



Independence  
Inclusion  
Recovery

**BIRCHWOOD HIGHLAND**  
**VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**  
**2008**

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# Valuing Our Volunteers

We value our volunteers and aim to provide the best of experiences and the opportunity for them to achieve their personal goals through volunteering. In the provision of our services, Birchwood Highland strives at all times to match the needs of our service users and our organisation, with the needs of our volunteers.

Our commitment to volunteers and the general content of Birchwood Highland's Volunteer Policy is outlined below:

- Volunteers will be given a clear idea of the tasks they are being asked to perform and of the responsibility, which goes with those tasks.
- Volunteers will be told who is responsible for their support and supervision. They will have regular access to this person and will be given adequate support.
- Volunteers will be protected against exploitation of their interests, both as volunteers and individuals.
- Volunteers will not be put under moral pressure to undertake work which is against their principles.
- Volunteers will be adequately protected against risks involved in volunteering.
- Volunteers will receive all reasonable out of pocket expenses
- Volunteers will not undertake work which temporary agency staff are being paid to do.
- The relationship between paid workers and volunteers will be complementary and mutually beneficial. All colleagues will be fully aware of the area of work undertaken by volunteers and of the distinction between paid work and volunteering.
- Volunteering should be a fulfilling experience. Through adequate support and supervision, volunteers should be able to develop expand and change their work and seek accreditation if wished.

Peter Cattanach, Chief Executive  
Birchwood Highland, November 2008

*Please note that a full copy of the Volunteer Policy is available on the Extranet or on request from the Volunteer Manager.*

# About Birchwood Highland

## Our Mission Statement

Birchwood Highland exists to provide high quality care, support and other services that promote: **Independence. Inclusion. Recovery.** Most people using our services have a mental health issue...some people have a learning disability, a dementia, an addiction.

## STRATEGIC VISION

The Strategy, "Independence. Inclusion. Recovery", sets the direction for Birchwood Highland for 2006-2010. It explains the principles underpinning our decision-making. Most importantly it lays out our specific objectives for the next five years. Our broad aim over the next 5 years is to increase our operations and the range of services we offer to current and potential service users.

**Independence, Inclusion and Recovery** - these are important for people with mental health problems and complex needs.

**Independence.** People have a degree of dependence on services and support to meet their needs, so it is very important that Birchwood Highland services promote a person's choice and control over their lives. Most people with a severe and enduring mental illness live in their own house or flat "in the community". Some people are in hospital from time-to-time when suffering an acute episode of illness...but for the most time they live independently with support at home.

**Inclusion.** In promoting social inclusion we want to ensure that experiencing mental ill health does not present a barrier to achieving individual goals and participating in society. It is, therefore, important to facilitate access to advice, support and mainstream opportunities in employment, education, arts, sports and leisure.

**Recovery.** Recovery encapsulates the values of independence and inclusion as can be seen in the description that follows: "Recovery is often described as a long-term process or 'journey' and is not simply the absence of symptoms. It is based on hope, involvement, participation, inclusion, meaning, purpose, control and self management, and emphasises the importance of peer support, meaningful activity, employment, maintaining social networks and activities when distressed and having the chance to contribute, or give back in some way." 'Rights, Relationships and Recovery' The Report of the National Review of Mental Health Nursing in Scotland. Scottish Executive, April 2006.

## STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

Birchwood Highland will adopt the following strategic principles in delivering its services, extending its influence and effectiveness.

- Asking always, 'How does this benefit people with mental health problems and complex needs? Is this best done alone or in partnership with others?'

- Developing systematic ways of involving our service users in the development of services and the Company.
- Preserving integrity and independence in our policy decisions.
- Ensuring that the priorities we adopt are well informed and defensible.
- Practising openness and transparency in our work and in all our communications.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

**Ethos.** Birchwood Highland's services, practices, policies and procedures will continue to promote the ethos of recovery in mental health. Staff and volunteers will become increasingly skilled in recovery practice, person centred planning and in the use of outcome measures to evidence the effect of the work that we do.

**Influence.** We will use our expertise, and knowledge to influence decision makers about standards, practices, policies and legislation, both locally and in Scotland. We will actively participate in local and national networks to the benefit of service users.

**Staff Development.** Our success in delivering services requires a valued and highly skilled workforce. As we adapt and change, we will continue to regard staff and volunteer training and development as a top priority. We will equip our managers with the training they need to lead their services and will look at job roles and career structures within the company.

**Company Development.** We will be flexible, and responsive to the needs of service users and continuously improve our services. We will continue to deliver services on our own but we will also consider service delivery in partnership with others.

