



Older People Active Lives

Good Neighbour

Information for Volunteers
who;

- Are volunteering as a Good Neighbour and will be matched to an OPAL member



Aims of this information sheet

Firstly, thank you for agreeing to be an OPAL Good Neighbour Volunteer!

This Information Sheet covers the important things that you need to know before you start visiting your Good Neighbour member. It covers social visits; ad hoc errands; reporting back on your volunteering experience; confidentiality and lone working, boundaries as well as a section on Further Reading.

Please note

Everybody must take responsibility for their own personal safety and be aware of how to keep as safe as possible, taking note of the training and procedures they receive from OPAL. Your safety is the top priority. Please see Further Reading at the end of this sheet for information on Safeguarding and Lone Working.



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Social Visits



Prior to being matched to a Good Neighbour member, the OPAL Organiser will visit the member at home to gather any important information and make sure the premises are safe before you start your visits.



If the member is totally new to OPAL, we may ask a pair of volunteers to visit together initially, until we get to know the member better.



The maximum frequency of visits should be weekly, but it could be less than this depending on your availability or the needs of the member.



The purpose of the service is to provide friendship and the majority of Good Neighbour members and their volunteer meet weekly for a brew and a chat.



Your Good Neighbour member may ask for some help with ad-hoc errands or tasks. You are not obliged to do these and many volunteers agree to help with some simple tasks but this is arranged between the volunteer and the member.



On the next page we have listed some example errands you could help with and also errands you should NOT help with. If you have any doubts or queries please contact your OPAL organiser.



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Tasks and Errands

If needed, we hope that volunteers will feel able to assist with small tasks whilst visiting the member. Here are some examples of tasks that you could help with:

- Making a hot drink, preparing a shop-bought snack, warming up a ready meal
- Helping to read/write/post letters
- Picking up prescriptions
- Popping to the shop
- Returning library books

It is important for OPAL to set clear boundaries in order to protect our volunteers. Here are some tasks that you should definitely **NOT** help with;

- Household cleaning
- Cooking meals
- Personal care (helping the person with washing/dressing/toileting)
- Assisting with medication
- Matters of a financial or legal nature
- DIY
- Lifting and handling

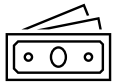
Some requests may need to be looked at on a case by case basis, for example, trips out. If a member asks you to take them out for a walk or go out to a cafe, you should explain that you are not able to do that without checking with OPAL first. Outings would need to be pre-arranged so that the Organiser can make sure it is safe and appropriate for that individual. And, importantly, that you are comfortable with the arrangement.



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Shopping

It is not intended that volunteers will do a full weekly shop for members. However, picking up a few items e.g. a pint of milk or loaf of bread, from time to time is definitely within the scope of the service. The guidance for this is;



There will be a spending limit of up to £20 if you are shopping on behalf of a member.



Volunteers may buy the items with their own money, take a receipt home to the member and the member will reimburse them in cash. Alternatively, the member may give you cash to take to the shop, in which case you would hand over the receipt and any change on your return.



You should **not** take the member's debit card to the shop or withdraw cash from a cash machine on a member's behalf.



If the member needs more significant help than this with shopping, or they do not have access to cash to pay for shopping, please raise this with your OPAL Organiser.



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Transport

If a member needs help with ad hoc errands (outside a regular home visiting arrangement), we will try to ensure that any requests are made to the OPAL Organiser, not directly to a volunteer.

Similarly, requests for transport should come to OPAL in the first instance. This allows us to make sure the requests are reasonable and within the boundaries of the service. It also protects volunteers from being overwhelmed and makes it easier to say 'no' if you are not able to help. If you have any queries please contact your OPAL organiser.

Before you can provide a lift;



Please speak to your OPAL Organiser as there are some steps you will need to complete;



You should ensure you have filled in an OPAL Driver Form.



You should ensure that you have informed your insurance company.



Please read the OPAL Driving on OPAL Business Policy and the Driving on OPAL Business Volunteers Information sheet – links to which can be found in your Volunteer Handbook.



Expenses can be claimed for mileage and parking as per the OPAL Volunteer Expenses Policy.



