

# Volunteering as a jobseeker

Searching for a job can feel overwhelming, and it may take time to find the right opportunity that fits your skills and needs. Volunteering is a good way to keep your skills up to date while also helping your community.

## Why Volunteer?

Finding a job can take a time. Volunteering is a unique way to focus on something positive while still giving you time to search for a job. You can volunteer while searching for a job and your jobseekers' payment will not be affected, as long as you remain available to take up paid employment. Some good reasons to volunteer:

- Use your skills – it's important to keep using your skills so you're ready when you start a new job.
- Develop new skills – volunteering allows you to learn new skills or find ones you never knew you had!
- Gain valuable experience for your CV – employers view volunteering as valuable experience and it can be a great addition to your CV.
- Meet new people – being unemployed, particularly for a long period, can mean less opportunities to meet and spend time with other people. Volunteering is a great way to meet new people and be part of a team.
- Build your networks – volunteering helps you expand your professional networks and contacts, which will be helpful in your job search. You never know who you will meet volunteering!
- Increase your confidence – if you have been looking for a job for a while, you may feel it is affecting your sense of confidence. Volunteering will remind you of the valuable skills you can offer.
- Make a positive contribution –volunteering allows you to give back and make a difference to others while also making a difference in your own life.

## Types of Volunteering

There are many different ways to volunteer. Examples include administration; IT; campaigning; designing; marketing; and more.

If you want to volunteer while searching for a job, there are a few things to consider:

- How much time can you give? Volunteering is a great way to improve your chances of finding work but it's important that you are still available and looking for a job. Think about how much time each week you are willing to commit before deciding to volunteer.

- Do you want to improve certain skills or develop new ones? – think about what skills you have and how they can help you volunteer. It is also a good opportunity to think about what other skills you might like to develop.
- Do you want to try a new career? – volunteering is a great way to try something different and see if you like it. For example, you may have worked in retail for a while but would like to try administration or IT.
- Are you passionate about a particular cause? – you're most likely to like volunteering if you're doing something you enjoy. If you're passionate about a particular cause, consider volunteering in that area.

### **Case Study: Barry**

Having spent his working life in the hospitality industry, Barry found himself unemployed for a long time following the downturn in the economy. He registered with his local Volunteer Centre and began to volunteer with Care and Repair, a voluntary service that helps older people maintain their independence. Through Barry's experience with Care and Repair, he realised that he would like to get a job working with older people and applied to do a course in care skills. Thanks to this, and his volunteering experience, Barry is now in full time employment as a Carer.

### **Case Study: Deirdre**

Deirdre took voluntary redundancy from her job to stay at home and look after her children. After a few years, she then decided to search for a job. She wanted to get into an administrative or account management type role. After a number of years away from the workforce, she found herself lacking in confidence and decided to volunteer first. She visited her local Volunteer Centre who had a role volunteering in the centre. Having volunteered for 8 months, she found a part time job as an account assistant. She thinks her success is because she had built up confidence in her ability through volunteering and had refreshed her skills.

### **Volunteering and Your Jobseeker's Allowance**

Your jobseeker's allowance will not be affected if you volunteer, as long as you are available to take up paid work.

Once you have found a suitable volunteering role, you need to fill out a VW1 form so you can keep your jobseeker's allowance. It can be downloaded from the [Intreo website](#) or found in your local Intreo or Social Welfare office. The organisation you want to volunteer with will also have to fill out part of the form. This is a simple form that asks a few questions about the volunteering role.

Once you submit this form, your Deciding Officer must confirm that it is ok for you to volunteer so that your jobseeker's payment will not be affected.

They will consider factors like

- the type of volunteering you do
- the cause of the organisation you volunteer for
  - The organisation should be a registered charity or not-for-profit organisation
- how many hours you volunteer every week
  - Intreo says that you would normally volunteer only a few hours a day or a few days a week and this may change slightly depending on the week. However, it is possible to be a full time volunteer.
- if you were volunteering before you became unemployed
- if the organisation you want to volunteer with will pay for your travel or lunch (known as 'out-of-pocket expenses')
  - If you get jobseeker's benefit, the organisation may not pay you for your volunteering but these out-of-pocket expenses are allowed.

It is important to your Deciding Officer that you are still available to take up paid work and that you are making genuine efforts to find paid work. If your Deciding Officer approves your VW1 form, you will get a VW2 letter which confirms that you're volunteering has been approved. If they reject the VW1 form, you will get a VW3 letter and this will explain why you are not able to volunteer. If you would still like to volunteer but your application has been rejected, you should talk to your Deciding Officer. Sometimes there is confusion about who can and can't volunteer, so it's always good to ask them to review your application again.

If you start to volunteer for more hours than you applied for, you should fill out a new VW1 form. Sometimes, you will be asked to fill out a VW4 form while you are volunteering. This is to check that you are still looking for work and that you are still doing the same volunteering.

### **How to Volunteer**

There are 2 easy ways to find a volunteering role in Ireland.

#### **Online**

Visit [www.I-VOL.ie](http://www.I-VOL.ie) and search for volunteering roles all over the country. You can search by location, what kind of volunteering you want to do or what kind of organisation you want to volunteer with. You can register and apply for volunteer roles online.

#### **Local Volunteer Centre**

There are 29 local Volunteer Centres in Ireland.

They are independent charities who match organisations that need help with people who want to volunteer. You can call or email and a member of the team will work with you to find a volunteering opportunity that's right for you. [A full list of Volunteer Centres](#)