

### Aware Volunteer Policy

Created by: Aware  
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Reviewed by: Emma Barnes  
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### Vision Statement

Aware undertakes to create a society where people affected by stress, depression, bipolar disorder and other mood related conditions are understood, supported, free from stigma, and are encouraged to access appropriate therapies.

### Aware Objectives

- To inform and educate on the nature, extent and consequences of depression and bi-polar disorders
- To provide emotional and practical support to those affected by depression, bipolar disorder and related conditions
- To provide positive mental health and resilience training
- To support research into the development and treatment of depression and related issues

### Policy Statement

Aware aims to assist individuals who are affected by depression, bipolar disorder and mood related conditions in a respectful and non-judgemental manner.

### Aware Ethos

Aware's approach to every aspect of its work is that of unconditional positive regard for the individual. This ethos of mutual respect and acceptance extends to all – staff, volunteers and those who use our services - and is the hallmark of all we do.

### Confidentiality

All who come to Aware can expect to do so in the knowledge and assurance that what they disclose will not be passed to third parties outside the organisation, unless disclosure comes within the limits of confidentiality. This principle is considered paramount and must be upheld at all times by all volunteers and staff. Details of the limits of confidentiality are explained in our **confidentiality policy**.

Confidentiality also applies within Aware itself, so that matters of personal disclosure may only be discussed internally in the context of support, evaluation or where applying to the limits of confidentiality. Any such breach of confidentiality will lead to disciplinary

proceedings. Specific or legal guidelines may exist relating to confidentiality in any particular area of the organisation. See 1.8

### **Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons**

Aware is compliant with Children First and has a Child Safety statement, Risk Register and Child Protection and Welfare Policy. All staff and volunteers adhere to this policy.

### **Volunteering Definition**

Volunteering is any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. This can include formal activity undertaken through voluntary organisations such as Aware as well as informal community participation.

### **Volunteer Involvement**

Volunteers are a valuable and vital resource without which Aware could not provide its services. Volunteers are encouraged to get involved at all levels of the organisation. They bring a unique and valuable perspective that enrich the services we offer. Aware commits to train and support its volunteers to the best of its abilities, and to act quickly and fairly if difficulties arise. One objective of this document is to present a model of good practice in volunteer involvement.

### **Equality and diversity**

At Aware we believe equality and diversity are central to our success. We encourage applications from people of all backgrounds and cultures. See Equality and Diversity Policy

## **1. General principles**

### **1.1 Purpose of document**

The purpose of this internal document is to provide guidance on all aspects of volunteering at Aware. It supplements other Aware policies and procedures, our definition of volunteering, our mission statement and our value base. These procedures apply to all volunteers who undertake tasks on behalf of and at the direction of Aware.

### **1.2 Responsibility**

Aware service managers\* are responsible for ensuring that the policy and the procedures in this document are implemented fairly, efficiently and effectively. All staff and volunteers, including the Board of Directors, are expected to facilitate this process.

### **1.3 Volunteer/Staff Relations**

Aware recognises the importance of equality and partnership between staff and volunteers and that each individual has a meaningful role to play within the organisation.

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\* Service manager in this document refers to and is understood to mean Support Group Coordinators, Support Line Mail Services Manager, Education and Online Coordinator or other appointed person.

#### 1.4 Volunteering conditions

Volunteers are treated as full members of the Aware team in that they can expect to enjoy parity of esteem with all other colleagues, on a basis of equality and fairness. They participate in the organisation's functions and decision-making processes. Volunteers are provided where possible, with work space and have access to equipment and facilities necessary to volunteer effectively and comfortably, as resources permit.

#### 1.5 Volunteering times

Volunteering times are negotiated between the service manager and the volunteer and are as flexible as the tasks allow. While voluntary time commitment is never expected to match that of full-time staff members, unscheduled absences create organisational problems and may directly affect the standard of services provided. When expecting to be absent, volunteers undertake to look for cover among peers. If unsuccessful, they will inform their service manager, urgently so that alternative arrangements can be made.

#### 1.6 Appropriate behaviour

Volunteers are expected to operate within the policies, procedures and ethos of the organisation. Such policies may include existing guidelines, code of practice or manuals relevant to the volunteer's specific area of practice. As representatives of the organisation, they are responsible for presenting a positive image of Aware to the outside world and to contribute in a constructive manner within the organisation. See Volunteer Code of Practice.

