

# Volunteering in schools and preschools

## Volunteer Information Handbook

### Document control

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Department for Education  
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Quotes from South Australian students about volunteers:

*“Having a volunteer spend time with me at school helped me to stay on track, feel worthy and maintain a positive focus on my studies.”*

**Chloe, Year 12**

*“The volunteers at my school support me with everything. They spend time talking and listening with me which I like.”*

**Rose, Year 7**

*“They can really help you with a lot of stuff that you would usually find difficult. They make learning fun.”*

**Jack, Year 2**



*“We had volunteers come into the class and talk to us about their culture and country they were born in. I wouldn't have known about this if they had not come to visit us at school.”*

**Jarrold, Year 5**

*“If it wasn't for the parent who volunteers, we may not have a coach for our netball team. My friends and I love playing in the school team each week and our coach is really nice. Thanks to our volunteer Rita for doing this for us.”*

**Rowana, Year 9**

Quotes from parents and caregivers about volunteers:

*“I have found my child to be a lot more confident since working with a volunteer in the mentoring program, he's looking forward to going to school a lot more and he loves the kitchen garden.”*

*“My child's volunteer mentor has given her skills to help her deal with everyday situation such as patience. My child loves having her mentor and looks forward to the sessions. Having a volunteer mentor helped my child to become more confident and make decisions for herself and to speak up for herself. It gave my child someone else to talk to other than her parents. It made her come out of her shell, more outgoing, and a lot more confident.”*



**NB: The above comments were provided in a 2013 survey about volunteer mentors working with their children in public schools.**

## Acknowledgements

With thanks to the Community Mentoring Program, Student Mentoring and Youth Development (2010-2012), Department for Education and Child Development.

# 1. About the Department for Education and Child Development

As a government department that includes and involves volunteers, the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) is committed to meeting the national standards for involving volunteers and providing flexible and mutually beneficial volunteering opportunities for parents and other community members.

The department will support volunteers and volunteering to strengthen partnerships for learning. Public education and care has a reputation for valuing the experience and inclusion of volunteers from the community. The department believes that the quality of public education and care is enhanced by the culturally rich and diverse experiences brought by volunteers. Volunteers make an important contribution to supporting the engagement, achievement and wellbeing of all children and students.

There are several settings where volunteers contribute within DECD, which include:

- children's centres
- preschools/kindergartens
- primary schools
- secondary schools
- better behaviour centres
- special schools.

The department is responsible for a range of integrated services for the benefit of all South Australian children, young people, families and carers, including education and early childhood care, health and wellbeing and child protection (through Families SA).

## 2. Volunteering in public education sites and settings

### 2.1 What is volunteering?

Volunteering is defined as *an activity whereby individuals choose to work without an expectation of remuneration to provide a service with a community focus in a designated volunteer position and of their own free will.*

Essentially, people who volunteer do so to help a service, such as a school kitchen-garden program, for personal satisfaction and a desire to pass on important skills to children.

### 2.2 Principles of volunteering

Volunteering:

- benefits the community and the volunteer
- respects and promotes the rights, dignity and culture of others
- is a legitimate way for citizens to participate in the activities of their community
- enables individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs
- does not threaten the livelihood of paid workers
- is always a matter of choice.

## 2.3 Benefits of volunteering

Everyone benefits from the volunteering partnership. Children and students benefit from the support of volunteers who bring life skills, expertise, knowledge and diversity to a range of learning and wellbeing activities in schools and early childhood settings.

DECD has many volunteers who make an important contribution to the achievement and wellbeing of children and students at South Australian public schools. This contribution is highly valued and recognised.

As a volunteer, you are contributing to both the service and the wider community. You may also benefit personally, such as:

- a sense of belonging and feeling valued
- personal satisfaction
- making friends and meeting new people
- learning new skills or maintaining existing ones
- improving your health and wellbeing
- a sense of giving back to the community
- a sense of making a difference for children and students
- building your confidence
- new experiences and learning skills.
- gaining work experience and employment opportunities

The benefits for the community are also numerous, including:

- diversity and expertise
- life skills and knowledge
- ideas and support.

Some of the many benefits for children and young people include:

- improving self-esteem and self confidence
- learning real life skills and healthy lifestyle habits
- learning effective citizenship skills
- experiencing positive relationships
- building leadership, communication and planning skills
- promoting new friendships and having fun.

## 2.4 Volunteer engagement

Volunteers must only be engaged to complement the work of paid staff, not replace them.