Our ability to offer stable, high quality services will increasingly be dependent on our having the right balance and range of funding sources and we will strive to achieve this.

We may also focus on a style of service that meets the needs of a variety of people and not exclusively people with mental health problems if that makes sense in a market where economies of scale and pressures on public funding drive change.

We will seek to gain skills in bidding competitively for service contracts.

**Communication.** Our success as a company will also be dependent upon us continuing to develop both our means of communication and our skills in communicating. We will ensure that we promote our services to the right audiences in the appropriate format and at the right time; that we equip our staff with the necessary tools to do their jobs and that there is a two-way communication feedback system in place for both our staff and our service users. Most of all it is important that our services are viewed by service users, staff and our stakeholders as open and transparent.

## **COMPANY PROFILE AND HISTORY**

The Company operates in the following locations, providing housing support services and in some services also personal care services:

Easter Ross:                      Base office in Invergordon

Inverness: Base office in Inverness  
Lochaber: Base office in Fort William  
Caithness: Base office in Wick.

The company's Head Office, our management and administrative base, is at 5 Wells Street, Inverness.

In Inverness we also support up to 23 individuals in our recovery centre, Birchwood Highland Recovery Centre, where we also offer the facility of respite stays and for those in crisis.

Birchwood Highland wishes to ensure that the service users' voice is heard and directly influences our strategic aims and vision.

In each of our service locations, a local group runs for service users and the Chairperson and Secretary of these local groups come together to represent the service users' voice in the Service Users Association Committee.

The company ensures that wherever possible, a trained service user serves alongside staff as an equal participant on staff interview panels.

For more information on service user involvement, please see our section on our website: [www.birchwoodhighland.org.uk](http://www.birchwoodhighland.org.uk).

## **How We Are Organised**

Like all registered charities, Birchwood Highland is governed by a Board of Directors, a team of volunteers who have overall legal and financial responsibility for the organisation, and support the Senior Management team.

The Senior Management Team, led by the Chief Executive, is a core team of employees who take responsibility for the leadership and day to day management of Birchwood Highland.

Volunteers are involved in all aspects of the organisational structure described above.

### **Your Induction**

Your volunteer supervisor will provide an induction into your role, introduce you to your immediate team, familiarise you with the facilities and emergency procedures within your location and provide any basic training to enable you to start volunteering.

### **Your Volunteer Agreement**

Your supervisor will also provide you with a Volunteer Agreement. This document will summarise the agreed role, supervision and any necessary training. It also sets out what you can expect from Birchwood Highland and what we expect from you.

The agreement is not a legal document and does not form a contract of employment. It is binding in honour only and simply designed to help both parties by setting out clearly what has been agreed.

## **Protecting Our Service Users**

Birchwood Highland has a duty to protect its service users. As part of that responsibility we must complete security checks on those volunteers who apply to work with vulnerable adults or under 18s. This process includes Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and checking references. We will need to renew a volunteer's CRB check at least every three years in order for them to continue volunteering in any role that involves contacts with vulnerable groups.

## **Your Personal Information**

All personal information about volunteers will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988. It will be held securely by Head Office and only used in relation to your role as a volunteer. It will be accessed by other Birchwood Highland staff on a 'need to know' basis.

As an organisation using the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) service to help assess the suitability of volunteers for positions involving under-18s or vulnerable adults, we fully comply with the CRB Code of Practice regarding secure storage, handling, retention and disposal of disclosures and disclosure information.

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## **While You Are Volunteering With Us**

It is important to us that you are comfortable and happy while you are volunteering. Please do not hesitate to contact either your supervisor or the Volunteer Co-ordinator if you need any further support or guidance about any of the items in this Handbook.

### **Expense Reimbursement**

It is Birchwood Highland policy that no volunteer be out-of-pocket as a result of their volunteering.

All expenses should be discussed and pre-agreed with your supervisor. We can reimburse public transport costs and lunch for those volunteering for a full day (more than four hours) up to the value of £3.50.

Any anticipated further expenses will need to be discussed and agreed between the volunteer and their supervisor in consideration of the available budget.

You must retain all receipts or proof of expenditure and attach these to an Expense Reimbursement Form in order to obtain a reimbursement.

Please also ensure you claim within one month of expenditure.

### **Your Availability**

We ask that you do your best to be available at the times agreed with your supervisor. However it's understandable that this may not always be possible for a variety of reasons. Please let your supervisor know at the earliest opportunity if you will not be available as expected.

