and alcohol issues to be upfront with the organisation about these issues so that we can work with you to find the right way to support you.

If you are under the influence of drugs or alcohol at a time when you are meant to be working for Groundswell, in the first instance we sincerely ask you to contact the organisation at the earliest opportunity and explain that you are unavailable for work, and we request that you do not turn up.

If you turn up for work and it appears that you are under the influence of non-prescribed drugs or alcohol, you will be asked to leave the premises, and will no longer be able to continue working for the remainder of that day.

### 3.5 Confidentiality

You will have looked at the confidentiality policy we give to clients during your training. It is important that the people we work with understand that their information is safe and won't be shared without their permission. But it also important that they know that confidentiality is not between them and the person they are working with, but between them and the wider Groundswell team. We all need to be able to freely able to discuss issues with our team managers and line managers so that we can get support and feedback, and work together properly as a team.

The same principal applies to staff and volunteer's confidentiality. What you discuss with your Line Manager and during supervisions is confidential, but they may have to share information with their immediate team and their own Line Manager. If there are any serious concerns regarding the health, well-being or performance of a volunteer; or concerns that a volunteer may be about to cause harm to themselves or to others, then a staff member must report this formally to their line manager at the earliest opportunity. Serious concerns should be reported even if it breaks a previously held promise to withhold information. We will **not** share information about you with the wider team, other volunteers or people outside Groundswell unless you have asked them to.

### 3.7 Boundaries

We need to protect you and our clients and make sure that Groundswell is safely and professionally run

#### **To do this we need to make sure that:**

- You're not doing anything that you haven't been trained to do
- You're not doing anything that you are not happy or comfortable doing
- There is no risk of abuse or harm to you or to clients



Because of this we have clear boundaries around what people should and shouldn't do when they are volunteering for us. Each role has its own guidelines, and you will have looked at these during training, but there are some general boundaries that are common to all roles.

### Volunteers Should Always

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- Have a working, topped up, **phone** with them if they are working out of the office
- **Inform the office** (as soon as possible) if there is a problem or you are not going to be able to do something
- Take care not to infringe **the law** – remember technically if you witness illegal behaviour and don't report it to the police you are breaking the law
- Make sure you **put your own safety first** – if you feel a situation is unsafe leave as quickly as possible

### Volunteers Should Never

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- Never offer **medical advice**, give out medication, or carry out any kind of medical role (other than basic first aid in an emergency)
- **Never accept money** or presents from a client, give money or presents, or buy or sell anything to a client
- Never enter into a personal or sexual **relationship** with a client they are currently working with. Please inform your line manager if you already know a client
- **Never work after 6pm** or on a weekend without the knowledge of your Line Manager
- **Never wear Groundswell ID** unless they are specifically doing Groundswell work
- Never use drugs or drink alcohol with clients (or at all when working for Groundswell)

Boundaries are not always clear cut. In your role as a Peer Advocate you may find that your personal boundaries are tested. We encourage you to use your own common sense and judgment, but if there is ever anything you are unsure about please do speak to us. There is always someone at the other end of the phone for you to talk to.

## 3.8 Safeguarding

Groundswell's clients can be very vulnerable, it is important that we work in a way that is safe. These guidelines might look frightening but they are in place to protect everybody. Abuse is very rare but however unlikely it is to happen it is important that we create a service where people are as safe as possible and to do this we have to have guidelines and procedures. You will have covered Safeguarding in your training, and been given Groundswell's Safeguarding Policy but these are some of the key points:

#### When working with vulnerable people:

- Treat people with respect. Don't just dismiss someone's feelings because they have substance misuse issues or mental health problems
- When you are working one to one with people try to stay in public spaces where there are other people around. Do not go into someone's private flat. If you need to go into someone's room in a hostel keep the door open
- Never arrange to meet a client unless it has been booked as an appointment and is in the diary. Last minute appointments must be phoned in.

- Be careful with physical contact; be aware of people's boundaries
- Make sure you explain our confidentiality agreement. Never say that something someone tells you is private between them and you. Information is confidential within the Groundswell team, and we may have to break confidentiality if we think someone is at risk

#### **What to do if you suspect someone is being abused:**

Abuse can be sexual, physical, emotional or financial, or it could be that you suspect someone is being neglected. It is important that you know what to do if you suspect that someone is being abused.

#### **If you suspect that abuse is taking place:**

- Report it to your line manager as soon as possible
- Even if something seems quite small it is important to discuss it with your line manager it could be that other people have also noticed something wrong
- Do not try to investigate it further yourself, it is important that the situation is dealt with by trained professionals

Remember that until the police or social services investigate it is important that you do not discuss anything with anyone outside the Groundswell team. You may well need to talk to someone because you feel worried or stressed by the situation, we can arrange for you to speak to somebody who will be able to support you and talk to you

Because we are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of vulnerable adults, we have to be careful that anyone (paid or unpaid) who works one to one with people is suitable to be in that role and doesn't have any convictions which suggest they might be a risk. This means that we carry out Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for any role that involves unsupervised one to one work. It is possible that we may also require you to be re-checked by the DBS from time to time during your time with us.