#### 1.7 Representation of Aware

Volunteers must seek prior approval from their service manager before undertaking anything that might affect the organization. This includes, but not limited to, statements to the press, joint initiatives with other bodies and agreements involving contractual or financial obligations.

#### 1.8 Confidentiality

Aware respects the volunteer's right to privacy and confidentiality. In turn, volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality within the normal limits, as set out in the Aware Confidentiality Policy, of all privileged information to which they are exposed while volunteering with the organisation. This responsibility also extends beyond the volunteers time and service with Aware.

#### 1.9 Records & Data

A system of records and data is maintained on all volunteers in our CRM which includes contact details, references and certifications and are maintained according to GDPR.

#### 1.10 Data Protection

Aware accepts full responsibility for the handling of all personal data disclosed to the organization and comply fully with our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) when handling such data.

As a responsible data controller Aware will:

- Obtain and process information fairly
- Keep information for only one or more specified and explicit lawful purpose
- Use information and disclose it only in ways compatible with these purposes
- Keep information safe and secure
- Keep information accurate, complete and up-to-date
- Ensure that information is adequate, relevant and not excessive
- Retain the information for no longer than is necessary for the purpose or purposes for which it was originally obtained
- Give a copy of his/her personal data to an individual on request

#### 1.11 Service at the discretion of Aware

Any voluntary service is at the discretion of Aware. Aware may, at any time decide to terminate a volunteer's relationship with the organisation if it is considered that the relationship is no longer assisting Aware to meet its objectives. Similarly, volunteers may at any time, for whatever reason, decide to discontinue their relationship with the organisation. Notice of such decisions should be communicated at the earliest opportunity, preferably in writing.

## **2. Recruitment**

### 2.1 Eligibility

Aware welcomes volunteers from all walks of life with a broad range of skills and experience, individuals must be able to demonstrate a commitment to the aims of the organisation and may only be placed if their needs as volunteers match the needs of the organisation.

### 2.2 Applications

Volunteers are recruited on a pro-active basis by the organisation using a range of publicity avenues that are suitable for the roles that need to be filled. Volunteers are recruited in accordance with Aware's Equality & Diversity Policy. All volunteers are required to complete an application form.

### 2.3 Interviews

Applicants are short-listed and suitable candidates are invited to interview with an Aware representative, to ascertain their interest in, and suitability for, the role.

### 2.4 Children First online training

As part of the recruitment process all volunteers must complete Children First online training and submit their Certificate to Aware.

### 2.5 Checks for suitability

Each applicant must supply two references from suitable sources. The references must include the telephone number of the referee so that references can be checked. The volunteer's appointment for service will be subject to receipt of two satisfactory references.

### 2.6 Garda Vetting

In order to protect the individuals who use Aware services, all volunteers and staff with relevant roles are subject to vetting by An Garda Síochána. Volunteer applicants will be asked to complete an invitation to Garda vetting form and consent to the disclosure of information to Aware. Similarly, all existing volunteers are subject to vetting at regular intervals (3 years) during their service with Aware. Failure to consent to Garda vetting or to supply the requested details will result in the candidate being refused an opportunity to volunteer with Aware. Completed Garda vetting invitations forms must be submitted on the first day of training otherwise the trainee cannot complete the training.

All Garda disclosures to Aware are treated in strict confidence (see section 1.8) - any that are deemed of serious concern will be discussed with the volunteer themselves in the first instance.

If a candidate has convictions this will be alerted to the Director of Services, Designated Liaison Person and the Service Manager. A decision on the candidate's suitability will be made by them on a case by case basis.

## 2.7 Placements

Formal placements are made only after the role description has been agreed and all necessary checks have proved acceptable. No placements are made unless the requirements of the volunteer and Aware can be met. Each volunteer is required to sign a volunteer agreement before commencing voluntary work.

## 2.8 Role descriptions and specifications

Prior to any volunteer assignment or recruitment effort, a role description is developed for each volunteer opportunity. This includes the title of the volunteering role and a clear and accurate description of the tasks and responsibilities they are expected to undertake, benefits, hours and details of service manager. It also includes, a brief person specification. The role description may be amended in joint agreement with the volunteer and their service manager. A copy of the final version will be given to the volunteer before commencing voluntary work, as it will be used in evaluation sessions. (For further details refer to section 5, General Procedures and Communication).

## 2.9 Probation

All placements are subject to an initial trial period of six months.

## 2.10 Conflict of Interest

No person who has a conflict of interest with any aspect of the organisation will be accepted as a volunteer. The level and impact of such conflict will be assessed by Aware on a case by case basis. Should a conflict of interest arise during a volunteer's service with Aware, the volunteer may be asked to step down.

