

Autism Berkshire Volunteer Handbook



Talking sense about autism.

About this Handbook

This handbook is a reference guide for you in the first few months of volunteering here at Autism Berkshire, and it should still be useful to you throughout your placement. It is yours to keep, so do add to it throughout your time with us, e.g. course certificates and notes. We hope that it answers all your questions, but if you have any other queries please ask, and let us know if you think it should be added to this booklet for new volunteers.

It is important that you are familiar with the policies and procedures which govern all the work we do. Please take time to read these, the safety of our staff and volunteers is very important to us.

We hope this guide is as user friendly as it can be. Please do make suggestions of how it can be improved.

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Autism Berkshire is a working name of **Berkshire Autistic Society**.

Charity no: 1076217. Registered in England and Wales. Company no: 3750656

Tel: **01189 594 594** Email: contact@autismberkshire.co.uk Website: www.autismberkshire.org.uk

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1.0 Welcome

Thank you for becoming an Autism Berkshire volunteer! As a member of the volunteer network your help is vital in ensuring that autistic children, young people, and adults and their families and carers, gain the support that they deserve. Whether it's through spreading the Autism Berkshire message locally, raising funds, supporting a young person to gain life skills or any other contribution, your input is invaluable.

As part of our volunteer network, you will be kept informed of developments within the organisation, and gain opportunities for personal development. You will receive a twice monthly Mailchimp newsletter which will keep you informed of volunteering opportunities and the charity's activities.

1.1 Essential Information

This handbook explains how Autism Berkshire works and how the charity is organised internally. It outlines the main volunteering opportunities and includes the Volunteer Policy for guidance.

Now that you are part of the charity, it is important that you know about Autism Berkshire's work and how to tell people about what we do as you may be representing the charity publicly and will need to follow Autism Berkshire's policies and guidelines.

1.2 Welcome from the CEO

You are joining Autism Berkshire at a crucial time in our history. In 2015, we celebrated our 25th anniversary, supporting children, young people and adults with autism, and their families across Berkshire.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your volunteering. Your enthusiasm and your commitment are vital to changing the lives of individuals with autism. Let's strive together for the next 25 years!

Best wishes,

Jane Stanford-Beale, CEO, Autism Berkshire

2.0 Overview of Autism Berkshire

2.1 What is Autism Berkshire?

Autism Berkshire was set up in 1990 by parents of children with autism, autism-related problems and challenging behaviours. Today we are the leading autism charity in Berkshire and deliver quality specialist services, training and social and leisure activities throughout the county, guided by a team of trustees with personal and professional experience of autism. We now have over 600 members including individuals, families and professionals, but you do not need to be a member to use our services.

Our mission is to help and support anyone living with autism in Berkshire. We aim to enhance the current provision of services and support, with the purpose of improving the quality of life of people with autism and giving them maximum independence.

We do this by:

- Providing information and advice through a helpline, events, workshops, outreach, publications and newsletters;
- Running accessible social and leisure activities for children and adults;
- Providing specific autism training and support;
- Working with education, health, emergency and employment services and the six main local authorities in Berkshire to deliver autism-appropriate services;
- Raising awareness in the wider community to promote greater understanding.

The Autism Act 2010 requires local authorities to support people with a diagnosis of autism. Autism Berkshire sits on all the county's Autism Partnership Boards. We are frequently consulted by Local Authorities and the NHS on autism services within the county.

2.2 Who does Autism Berkshire support?

We support children, young people and adults and their parents and carers, from when concerns are initially raised, to when they are placed on the waiting list for an assessment, to after diagnosis, and life beyond. You do not need a formal diagnosis of an autism spectrum condition (ASC) to be supported by Autism Berkshire.

We run youth groups for children from age 8 to 17, adult social groups for 18+, and family days out. We support parents and carers by running parent support groups and workshops for parents, so that they can learn more about autism and how to support their children. For adults with an ASC, we run community learning courses.

2.3 How is Autism Berkshire funded?

We are a registered charity funded by donations, grants and our own fundraising efforts. The majority of our funding comes from grants from the NHS and Local Authorities across Berkshire. We take part in a competitive bidding process for the grants, and are required to deliver defined services and report on the impact of the funding.

