

Volunteering and DWP Welfare Benefits

Volunteering is a great activity to get involved: you can help make a difference in your community while learning and gaining skills that will help to improve your confidence and employability.

At CVS Falkirk, we can tell you about the range of volunteering opportunities there are available in the Falkirk Council area. We can help you find the right volunteering opportunity and introduce you to the organisation you will be volunteering with. You can call us on **01324 692000** or email: info@cvsfalkirk.org.uk or visit our website: www.cvsfalkirk.org.uk

We work closely with Jobcentre Plus in Falkirk and Grangemouth to highlight volunteering opportunities that are available and to support their staff in encouraging people to volunteer.

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has published guidance on volunteering while claiming benefits.

What is volunteering?

Volunteering is the giving of your own time and energy for the good of the community, society at large or an individual other than yourself, who isn't a member of your family. You chose to do it - no one should force you to volunteer and it's something that you shouldn't gain financially from. For your volunteering to be recognised you must be volunteering for an organisation or group.

Can I volunteer while receiving benefits?

Volunteering can be a great way to develop your skills, increase your confidence and experience or to try out something new. It's also an opportunity to give up your time to help an issue you care about. You can volunteer while receiving benefits as long as you are still able to satisfy all the conditions of your benefit.

How could volunteering affect my benefits?

If your volunteering stops you from being able to meet the conditions set out in relation to your benefit this could affect your entitlement to benefits. Your work coach will be able to talk to you further about this.

How many hours can I volunteer for?

You can volunteer for as many hours as you wish to as long as you can still spend the amount of time that you have agreed to on your job search activity. If you are actively looking for work it is also possible for up to 50% of your Universal Credit claimant commitment hours to include the time you are volunteering, You can discuss this with your work coach.

Can DWP make me do voluntary work?

No one can make you volunteer - when you volunteer it should always be your choice to do so.

Do I have to tell DWP about my volunteering?

You have to tell your benefits office about volunteering to make sure that what you are doing means that you can still meet all the conditions set out in relation to your welfare benefit. You should tell your work coach about what volunteering you are going to do before you start doing it.

If you are already volunteering but haven't told DWP about this you should talk to your work coach to ensure that your volunteering does not affect the conditions related to your welfare benefit.

What information do I need to provide?

You must tell your work coach or DWP how many hours you plan to volunteer for and what you will be doing. You will also need to know if the volunteering is flexible or happens at the same day and time on a regular basis. You will have to provide evidence of your volunteering: this might include completion of a DWP form (called VOLW1). If you stop volunteering or your hours change you must tell your work coach.

Am I allowed to claim expenses for volunteering?

Yes, you should not be out of pocket for volunteering and should always claim expenses where these are available – please check with the organisation you volunteer with. These expenses often cover items such as travel and some organisations can provide expenses for childcare costs. It can also include overnight stays and cover the cost of any specialist equipment needed to complete the voluntary work. Volunteers that are in receipt of benefits can also claim for lunch/food expenses when volunteering. What expenses are available depends on the organisation you volunteer with.

What if I don't have to look for work because I am ill or have a disability?

- Will getting involved in volunteering be viewed as a change in my capacity to work?
- Will volunteering make me 'fit for work' even if I'm on a health related benefit/conditionality?

If you are claiming health related benefits this volunteering will not trigger a Work Capability Assessment and you will not need to get a doctor's letter. There will be no change to your requirement to look for work.

What if I'm offered a job interview or a job while I am volunteering?

You must be willing and able to:

- attend a job interview on being given 48 hours' notice
- start work on being given a week's notice
- rearrange or give up your volunteering to start a job if you can't fit your volunteering around the job
- attend an interview connected with your job search.

This guidance applies to welfare benefits that will remain the responsibility of DWP.