Volunteers must not be asked to perform tasks:

- they are not trained for
- that put themselves or children and young people in potentially vulnerable or unsafe situations
- where there is a conflict of interest.

## 2.5 Types of roles/volunteer opportunities

There are many ways you can volunteer in education settings. You can:

- help with reading and writing
- assist with music and drama programs
- join a governing council or management committee
- mentor a child or young person
- provide support with camps and excursions
- coach sporting teams
- serve in in the school canteen
- help in the garden and improve the grounds
- help in the library
- help at the school fete
- fundraise
- assist refugees and new migrants with English
- e-volunteer to assist remote and isolated students
- be a guest presenter and share your knowledge and expertise.

## 2.6 Who can offer volunteer services?

Everyone has the right to actively participate in and contribute to their community: young people, retirees and older people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people. There are volunteering opportunities for everyone. Valuing diversity is extremely important in providing a full range of services to the many children and young people from different cultural and social backgrounds.

Volunteers can be:

- parents, caregivers and extended family members
- community members
- international students and workers
- new to Australia
- school alumni
- students
- local business and trades people
- service club members
- church groups
- from non-government organisations

and many others who wish to support children and young people, families and school communities.

## 2.7 Preschool or school obligations to volunteers

As a volunteer you can expect:

- support with obtaining the DCSI screening check
- the *Responding to abuse and neglect – education and care induction for volunteers* to be facilitated for you by the site
- to be provided with sufficient and appropriate training and site orientation

- the preschool or school you are volunteering in to be clear in their expectations of you by giving you a written role description
- meaningful work, appropriate direction, and supervision
- to be provided with a safe and well-managed workplace
- not to be left unsupervised with students
- to be kept informed of anything that would affect your volunteering role
- to have your opinions and ideas respected
- no physical, economic, social and cultural barriers to your participation
- regular opportunities for feedback, recognition and support
- to have explained to you the expectations about personal conduct and interactions with children and young people
- to be given a Volunteer Agreement to read and sign
- the site to adhere to confidentiality and privacy principles.

## 2.8 Your obligations to the preschool or school

As a volunteer you are expected to:

- ensure children and young people benefit from what you have to share
- undertake the job you have agreed to perform as per your role description
- be open to change and ready to learn new skills
- adhere to the boundaries as outlined in the protective practice guidelines (see 3.8)
- be respectful to others and respect the rights of children
- talk to a nominated staff member about any concerns you have about a student's welfare
- be reliable and accountable for your actions
- adhere to confidentiality and privacy principles
- cooperate with DECD policies and procedures including your work health and safety requirements
- cooperate with others
- provide ongoing feedback about your experiences or concerns
- respect property, materials and equipment
- read, sign and adhere to the conditions set out in the Volunteer Agreement.

## 2.9 Feedback from current volunteers

Volunteering provides a valuable experience for all those involved. Some of our previous volunteers have said:

*"It's been great to feel I am giving back to the community"*

*"I feel I have added value to children's learning"*

*"I can see how my contribution has supported the preschool program and priorities"*

*"I didn't realise I had so many skills to share"*

*"It's fun learning with children"*

*"It's been good to be able to bring our community views to school decision making"*

*"It's given me wonderful memories"*

*"It's led to me getting a paid job"*

*"The staff have been so supportive"*

## 3. Getting started

### 3.1 Things to consider before volunteering

There are a number of important things you may need to consider before volunteering in a preschool or school. These could include:

- what the position will involve
- training, and ongoing support
- the time involved, ie short or long term, occasionally or regularly
- rights and responsibilities
- screening checks and processes including the DCSI screening check and attending the *Responding to abuse and neglect – education and care induction for volunteers* training.

Each volunteering role will have different requirements, including the:

- length and duration of time involved
- level of training required
- type of support needed
- types of activities or projects
- screening processes.

### 3.2 How can I become a volunteer?

To register your interest in volunteering, contact the preschool or school where you are considering becoming a volunteer. The preschool director, school principal or volunteer coordinator will discuss available opportunities for you to consider. You may be asked to provide some further information about your skills and interests to consider your volunteering role and the best use of your time and expertise.

Please be aware that not everyone will be suitable to volunteer at their chosen school or preschool. It is up to the school principal or the preschool director to determine the best needs for their schools at any given time.

### 3.3 Mandatory screening process

Before starting your volunteering role, you will need to complete an informal interview so that your suitability, interests and expertise can be considered and matched with needs. You will also be able to ask any questions you have about possible roles and tasks.