We have a Rehabilitation of Offenders Policy which explains how we decide whether certain convictions suggest that there is a risk, which we will share with you if you would like to see it. We will look at how serious the offence was, how long ago it happened, what the circumstances around it were and what has changed in your life since it happened. Having a past conviction does not mean you can't volunteer and in most cases we will decide there is no risk.

You must immediately notify your Line Manager of any police investigations, cautions, bindovers or convictions that happen while you are working with us. We ask you to do this regardless of whether you think they are relevant to your role. Again, in most cases this will not affect your volunteering with us, but our first Duty of Care is to our service users, and it is very important that we are aware of anything that could put them at risk.

## **4) Some Practicalities**

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### **4.1 Coming into the office**

The office is open 9.30 – 4.30 Monday to Friday (except bank holidays and the week between Christmas and New Year). You are welcome to drop in between these times and use the phones and

computers if there is one free. Please don't come in before 9.30 or after 4.30 unless you have arranged it with us first, there might not be anyone in! If you need to talk to someone make sure you phone and arrange to come in at a time when they are free to see you. People's diaries can get quite booked up, and if you just drop in you might find they are busy.

The office is split into two sections, when you come in through the door, to your left is the 'Office', and to the right is the 'Space'. We have some general ground-rules the whole team have agreed on for how we will all behave when we are in the Office and the Space

## **4.2 Groundswell Office - Space Ground rules**

"The Office - Space is a healthy and productive Home for Groundswell, Where we deliver our best work imaginable."

### **1. There is a clear separation between The Office and The Space!**

- The Office is a closed boundaried place for quiet working.
- The Space is open for interacting, thinking, eating, drinking, dreaming, doing.

### **2. We respect the place!**

- We keep it tidy and hygienic.
- We clear up after eating and meeting.
- We put things away after use.
- We use the right door for entering and leaving.

### **3. We respect each other!**

- We embrace diversity and difference – everyone is unique.
- Everyone can do their jobs and be themselves.
- Please don't swear (too much).
- We are generous when people need a hand.

### **4. We respect the roles!**

- When someone is on duty – we leave them to work... and offer them drinks.
- When on reception we answer the door and the phone, when we are not – we don't!

### **5. We have good phone etiquette!**

- When we are on the phone - we don't shout.
- When someone else is on the phone - we don't disturb them.

### **6. We have good meeting etiquette!**

- We start meetings on time.
- We end meetings on time.
- We prepare in advance.

- We clear up afterwards.

## **7. We have good office etiquette!**

- We reinforce good behavior – and affirm each other when we do things well.
- Any one of us can pull anyone else up if we don't follow the Ground rules.
- We don't take it personally if we get pulled up!
- We take responsibility for our own behaviour.
- We all contribute to creating a healthy and productive home for Groundswell.

## **4.3 Using the phones and computers**

### **Phones**

- Staff/volunteers should give their work phone number to clients and not their personal number
- Staff/volunteers should feel able to turn off/not answer their work phone when they are not working
- You can use the office phone to make important calls but please check with us first if you need to ring abroad or make a premium rate phone call
- There is a phone where you can make private calls in Everest.
- All staff/volunteers should take responsibility for making sure that their Line Manager has an up to date work mobile phone number for them

### **Computers**

- There are usually a couple of computers free for volunteers to work on. The office gets quite busy before and after team meetings, so there is not always a computer available
- You are welcome to use the computer but please respect the fact the office is a workspace and all the computer screens are clearly visible to everyone who walks through the office.
  - Do not look at anything offensive or sexual – bear in mind other people may be more sensitive to certain things than you
  - If you want to view something with sound use headphones
  - If you want to show people something on the computer please do so in a way that doesn't disturb people working around you
- Do not attempt to download anything on to a Groundswell computer
- Staff and other volunteers are usually happy to help you if you get stuck, but do bear in mind that sometimes they will be busy and won't have time

## **4.4 The kitchen**

The kitchen is a shared space for everyone who works at Groundswell. Groundswell provides tea, coffee, milk, sugar etc. and we will try and make sure there are snacks like biscuits and fruit. If food is left out on the side or on the table in the kitchen then it is for everybody, help yourself to it. Food in the fridge and cupboard has usually been brought in by people for their lunch, so don't eat it

without checking first. When you have finished with cups, plates and cutlery please put them in the dishwasher.