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Phone Calls

A small number of members prefer telephone calls only and your Organiser will advise you if this is the case. Even with making face to face visits to your member, there may be times when a phone call is more convenient for you or the member. If you are making calls to your Good Neighbour member;

- OPAL will provide you with the phone number of the member you are helping so that you are able to contact them. If you do need to call the member, you can make sure your own phone number is not visible by inserting 141 before dialling the number.
- Our policy is that you do not give out your phone number to a member. If they need to get in touch, they can contact you via the OPAL Organiser.
- Some volunteers and members do swap numbers, which is their choice, but this does mean that your member may call you ad-hoc or asking for additional help at times that may not be convenient for you.
- It may well be best for the members if you call during the middle of the day, but not at meal times.
- Each time you ring you will have to introduce yourself and the preferred format is 'Hello I'm, your OPAL Good Neighbour volunteer. The OPAL organiser,, has given me your number.'
- The aim of the call is to chat with our members, to check that they are OK and to pass on any information to us which may be useful. Please set aside 15-20 minutes for each call.
- On the next page are some suggestions about what to chat about before you start each call.



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Phone Calls

It goes almost without saying that when making your calls you need to be a good listener, positive and re-assuring.

Keeping conversations confidential is obviously important. However, if the member raises any issues/problems, please let us know asap, with their permission of course. We will try and sort things. Please don't take on any tasks yourself.

If you feel there is a safe guarding issue i.e. they are alleging abuse, whether it be physical, financial, emotional or from neglect, you must inform your Organiser, whether they give your permission or not.

Please find below some suggested topics for phone calls;

- How are they feeling today, and do they have any concerns or worries?
- Ask about their own personal history: family/ work/where they were born/ grew up.
- Any pets living with them? People generally enjoy speaking about their pet.
- What do they enjoy doing?
- The weather is often an easy way into a conversation!

- Food and mealtimes e.g. What are you having for lunch today? What do you think you might cook today?
- Are there any programmes they like to listen to on the radio/watch on television? Are they going to watch/listen to something today?
- Do you read/do crosswords/enjoy any craft activity?
- Is there a job around the house that you've been meaning to get to, or a hobby you never got around to starting?
- Do they have a garden? Are they able to make use of it?



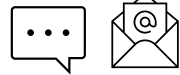
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Reporting back on your volunteering

When you begin volunteering, the OPAL Organiser will check in with you regularly to make sure everything is going well. If you have any concerns about the member you are supporting or the tasks you are doing, please don't hesitate to contact your OPAL Organiser straight away.

If you are providing regular visits to a member, the OPAL Organiser will be aware generally of when and how often you are visiting e.g. every Tuesday

During your first month



It would be helpful if you could send a short text message or email at the end of each visit to confirm that everything went well.

After your first month



If things are running smoothly, we can revert to monthly updates instead.

This involves emailing the Organiser at the end of each month to confirm exactly which dates you have visited and whether you provided any extra help, other than just a social call.

This will allow us to keep accurate records and compile reports for our funders.



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Confidentiality

Whilst you are volunteering, it is likely that you will learn much about the personal lives of the older people receiving OPAL's services. It is important that you respect and keep confidential such information. If you haven't already done so, please take time to read OPAL's information sheet on Confidentiality and Data Protection.

Emergency Information Sheet

You will be given an information sheet containing important details about the member you are supporting, to be used in case of an emergency. As this sheet will contain sensitive data, it is extremely important that it is stored safely at home and kept secure whilst you are out volunteering.

- If you take it out of the house with you, OPAL ask that the sheet is securely stored in a folder that displays your name and contact details on the outside.
- If it is lost or mislaid, it will then be possible for someone to return the file to you without having to delve into its contents.
- If you do mislay an information sheet, please report this to the Organiser as soon as possible.
- If you are providing one-off support to a member, such as giving a lift, you will be asked to destroy or delete the information sheet once your task is complete.



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Keeping People Safe

If you have any concerns about the welfare and safety of any of our members, please talk to your OPAL Organiser as soon as possible. We have a procedure which enables us to report serious matters to Cheshire West and Chester Council under their Safeguarding Adults Procedures.

If you haven't done so already, please complete the OPAL Safeguarding Awareness module for Volunteers and please read the OPAL Safeguarding Policy.

Lone Volunteering

We are aware that this role is likely to involve being on your own whilst volunteering.