2.4 What services does Autism Berkshire provide?

We offer a number of services:

- **Helpline**, which is available 10am to 4pm Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays). We deal with a wide variety of enquiries including where to go for a diagnosis, help for the newly diagnosed, problems with education, employment and respite, claiming Disability Living Allowance, signposting to services and resources. Most of our staff and volunteers have personal experience of living with autism so callers can be sure that we will do our best to support them.
- **Support Groups** – we run monthly support groups, with a guest speaker and a time for a chat and a cuppa. It's an opportunity to learn more about how to support a family member with an ASC, and meet other people in the same situation.
- **Workshops for Parents**
- **Autism Awareness Training for professionals**, plus bespoke training.
- **Regular Email updates.**
- **Modern mobile friendly website** redesigned in 2016
- **Library of books and sensory toys**- Our library includes books and booklets for reference, and lending, and a wealth of other useful information. Sensory toys can be borrowed on a “try before you buy” basis.
- **Youth groups for the 8-17s year olds** to promote friendships and give parents a “Short Break”
- **Trampolining and swimming**
- Organised leisure walks, bowling, pub visits and picnics for our **Adult Social Group**.
- **Adult Community Learning** for adults with ASC to improve independence skills
- **Benefits Advice** for families and individuals with an adviser with a specialist knowledge of ASC and the benefit available.
- **Berkshire Autism Alert Card** we run an Alert Card service, where individuals with a diagnosis of an autistic spectrum condition can carry a credit card sized card with two emergency contacts. Local emergency services are trained in the use of the card.

We work with local authorities and other voluntary groups to lobby for improvements in services in education, respite care, employment and to raise awareness of autism and Autism Berkshire. Our website is: <http://autismberkshire.org.uk/>

2.5 How is Autism Berkshire organised?

Autism Berkshire is managed by a Board of Trustees. All our trustees have a personal connection to autism. We are registered with the Charity Commission and Companies House, as a company limited by guarantee. There are about 30 part-time paid members of staff who run Autism Berkshire services, supported by volunteers. We have an office based in Reading where the Helpline and Library, CEO, Grants and Trusts Officer, Finance Manager and Administrator are based. We hold Workshops for Parents, Support Groups and Benefit Sessions in the office.

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3 Volunteering opportunities

By joining the Autism Berkshire volunteer network you will have many different opportunities to contribute, regardless of your location, age, experience or ability. Your involvement will be of great value to us, whether it's one hour, one day or a more regular commitment.

Volunteers are crucial to the delivery of our services and Autism Berkshire strives to give you a great volunteering experience! Please find below an outline of the main volunteering opportunities that we can offer, which include:

- Volunteer at Youth groups
- Volunteer at Adult Social Group
- Fundraising
- Campaigning and Awareness-raising
- Strategic Projects and Internships

3.1 Volunteer at youth groups

Autism Berkshire has youth groups that support children and young people from 8 to 17 years in seven locations across Berkshire. The aim of the youth clubs is to bring together young people with an ASC, or on the waiting list for a diagnosis, to make new friends and try out new activities and in turn to increase their confidence and independence. Some clubs are funded so that siblings can attend as well. Some clubs are funded as a "Short Break" to enable parents to have some valuable time to themselves..

3.1.1 Volunteer Role

As a volunteer at a youth group, you play a vital role in helping us provide the club. You don't need any prior knowledge of ASC, but you do need a positive attitude and lots of enthusiasm! The key role for volunteers at the clubs is to encourage and support young people to participate in the activities taking place. It is essential that volunteers get involved in the activities as well.

3.1.2 The Youth Groups

The youth groups are facilitated by a youth group leader who is experienced and skilled in working with children and young people. There are typically 15-20 young people registered for each youth group, who are supported by volunteers, as well as support workers.

3.1.3 Things to remember when working with a young person with an ASC

You do not need any prior knowledge of disability or autism to volunteer at Autism Berkshire, but there are a few important things to bear in mind. Appropriate language is important, but it is also a difficult subject because there is not always consensus on what is appropriate and what isn't. Some parents have not told their children about their diagnosis so you will be guided about how to handle this by the youth group leader. Some parents and children want to be known as "an autistic child" others prefer to use a "child with autism". It is not necessary to worry about this too much, but you should be aware of what language is generally accepted, used by Autism Berkshire and considered progressive.

3.2 Volunteer at Adult Social Group

Autism Berkshire has Adult Social groups that support adults in three locations across Berkshire. The aim of the Adult Social group is to bring together people with an ASC, or on the waiting list for a diagnosis, to make new friends and try out new activities and in turn to increase their confidence and independence. Some clubs are funded by Local Authorities with the support of the Social Services team, others are funded by local trusts.