You will need to complete a criminal history screening check through the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI) Screening Unit. This process is commonly known as the DCSI screening check. The application form for the DCSI screening check is available from the preschool or school site where you are considering volunteering. The site will also assist you in obtaining your screening check. You cannot start volunteering until a letter of clearance from the DCSI Screening unit has been viewed by the site where you are interested in volunteering.

Please note that for some volunteer positions, referee checks may be undertaken.

## 3.4 Mandatory training

Before you begin your volunteering role, you will be required to complete the *Responding to abuse and neglect – education and care induction for volunteers*. You must attend the free induction either at the school or preschool you are going to volunteer in or your site leader may facilitate for you to attend the induction with the South Australian Association of School Parents Clubs Inc. Go to [www.saaspc.org.au](http://www.saaspc.org.au) or phone 1800 724 640 for information.

## 3.5 Child protection and your obligations to notify Families SA

As a volunteer, you are obliged by law to notify Families SA (part of DECD) if you suspect that a child or young person has been, or is being, abused or neglected.

Under Section 11 (1) and (2) of the *Children’s Protection Act 1993*, an employee of, or volunteer in, a government department, agency or instrumentality, or local government or non-government organisation that provides health, welfare, education, sporting or recreational, child care or residential service wholly or partly for children, being a person who:

- is engaged in the actual delivery of those services to children;
- holds a management position in the relevant organisation the duties of which include direct responsibility for, or direct supervision of, the provision of those services to children;

is obliged by law to notify Families SA if they suspect on reasonable grounds that a child/young person has been or is being abused or neglected and the suspicion is formed in the course of the person’s work (whether paid or voluntary) or of carrying out official duties.

This responsibility is part of the broad duty of care that staff and volunteers have towards the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. To make a notification, call the Child Abuse Report Line on 131 478.

All volunteers will be inducted into child protection procedures through the *Responding to abuse and neglect – education and care induction for volunteers* prior to commencing their volunteering work (see 3.4). Volunteers are advised to always speak to their nominated staff member at the site should they have any concerns about a child or young person.

You should also read *Protective practices for staff and their interactions with children and young people* (2011), which provide guidelines for staff and volunteers on their interactions with children and young people in education and care settings. Preschools and schools can provide this document for volunteers or you can view it online at [www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/ProtectivePracticesforSta.pdf](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/ProtectivePracticesforSta.pdf).

## 3.6 Orientation and induction

The next step will be to complete a site orientation and induction where you will be introduced to the preschool or school environment. A staff member responsible for volunteers will complete an induction checklist with you to make sure all important areas are covered. The checklist includes:

- your role description
- work health and safety induction
- reporting lines
- administrative procedures e.g., sign in/out
- professional boundaries

Your induction will also help to ensure you are aware of your obligations under the public sector Code of Ethics. Go to [www.decd.sa.gov.au/hrstaff/pages/default/CodeOfEthics/](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/hrstaff/pages/default/CodeOfEthics/) for more information on the code.

### 3.7 Supervision

Principals and preschool directors are responsible for ensuring that volunteers are appropriately supervised and there is compliance with all relevant guidelines, such as work health and safety requirements. The level of support will vary according to the role of the volunteer.

If you are working directly with students, you must be visible to a staff member at all times. You must not be left alone in a separate classroom/ building, be involved in duties associated with change rooms, sick rooms or toileting or be sent on a student excursion without a supervising staff member. If you are not working directly with students, the level of supervision can be negotiated between you and your supervising staff member.

If you are asked to transport students using your own private vehicle, then specific approvals must be given by the students' parents/caregivers and the principal/preschool director. You must have a current driver's licence (no learners,) insurance, and your vehicle must be registered (which includes comprehensive third party bodily injury.)

### 3.8 Professional boundaries

As a volunteer within DECD, you are expected to maintain professional boundaries with children and young people. You must not exchange personal details such as phone numbers, email addresses, social networking profiles or anything similar.

For more information, ask staff for a copy of the *Protective practices guidelines for staff working or volunteering in education and care settings* or download a copy at [www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/ProtectivePracticesforSta.pdf](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/ProtectivePracticesforSta.pdf).

### 3.9 Reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses

School staff will provide you with information about the type of out-of-pocket expenses that you will be reimbursed for and the procedure for requesting reimbursement. Through the normal course of your volunteering you will not be expected to purchase any resources.