OPAL will have taken steps to assess and control risks, but you are also expected to take reasonable care of yourself.

For example, we recommend that you carry a fully charged mobile phone with you and make sure someone (family member, friend or OPAL Organiser) knows where you are going and when you are expected to return.

Please read the OPAL Lone Working Information Sheet and the Lone Working Policy.



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When Boundaries start to ‘blur’

We all have the best intentions, but it is easy for boundaries to shift over time. Being a Good Neighbour volunteer can feel very personal, and small changes can lead to situations that become uncomfortable or unsafe.

Early Warning Signs

Emotional Signs

- You start to feel personally responsible for the person’s happiness or wellbeing
- You worry about them outside of your volunteering hours
- You feel guilty if you can’t visit or do more
- You start to feel like you’re their only support

Behavioural Signs

- Visits are becoming longer or more frequent than agreed
- You’re making exceptions “just this once” more often
- You’ve started doing tasks that weren’t part of your role
- You’re in more frequent contact (calls/texts) outside visits

Relationship Changes

- The person forgets you are a volunteer and refers to you as:
 - “My best friend”
 - “Like family”
- They rely on you for decisions or emotional support beyond your role
- They begin to expect more time or help

When Boundaries start to ‘blur’

When boundaries start to drift or blur, it can be slowly but over time can create additional pressure, emotional support, dependency, and shifts the role from friendship to practical support and can lead to safeguarding or ethical concerns.

Some common scenarios

- ‘Can I call you if I feel lonely in the evening?’
 - Can create emotional dependency on you, you find it hard to switch off and you may end up receiving frequent calls or messages outside of your agreed visiting time.
- ‘You’re the only person I can talk to.’
 - Can make you feel that the member is overly reliant on you and / or that you are unable to step back
- ‘Take this you deserve it’ or ‘I’m going to leave you something in my will’
 - Even small gifts can escalate and you may then feel obligated to do more in return. This is where safeguarding and ethical lines start to blur.
- ‘It will be okay if I don’t report this / There’s no need to report this’
 - If you choose not to report something or flag a concern or choose to handle a situation on your own, this is where safeguarding risks increase.



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When Boundaries start to ‘blur’

When boundaries start to drift or blur, it is because we;

- Want to be helpful
- Care about our Good Neighbour member
- Don't want to disappoint our Good Neighbour member

Remember, changes happen gradually, not suddenly. If you start to notice a change in boundaries then;

Step 1. Pause & reflect

- “Is this part of my role?”
- “Would I feel comfortable if I was asked about this?”
- “Am I treating this person differently from others I might support?”

Step 2. Re-establish boundaries early

- “I’m really glad you asked, but I’m not able to do that as part of my role.”
- “I can’t help with that, but I can let the Organiser know.”
- “I’ll speak to the Organiser to see what support might be available for that.”

Step 3. Talk to your organiser

- Don't wait until it becomes a bigger issue
- You won't be judged—this is expected
- Early conversations prevent difficult situations later
- Record & report where needed but especially if it involves money, safety concerns or increasing dependency



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When Boundaries start to 'blur'

By being a Good Neighbour volunteer you are helping to reduce loneliness and isolation in older people. As part of your volunteering role please remember that;

- Building a warm connection is a good thing
- Noticing boundary changes means you're being a responsible volunteer
- You are not expected to manage complex situations alone
- Asking for support is always the right step

Here is a simple checklist to ask yourself;

- Am I visiting / calling more than the agreed times and days?
- Have I started doing things outside my role?
- Would I feel comfortable explaining this to my Organiser?
- Is this person becoming dependent on me?

If you answer yes to any of the above please speak to your Organiser.

We are here to help and support you and want your volunteering experience to be enjoyable and fulfilling.



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Your OPAL Organisers



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Further reading

Links to all the below can be found in your Volunteering Handbook.

- OPAL Safeguarding Awareness module for Volunteers
- OPAL Safeguarding Policy
- OPAL Lone Working Information Sheet
- OPAL's Lone Working Policy and Procedures
- OPAL Information Sheet on Confidentiality and Data Protection.
- Driving on OPAL Business – Information for Staff and Volunteers.
- Driving on OPAL Business – Volunteers' Sheet.