## **3. Training**

### 3.1 Induction

All volunteers receive induction training when they begin voluntary work with Aware. This consists of a general introduction to the organisation, as well as a specific orientation on the purposes and requirements of their volunteering role and training and practice in the skills and knowledge required to carry out their role effectively. Volunteers must attend all parts of the induction training before placement is agreed.

### 3.2 On-going training

Volunteers receive initial and ongoing training to provide them with the information and skills necessary to perform their tasks. The training will be appropriate for the demands of the position and the responsibilities of the volunteer. Volunteers are expected to attend regular training every year. Both formal<sup>†</sup> and informal<sup>‡</sup> training will be made available. Volunteers will be obliged to attend a minimum of one formal training event each year. In addition, volunteers are strongly encouraged to utilise other informal training opportunities during the year.

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<sup>†</sup> Formal training may include national, regional or local training provided by Aware.

<sup>‡</sup> Informal training may include attendance at meetings, lectures or other events organised by Aware.

As Aware is dedicated to providing quality services to people affected by depression, bipolar & related disorders, on-going training is essential in maintaining the integrity of these services while providing up-to-date skills and development for the volunteers. A record of all training completed by volunteers will be maintained and reviewed to ensure volunteers are participating in adequate training. It is paramount to Aware that volunteers feel supported in their work and this is achieved through on-going training and communication.

### 3.3 Additional training

Personal development is actively encouraged within Aware and additional training can be an integral part of such development. Volunteers may avail of training opportunities outside the organisation (e.g., courses, seminars, conferences etc.)

### 3.4 Training information

Volunteers may be invited to disseminate training information to relevant people within the organisation (at the discretion of the service manager).

## **4. Support and Recognition**

### 4.1 Support

Aware commits to provide the support necessary to encourage and empower volunteers to make a meaningful contribution, and to benefit from their voluntary work. Support will take a number of forms including regular volunteer group meetings which may be supplemented by one to one meetings with the service manager where and if necessary. These supports will provide volunteers with a safe environment in which to express concerns, and to discuss any issues relating to their role. The service manager will always try to be available to volunteers who require support in areas that are affecting their performance.

### 4.2 Recognition

Aware could not provide its services without its volunteers. It is essential that their efforts are recognised and rewarded. Aware staff members are responsible for thanking all volunteers informally on a regular basis for the valuable contribution that they make to the organisation. The service manager is responsible for ensuring that more formalised recognition takes place at key times.

- All volunteers will be presented with a service recognition pin after completing 3/10/20 years' service with Aware.
- The service manager will arrange at various intervals throughout the year an opportunity for volunteers to meet, allowing for review of practice and the development of rapport and morale between volunteers and service manager.
- Once volunteers have completed their 18 month commitment, have attended initial and ongoing training volunteers will be issued/presented with a Certificate outlining their completed the initial commitment to Aware.

### 4.3 Expenses

Volunteers give their time and skills free of charge. If from time to time a volunteer incurs costs outside of their usual level of involvement, then Aware offers to reimburse

any such out-of-pocket expenses provided they have been agreed in advance with the service manager and valid receipts are provided. Current rates and procedures for claiming expenses can be provided by the service manager.

#### 4.4 Personal development

Volunteers are encouraged to develop their skills while involved with the organisation and are encouraged to assume additional and broader responsibilities over time, if they wish to do so.

#### 4.5 References

Where a volunteer requests a reference from Aware, whether for employment or other purpose, a statement of fact will be provided by the service manager:

4.5.1 Statement of fact – outlining initial/ongoing training attended, completed Garda Vetting, Children First online training and whether to-date commitment to the service has been met.



## 5. General Procedures and Communication

### 5.1 Quality of communication

Aware seeks to communicate effectively with volunteers via a range of methods including the newsletter, the website, education days, team meetings, training sessions and one-to-one interactions between service managers and volunteers. However, good communication must be two-way and is the responsibility of each volunteer and the service manager. To be effective it should exist both formally and informally. Volunteers will have access to all appropriate information, memos, materials and meetings relevant to their role. Volunteers will be consulted on decisions that would substantially affect their volunteering conditions.

### 5.2 Service managers

Each volunteer will have a clearly identified service manager to whom they are accountable for the performance of their role and who will provide guidance, support and evaluation for that volunteer. The reporting lines will be clearly communicated and understood at induction training and outlined in the Volunteer Agreement. Where relevant, Aware employees receive training and guidance on how to involve volunteers effectively in the work of the organisation.