### 3.10 The exchange of gifts

Respecting the rights of children means volunteers must not encourage affection from or dependency in students. One way this must be avoided is by not giving gifts to children. This relates to any item exchanged that is outside of the approved activities in the preschool or school curriculum. Remember, you are already giving your best gift, the gift of your time.

### 3.11 Confidentiality and privacy

During the course of your volunteering, you may be given access to private and confidential information. Preschools and schools will ensure that you are made aware of your responsibilities in relation to confidentiality, privacy and cultural sensitivity.

## 3.12 Volunteer agreement

The principal or preschool director will provide you with a Volunteer Agreement, which you are both required to sign. Copies of the signed agreement will be kept at the school or preschool and you should also keep a copy for your own records. The agreement can be utilised by both parties in matters such as performance reviews.

# 4. Volunteer safety and wellbeing

## 4.1 Work health and safety (WH&S)

For the purposes of work health and safety, volunteers have the same rights and responsibilities as workers. You will be required to complete an induction before starting your volunteering role which will be provided to you by the site.

You are also responsible for taking care of both your own health and safety, and that of others, e.g. students. You will be informed of emergency procedures, identified hazards and control measures. You will be required to report all hazards, injuries and accidents that may occur in your presence while you are at the site. You must cooperate with any reasonable DECD policy or procedure relating to health or safety at the workplace that has been notified to workers. You will be informed of your responsibilities in relation to using government equipment and services (including use of email, the internet and information technology security).

Please don't hesitate to assistance with WH&S from site staff. Remember, your safety is of utmost importance.

## 4.2 *Volunteer Protection Act 2001*

The *Volunteer Protection Act 2001* seeks to protect volunteers from personal liability while they are undertaking volunteer roles. It does not cover personal injury matters (see 4.3). Preschool or school leaders can assist with enquiries related to your rights and responsibilities under the Act.

## 4.3 Insurance

As a volunteer, you are covered by the government's self-insurance arrangements, which cover personal accidents for volunteers who are carrying out volunteer duties at the direction of the site leaders or governance body. Preschool or school leaders can assist volunteers with insurance enquiries.

## 4.4 Anti-discrimination, bullying, sexual and racial harassment

DECD is an equal opportunity employer and believes that everyone should have the opportunity to make a positive contribution through volunteering. The recruitment and screening of volunteers is done in accordance with anti-discrimination and equal opportunity-related legislation, policies and practices. All people will be treated according to their merits, without regard to their sex, age, physical impairment, social

origin, political belief, race, learning abilities, lawful sexual activity, parental status, religion or any other factor not applicable to their volunteer position.

Under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*, (the *Equal Opportunity (Miscellaneous) Amendment Bill 2008*) it is unlawful to subject a student, a fellow employee or volunteer worker to sexual or racist harassment or disability discrimination. Note: sexual harassment refers to any form of sexual attention that is unwelcome.

If you feel that any relationship within the volunteering role has been misused in this regard, please contact the preschool director or school principal immediately. If the concern relates to the actions of the preschool director or school principal, please contact the Parent Complaint Unit on 1800 677 435.

DECD is committed to providing a safe environment for all. Volunteers will not be disadvantaged as a result of lodging a complaint.

## 4.5 Complaints procedure

Should a dispute arise, it is important that problems are brought to light early and resolved using the correct process and procedures. As a volunteer, you have a right to open and fair access to grievance processes and to be fully informed of your rights.

DECD sites are responsible for ensuring all volunteers are made aware of their grievance policy and procedures. All volunteers have the right to have their grievances heard, respected and dealt with in a professional, efficient and fair manner.

## 4.6 Signing in and out

DECD sites are responsible for maintaining accurate records on each day that volunteers participate at the site as well as records of the students working with volunteers. When you arrive and leave the school, you must 'sign in' and 'sign out' in an attendance book, which is generally in the reception or administration area.

Schools and preschools will issue volunteers with a badge. Please wear it at all times when on the school or preschool grounds.

The site is required to keep personal details of volunteers including full name, address, date of birth and emergency contact information. This information will be kept confidential.

## 4.7 Student behaviour

Everyone in the school or preschool community is expected to treat each other with respect and courtesy at all times. As a volunteer, you are not expected to tolerate offensive and inappropriate behaviour. If a student is acting inappropriately, please seek the assistance of a staff member who is responsible for behaviour management. Volunteers should not manage behaviour issues.

