

Healthcare at Aware

Created by: Aware
Edition No: 4
Reviewed by: Emma Barnes and Stephen McBride
Revised Date: December 2021
Next Revision Date: December 2023

Aware undertakes to create a society where people affected by stress, depression, bipolar disorder and mood related conditions are understood, supported, free from stigma, and are encouraged to access appropriate therapies. In carrying out this mission, the organisation relies on and appreciates the generosity, time and expertise of people who train as Aware Volunteers.

The role of a volunteer can be a very rewarding one. It can also at times be demanding. The desire to volunteer often comes from an individual's own personal experience of depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety and/or other mood related conditions. As well as having a duty of care to people who use its services, Aware is also concerned for the health and well-being of its volunteers.

The recruitment process is in place to help potential volunteers determine if they have sufficient time, energy and inner resources to take on the role of volunteer, as well as to help the organisation identify people who will be suited to the role of volunteer. Recognising that some aspects of the volunteering role may impact some volunteers, Aware provides on-going training and support to all volunteers.

While it can be difficult for anyone to acknowledge the need for help and support, particularly if they are used to giving this to others, Aware is mindful of the fact that from time-to-time volunteers will experience difficulties and life experiences which will affect their ability to be focused on the role that they have committed to. It is the experience of Aware that at times volunteers and service-users may express concern about the well-being of a volunteer. It is essential that all volunteers prioritise their own health and well-being. This may mean that they take some time out from their role as volunteer to do so, although this is not always the case.

We hope that 'Healthcare at Aware' will support volunteers in deciding what to do if there is a concern about their own health and/or that of another volunteer.

Taking a Break

Where volunteers are concerned about *their own health* in relation to their role:

1. Please contact your Service Manager to get some support and if you wish, consider discussing what it is that is causing you concern. While it is not appropriate for the Service Manager to ask specific details about your health, it can be very beneficial for you to share, as much as you consider relevant to your role, knowing that this information will be respected as confidential *within the normal limits*.
2. Please consider accessing the supports that are available. These may include contacting your GP and/or health professional; weekly contact with your Service Manager; meeting with the Clinical Director or taking a break for a period of four weeks and reviewing it after that time.
3. Consider taking time to reflect on whether this volunteering role you currently do is appropriate for you in the short-term or long-term and prioritise your emotional well-being and self-care daily.
4. If you are taken ill and feel unable to contact your Service Manager, please consider asking a family member or friend to contact your Service Manager or Aware on 01 661 72 11 or at info@aware.ie
5. If you are taken ill whilst undertaking your role with Aware, we will endeavour to contact your nominated next of kin where we have that detail.
6. If you have been on an extended break of more than six months, it is essential that re-training occurs before you go back on the roster. This will benefit both you and service users and ensure that you are able for the role and up to date with any changes within Aware's services. Please discuss this with your Service Manager who will contact the Training Officer.

When volunteers are concerned about the *health of another volunteer*:

1. Please consider what it is about the volunteer that is causing you concern, for example, is it how they say they are feeling, what they are doing and/or their general manner and expressed mood? Are these different in frequency, intensity, and duration to how they normally appear to be? Has the person seemed to disconnect from the support of their fellow volunteer?

Examples: The volunteer:

- frequently arrives late or leaves early,
 - has missed a number of commitments (with little or no notice),
 - becomes impatient or angry with the person who is looking for help and/or with another volunteer,
 - is not following Aware's policies and procedures,
 - is talking about non-Aware issues at inappropriate times,
 - is evidently experiencing strong mood swings,
 - is exhibiting a reduction in the quality of how they carry out their role as a volunteer.
2. Please use the 'Debrief' as an opportunity for the volunteer who is concerned to express that concern to the person directly, e.g. 'I notice that you seem to be under some pressure. Is there

anything that I can help you with or is this something that you need to talk to your Service Manager in Aware about?’

3. If the volunteer continues to be concerned, it is essential that he/she advise the Service Manager (by phone/email) of their concern for their co-volunteer for the benefit of the person involved and for service-users.

When *Aware* is concerned about the health of a volunteer:

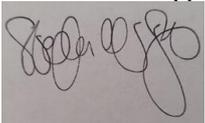
1. The Service Manager will discuss the concerns with the volunteer. If appropriate they will review and/or observe him/her carrying out the volunteer role and consider how best to support the volunteer, offering options for consideration such as taking a break, visiting their GP, attending a Support Group, using the Support Line or other appropriate supports.
2. If the Service Manager’s view is that the volunteer is not sufficiently able to carry out the role of a volunteer at that time; that they seem unaware of and/or are minimising the extent of the concerns and are unwilling to take the supports which were discussed; he/she and/or the Director of Services will meet with the volunteer and the volunteer will be asked to take a break for an initial period of four weeks.
3. The Service Manager will review this situation with the volunteer after four weeks to ascertain if a further break may be required or if the volunteer is ready to return to their role.

Self-Care Suggestions

Aware recommends the following as suggestions for volunteers to look after their mental health:

- Plan and do at least one thing each day which you can enjoy (not alcohol related, and it doesn’t have to cost money)
- Acknowledge what is going well
- Practice breathing exercises and other relaxation techniques for tense moments
- Be aware of signs and symptoms of depression
- Ask for and take help
- Keep connected with other volunteers
- Maintain connections and contact with people who give you support
- Prioritise good patterns in exercise, diet and sleep
- Read the Psychological Society of Ireland’s ‘40 tips for mental health, well-being and prosperity’
- https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/40%20Tips%20for%20Mental%20Health%2C%20Well-Being%20%26%20Prosperity_0.pdf
- Use Aware services
- Useful links are:
- <https://www.aware.ie/information>

Reviewed and approved by:



Stephen McBride
Director of Services



Emma Barnes
Volunteer Training and Online Support

Date: 7th December 2021