### 5.3 Mutual Feedback

Volunteers receive regular appraisals of their work, based on their role descriptions. The sessions provide valuable feedback to the volunteer, may suggest any changes in work style, and seek suggestions from the volunteer on means of enhancing their participation within Aware. It is also an opportunity to convey appreciation to the volunteer for their work, and to plan for and encourage their further involvement.

Aware recognises that on-going informal feedback and guidance may also exist between volunteers and service manager. This may include less formal means such as telephone calls or general networking at meetings or events

### 5.4 Corrective action

If appropriate, corrective action may be taken following evaluation sessions. Examples include suggestions for improved practice, the organisation of training for an identified training need, the reassignment of a volunteer, the dismissal of a volunteer, or change in work practice within the organisation.

### 5.5 Concerns and grievances

If volunteers are not satisfied that issues relating to their volunteering are being handled appropriately, they can (in the first instance) discuss this with their service manager in an attempt to resolve the situation satisfactorily.

In the event of a complaint arising *against* a volunteer, a meeting with the volunteer and service manager will often lead to resolution. At this meeting, the volunteer is entitled to be accompanied by another impartial volunteer of their choice. Failing this, the volunteer can put in writing their concerns and they will be dealt with in line with Aware's Complaints Policy.

### 5.6 Taking time out

Volunteers are expected to meet the commitment made in their volunteer agreement. From time to time volunteers may become unwell and unfit for volunteering with Aware. Aware will do its best to accommodate such instances, however, where sick leave is frequent and extensive, the service manager and volunteer may need to review the feasibility of a long term commitment to Aware. See Healthcare at Aware Document

### 5.7 Retraining after extended absence

Where a volunteer has been absent for a period of six months or more, they will be required to undertake a period of refresher training and shadowing to help them readjust to volunteering. This will be organised with the individual volunteer and their service manager.

### 5.8 Stepping down a volunteer

Volunteers who do not adhere to the Aware's code of conduct or who fail to perform their work satisfactorily after support and guidance from the service manager may be asked to step down from volunteering with Aware. No volunteer's involvement will be terminated until the volunteer has had an opportunity to discuss the reasons for possible dismissal with their service manager. Grounds for stepping down include, but are not limited to, the following:

- gross misconduct,
- being under the influence of drugs (including alcohol)
- theft
- misuse of equipment and/or materials,
- abuse of clients and/or co-workers,
- breach of confidentiality,
- failure to supply a satisfactory Garda vetting application form and documentation
- failure to undertake and supply Children First Certificate
- failure to abide by Aware policies and procedures,
- failure to complete duties to a satisfactory standard, or
- acting in a way that is detrimental to the interests of Aware.

Should a volunteer feel they have been subject to unfair treatment, they may appeal the decision to the Board of Aware. The appeal is to be made in writing within one month of the being asked to step down.

### 5.9 Exit interviews

Where possible, informal exit interviews are held with volunteers who are leaving the organisation, because they have reached the end of their project, or are leaving for some other reason. Following discussion with your service manager an exit letter and feedback form is sent by administration. The feedback form and discussion ascertains why the volunteer is leaving, how they found the volunteering experience and any suggestions they may have to offer to Aware.

## 6. Health & Safety

### 6.1 Health & Safety

Volunteers are required to familiarise themselves with the Health & Safety policy of Aware and adhere to procedures.

### 6.2 Self-Care

Given the nature of the work that Aware undertakes, each volunteer has a responsibility to exercise self-care in relation to his or her own work. Dependant on the area of work, self-care tools and training may be provided to volunteers and they are encouraged to utilise these where practical. Aware recognises that self-care throughout the organisation is paramount and commits to nurturing an environment of peer support and care. See Healthcare at Aware.

### 6.3 Insurance

Insurance is provided by Aware to cover all volunteers working on behalf of and at the direction of the organisation. This cover applies to the place or premises where Aware's work is carried out. It does not extend to motor insurance or to travel to and from their voluntary work.

### Additional Information

Healthcare at Aware  
Equality & Diversity Policy  
Health & Safety Policy  
Complaints Policy  
Volunteer Agreement  
Volunteer Code of Practice  
Confidentiality Policy  
Safeguarding Statement  
Child Protection and Welfare Policy  
Risk Register

Reviewed by:

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*3rd Aug 2018*

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*3/8/2018*