3.2.1 Volunteer Role

As a volunteer at the Adult Social group, you play a vital role in helping us provide the club. You don't need any prior knowledge of ASC, but you do need a positive attitude and lots of enthusiasm! The key role for volunteers at the clubs is to encourage and support people to participate in the activities taking place. It is essential that volunteers get involved in the activities as well.

3.2.2 The Adult Social Groups

The Adult Social groups are facilitated by a group leader who is experienced and skilled in working with adults with an ASC. There are typically 15-20 adults registered for each adult social group, who are supported by volunteers, as well as support workers.

3.2.3 Things to remember when working with an adult with an ASC

You do not need any prior knowledge of disability or autism to volunteer at Autism Berkshire, but there are a few important things to bear in mind. Appropriate language is important, but it is also a difficult subject because there is not always consensus on what is appropriate and what isn't. Some autistic adults were diagnosed late on in their lives, others were diagnosed with other conditions in childhood, so you will be guided about how to handle this by the group leader. Some individuals want to be known as "an autistic adult" others prefer to use a "adult with autism". It is not necessary for you to worry about this too much, but you should be aware of what language is generally accepted, used by Autism Berkshire and considered progressive.

3.3 Fundraising

Fundraising is extremely important to Autism Berkshire as without it, we wouldn't be able to help so many children and young people, families and adult with autism. Becoming a **Fundraising Volunteer** helps you understand the important work Autism Berkshire does and you get to play a key role in supporting and helping us to raise awareness of ASC, as well as funds, across the Berkshire. It tends to work on an ad hoc basis, which is great if you want to help but cannot commit to volunteering every week or every month. Not to mention, it's good **fun!**

Here are some examples of activities you could get involved in:

- Helping at a stall at a local music festival
- Placing or picking up a collection box in a local shop or pub
- Collecting money at your local supermarket
- Putting up posters or handing out flyers
- Helping our Fundraiser with research and mailings
- Talking to local Clubs and Schools about Autism Berkshire
- Picking up big cheques and representing Autism Berkshire

3.4 Campaigning and Awareness-raising

Autism Berkshire is committed to campaigning on behalf of people with an ASC and to raising awareness about autism across the county. We need volunteers to support us in influencing key decision-makers by strengthening our campaigns. Volunteers can contribute by lobbying their MPs or engaging local media.

3.5 Strategic Projects and Internships

There are often three month internships available at our offices in Reading, which can be flexible to suit the volunteer and will offer a challenge and opportunity for personal development to the volunteer. We are also looking for skilled volunteers to use their experience and help us in various areas of the organisation. We may have a strategic project available depending on the skills of the volunteer, which can be worked on from home or within the office. Past projects have included volunteers working on the re-branding of Autism Berkshire and examining our key messaging and how we communicate with different audiences.

4 Volunteer Policy

4.1 Introduction and scope

Autism Berkshire recognizes the significant and valuable role the volunteers play in supporting us to achieve our aims. This policy reflects our commitment to ensuring the volunteer is integrated into the heart of Autism Berkshire, that volunteering with us is a constructive and rewarding experience and that all volunteers are treated in an equal, fair and just manner.

This policy sets out to provide guidance to staff and volunteers and outline procedures and support mechanisms available to volunteers. It defines the term “volunteer” and provides a framework of best practice which we will endeavor to follow when appointing, managing and supporting our volunteers.

4.2 Definition of the relationship

Volunteers are individuals or groups who offer their time, experience and skills without financial gain beyond reimbursement of expenses; helping us to achieve our aims as a charity.

There is no contract of employment between Autism Berkshire and its volunteer and volunteers are not considered to be employees of Autism Berkshire.

4.3 Autism Berkshire’s Commitment to the volunteer

Autism Berkshire views its volunteers as a valuable resource and is committed to providing support and recognition of their input. Volunteers are supported through the provision of appropriate induction and ongoing training. Volunteers have the right to refuse any request made of them and are not bound by contract, but are obliged to volunteer in line with this Handbook, the Volunteer Policy and the Volunteer Agreement.

4.4 Commitment of the Volunteer

Autism Berkshire expects volunteers to behave in a manner which reflects positively on the organization and to promote the key organizational messages where possible. Autism Berkshire expects volunteers to execute agreed duties, unless otherwise informed, and requests that volunteers carry out in the name of the charity only those tasks approved by supervising staff. Autism Berkshire expects volunteers to be supportive of staff, other volunteers and of Autism Berkshire’s ethos and aims.