## 4.8 Privacy and confidentiality

All DECD sites must comply with privacy and confidentiality principles regarding the use and release of information. Volunteers need to be aware that any personal information (including names, addresses, telephone numbers, circumstances or situations) about students, staff and other volunteers that you become aware of during your volunteering must not be shared, unless required by mandated reporting processes. Volunteers also have the right to expect privacy and confidentiality from staff and colleagues.

## 4.9 Training and development

DECD sites will provide training and development opportunities for volunteers as required. Free or low cost training is offered for volunteers through SA Association of School Parent Clubs Inc, Volunteering SA&NT, Northern Volunteering, Southern Volunteering and other regional volunteer resource centres:

- Northern Volunteering – [www.northernvolunteering.org.au](http://www.northernvolunteering.org.au) / (08) 8250 1582
- Office for Volunteers SA – [www.ofv.sa.gov.au](http://www.ofv.sa.gov.au) / 1300 014 712
- South Australian Association of School Parents Clubs Inc – [www.saaspc.org.au](http://www.saaspc.org.au) /1800 724 640
- South Australian Association of State School Associations – [www.saasso.asn.au](http://www.saasso.asn.au)
- Southern Volunteering – [www.svsa.on.net](http://www.svsa.on.net) / (08) 8326 0020
- Volunteering SA&NT – [www.volunteering.sa.gov.au](http://www.volunteering.sa.gov.au) / (08) 8221 7177 (regional: 1300 135 545)
- For regional resource centre locations phone Volunteer SA and NT on 1300 135 545 or go to [www.volunteering.sa.gov.au/VSA\\_VOLUNTEERING\\_RESOURCECENTRES](http://www.volunteering.sa.gov.au/VSA_VOLUNTEERING_RESOURCECENTRES)

## 4.10 Feedback and appraisal

Appraisal is part of an overall approach to managing volunteers. This should be a mutually rewarding process for both the volunteer and the site. It is during this process that the successes and achievements are identified and discussed, concerns are dealt with and importantly the opportunity given to suggest how DECD services can be extended or improved. Ask your site leader for a regular appraisal. Your Volunteer Agreement and role description can be utilised in this process.

## 4.11 Recognition and acknowledgement

As a volunteer, you will receive both formal and informal acknowledgement and recognition of your valuable contribution to the preschool or school. There are a number of special dates throughout the year that acknowledge and celebrate the contribution of volunteers. The department encourages volunteers and sites to also access information about state and national events through Volunteering SA&NT and the Office for Volunteering SA.

The Minister for Education and Child Development provides a *Volunteer certificate of recognition* for individual or group volunteer contributions over time. To be eligible for a certificate, you must have served a minimum of five years. Nominations are to be approved by site leaders (Available from July 2014.)

## 4.12 Smoke-free workplace policy

A reminder that the *Smoke Free Workplace Policy* prohibits smoking at all government facilities including in all preschools and schools, buildings, structures, outdoor areas and government vehicles. This also includes on-site car parks, and therefore you cannot smoke in any vehicle (including private cars) if they are located on-site or being used to transport children or others as part of your volunteering.

Support is available for those who wish to quit smoking at [www.quitsa.org.au](http://www.quitsa.org.au) or phone the Quitline on 13 78 48.

*Enjoy your volunteering and thank you*

## 5. Useful resources

DECD Volunteers working in educational sites and settings

[www.decd.sa.gov.au/volunteers](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/volunteers)

DECD *Criminal history and screening policy guidelines*

[www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/ScreeningandCriminalHisto.pdf](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/ScreeningandCriminalHisto.pdf)

Northern Volunteering

[www.northernvolunteering.org.au](http://www.northernvolunteering.org.au)

Office for Volunteers

[www.ofv.sa.gov.au](http://www.ofv.sa.gov.au)

South Australian Association School Parent Club (SAASPC)

[www.saaspc.org.au](http://www.saaspc.org.au)

South Australian Association of State School Organisations (SASSO)

<http://www.saasso.asn.au/>

Southern Volunteering

[www.svsa.on.net](http://www.svsa.on.net)

Volunteering Australia

[www.volunteeringaustralia.org.au](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org.au)

Volunteering SA/NT

[www.volunteeringsa.org.au](http://www.volunteeringsa.org.au)

Volunteering in DECD

[www.decd.sa.gov.au/volunteers/pages/beingVolunteer/Volunteering/?reFlag=1](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/volunteers/pages/beingVolunteer/Volunteering/?reFlag=1)