We would ask that all volunteers volunteering on a regular basis (fortnightly) to please, where possible, give us four weeks’ notice if they are considering leaving their role.

4.5 Principles

This Volunteer Policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- Autism Berkshire will endeavor to ensure volunteers are properly integrated into its organisational structure and that they are kept informed of organisational developments.
- Autism Berkshire does not aim to introduce volunteers to replace paid staff.

- Autism Berkshire recognises that volunteers require satisfying work and personal development opportunities and will seek to help volunteers meet these needs.
- Autism Berkshire expect staff to work positively with volunteers

4.6 Recruitment and Selection

Autism Berkshire recruitment and selection of volunteers is designed to ensure that we recruit volunteers who are suitable for the role they would like to do:

- a) Autism Berkshire will provide volunteer roles descriptions which outline duties and responsibilities.
- b) Prior to appointment, volunteers are invited to engage in a two- way discussion of the proposed role including its requirements and expectations with a view to assessing mutual suitability.
- c) Commencement of the volunteering opportunity is subject to either a relevant Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and /or reference clearance.
- d) Volunteers may be subject to a probationary period of 1-2 months depending on the role.
- e) Support, guidance and supervision are provided as appropriate.

4.7 Disclosure of Criminal Record

Due to the nature of the charity, all volunteers, aged 18 year or over are subject to a criminal record disclosure as part of the recruitment process. Autism Berkshire complies fully with the code of practice provided by the Disclosure and Barring Service and undertakes to treat all volunteers fairly in line with our commitment to Equal Opportunities and to comply with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

4.8 Equal Opportunities and Diversity

Autism Berkshire is committed to promoting equal opportunities. Volunteering opportunities at Autism Berkshire are open to all regardless of age, race, disability, ethnic origin, gender, marital status, nationality, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity. Autism Berkshire recognises the positive benefits a diverse volunteer pool can bring to the organisation and is committed to ensuring our recruitment and selection procedure reflects this.

4.9 Disabled Volunteers

Autism Berkshire promotes diversity in all areas of volunteering, and we encourage disabled people to volunteer with us. Where possible we use accessible venues. In 2016, we received a capital grant from Reading Borough Council to replace the strip lighting with LEDs panels in the Reading office, to reduce the sensory overload for our ASC staff, volunteers and service users.

Disability should not be a barrier to volunteering. Volunteers can still claim appropriate benefits within the restrictions explained in the 'Volunteering while getting benefits' leaflet produced by the Department for Work and Pensions.

4.10 Induction and Training

All volunteers will receive a general orientation on the nature and purpose of the organisation as well as task specific training to ensure they can carry out their work on behalf of Autism Berkshire effectively and efficiently.

4.11 Safeguarding

Autism Berkshire is committed to Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children, young people and vulnerable adults. All volunteers must share this commitment and undertake training and comply with the Safeguarding policy.

4.12 Confidentiality

Volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all privileged information to which they are exposed. Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in termination of the volunteer's relationship with the organisation.

4.13 Support and Recognition

All volunteers will have a named supervisor responsible for the management of their work who are there to provide guidance and assistance. Those engaged in more sustained volunteering will have more formal supervision sessions at agreed intervals. These sessions shall be conducted via email, phone or face-to-face as appropriate and agreed.

Supervising staff will conduct a review the volunteering placement as often as required, with the aim of ensuring that recognition keeps pace with role development. Autism Berkshire is happy to provide a confirmation of contribution for volunteers who have given a minimum of a full week of their time or a reference for those contributing over longer, sustained periods. Volunteers may be invited to "thank you" events and consulted, where possible, on development of the volunteer strategy.

4.14 Partnership Working

Autism Berkshire is keen to develop relationships with partner organisations. When volunteers attend Autism Berkshire events from partner organisations, Autism Berkshire requests that partners sign a Memorandum of Understanding which clarifies our behaviour and safe working protocols, and confirms the criminal record disclosure status of volunteers.

4.15 Health and Safety

All volunteers volunteering in Autism Berkshire's buildings, or on the premises where an Autism Berkshire event is being held, are to be given a Health and Safety induction. All volunteers in the course of representing Autism Berkshire are covered by the organisation's Public Liability Insurance. We endeavour to ensure that any events which volunteers are asked to attend on behalf of Autism Berkshire are safe and accessible. This is achieved through the prior completion of risk assessments at Autism Berkshire organised events and in some cases written confirmation of appropriate insurance cover at third party organised events.

We ask that all volunteers organising an event for the general public address Health and Safety issues as a matter of course. If you have any questions about this matter, please speak to the Administrator in the first instance.

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4.16 Volunteer Expenses

It is Autism Berkshire's policy that volunteers should not be out of pocket for their contributions, therefore we are happy to reimburse reasonable receipted travel and subsistence costs. Minimising costs maximises income to Autism Berkshire therefore, Autism Berkshire asks volunteers to keep expenses to a reasonable and necessary level. Below is some guidance of what constitutes reasonable expenses and the procedure for claiming them. If you so wish, expenses can be donated back to the charity, the tax on which can then be reclaimed through Gift Aid. If you wish to do this, please contact the Administrator.

If volunteers have any queries with regards to expenses, they should consult the Administrator prior to any commitment being made.

Travel and Subsistence

- Up to £5.00 lunch costs reimbursed on production of receipts; this only applies when volunteering for an unbroken 4 hour period.
- Volunteers will be reimbursed for all **necessary** travel expenses - assuming they have chosen the most cost effective option. (The use of a taxi is only approved when necessary and in advance by a department manager.)
- For volunteers helping with administrative tasks in the Reading office, a maximum of £10.00 a day can be claimed for travel and lunch on production of receipts.
- For volunteers helping at events such as Fundraising, Family Fun Days, Trampolining or Youth Clubs, a maximum of £10.00 a day can be claimed for travel and lunch on production of receipts. and if your expenses may exceed this amount, please get approval from the Administrator in advance.
- If it is essential that a volunteer stay overnight in the course of their volunteer duties, Autism Berkshire will organise this for the volunteer, but it must be agreed in advance with the volunteer's supervisor.).
- If relevant, dinner will be reimbursed up to a cost of £20.00 including non-alcoholic drinks and service if this is on the receipt, per night.

4.17 Procedure for Claiming Expenses

All claims must be made using the Expenses Claim Form – only **fully completed forms with receipts attached will be accepted**. The Expenses Claim Form must be signed by the volunteer and returned to the volunteer's supervisor for authorisation and then sent to the Administrator for further authorisation. Payment of authorised expenses is made by BACS transfer directly into the volunteer's bank account (N.B. full bank, or building society, account details must be completed on the Expenses Claim Form for this to be processed). Expenses are paid to volunteers at the end of each calendar month.

4.18 Concerns and Complaints

Autism Berkshire is committed to the welfare of our volunteers and we believe that any concerns brought to light at an early stage can be dealt with in an informal manner between volunteer and Supervisor. In the unlikely event that a dispute cannot be resolved in this manner, the Administrator can be involved.

Volunteer Agreement

This Agreement describes the arrangement between Autism Berkshire and you. Volunteers are critical to the success of Autism Berkshire in making life better for those living with autism. Thank you for volunteering.

Autism Berkshire commits to the following:

- To provide appropriate induction training appropriate for your role and in Autism Berkshire’s policies and procedures, including Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Adults Safeguarding and Equal Opportunities.
- To include you in communications and meetings.
- To explain the standards that we expect and to support you in achieving and maintaining them.
- To provide a named person who will be responsible for organising your voluntary work and with whom you can discuss any problems, if needed.
- To help you develop your volunteering role with us.
- To pay expenses in line with the Expenses policy as detailed in the Volunteer Handbook.
- To provide insurance cover for volunteers whilst undertaking voluntary work.
- To try to resolve fairly any problems, grievances or difficulties you may have while you volunteer with us.

The volunteer

I agree:

- To perform my volunteering role to the best of my ability.
- To follow the Charity’s policies, procedures and standards in relation to staff, volunteers and members.
- To maintain the confidential information of the Charity and its members.
- To meet time commitments and standards agreed to, and if unable to meet those commitments, to give reasonable notice.
- To represent Autism Berkshire outside the organisation in a positive way
- To provide referees and to agree to a DBS being carried out.

This agreement is binding in honour only, is not intended as a legally binding contract between us and may be cancelled at the discretion of either party. Neither of us intends any employment relationship to be created either now or at any time in the future. I confirm that I have received a Volunteer Handbook from Autism Berkshire. I have read and understood the Safeguarding Policy and Procedure.

SignedPrint Name

DateEmail address

Signed on behalf of Autism BerkshireDate