## What to Wear

Everyone at Birchwood Highland is encouraged to dress appropriately for their role or for the specific duties they are carrying out on any given day.

## Keeping a Record of Your Hours

Please keep a note of the hours that you are giving to the charity. Your supervisor will ask you for these at the end of each month or quarter. This information will help us to recognise the contribution of volunteers across the charity and is vital information when reporting to funders and other partners.

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# Important Policies and Procedures

## Health & Safety

Birchwood Highland aims to provide a healthy and safe working environment for all. This not only enables us to meet our legal requirements but improves the quality of what we do and the service we provide. Birchwood Highland has a duty as far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that the health and safety of volunteers is not put at risk.

As a volunteer we ask that you:

- Take reasonable care for your own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by what you do or do not do.
- Co-operate, as far as necessary, to enable the charity to meet its responsibility for the health and safety and well-being of all.
- Not intentionally or recklessly interfere with, or misuse anything provided in the interests of health and safety.
- Report to your supervisor or any staff member any hazards you encounter or observe.
- Use correctly any equipment provided by the charity, in accordance with any training or instructions you receive to enable you to use the items safely.
- Do not carry out any of your voluntary duties while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs. Please inform your supervisor if any prescribed medication you are taking may affect your health and safety or that of others.
- Wherever possible avoid lifting or manual handling to protect yourself from injury. Do not attempt to lift a load that you cannot manage comfortably.
- When working with Visual Display Units (VDUs), adjust the furniture and computer so you are comfortable, ensure the light is not shining on the screen, clean the screen.
- When necessary, take regular breaks and work at a comfortable pace.

*Note that Birchwood Highland's full Health & Safety Policy is available upon request.*

## **Emergency Contact**

The Head Office team at Birchwood Highland oversees the Health and Safety Policy and is the first point of contact for any issues relating to security, buildings maintenance, fire and first aid.

A useful number to store in your mobile phone is the mobile phone number for the Volunteer Co-Ordinator – 07812 307580. This is a useful emergency contact number, particularly if volunteering out of usual office hours, although of course Dial 999 if necessary.

Note that it is important that we have the correct contact information for your own emergency contact person.

## **First Aid**

Birchwood Highland ensures that a sufficient number of staff have current first aid training. Make sure you are aware of your appointed First Aider and where the First Aid Box is kept. A list of qualified First Aiders is on display in every Birchwood Highland building. If you need First Aid this is the person you should see.

Please report to your supervisor or the Volunteer Co-ordinator, any accidents or near misses that you experience while carrying out your duties as a volunteer.

## **Working Out of the Office**

If you are due to work out of the office, please make sure that your team or supervisor knows where you are, who you are meeting and when you are due to return.

Any volunteer in a role involving contact with service users out of the office will be suitably briefed by their supervisor about procedures for protecting their health and personal safety.

## **Driving**

Volunteers who drive for the organisation are required to submit a copy of their driving licence to their supervisor annually and to notify them of any charges or convictions in relation to driving offences at the earliest opportunity. Volunteer drivers should also notify supervisors of any road incidents encountered while driving the vehicle.

## **Confidentiality**

It is necessary to collect and keep a certain amount of information about staff, volunteers and service users. We collect this information on a 'need to know' basis. Our confidentiality policy aims to safeguard privacy and ensure appropriate access to information. Breaches of confidentiality can occur as a result of thoughtlessness or lack of awareness of the potential consequences to an individual of disclosing confidential information.

Volunteers should:

- Regard all information they have access to or are given as a result of their volunteering duties as confidential unless advised otherwise.

- Respect the right of confidentiality of those people who work or volunteer for Birchwood Highland, and who we provide a service to.
- Do not disclose information given to you to third parties without consent. This applies except where it is superseded by the Child Protection Policy (see below).
- Keep only factual and objective notes about individuals.
- Do not leave confidential information lying around, ensure that it is locked away or shredded using the bins provided. This includes any documents that contain names or addresses of any kind.
- Be mindful of discussions that involve confidential information and ensure that these are not overheard or carried out in front of people who do not need this information.
- Be mindful of any confidential information included in e-mails as this is not completely secure.

*Any volunteer in a role involving large amounts of data or particularly sensitive information will be suitably briefed by their supervisor but should also refer to the full Confidentiality Policy available on request.*

## **Equal Opportunities**

Birchwood Highland is committed to equal opportunities in recruitment, service delivery and use of property. It is recognised that in our society groups and individuals have been and continue to be, discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity, colour, national origin, nationality, gender, marital status, disability, sexuality, age, social class and religious belief.

The aim of the Equal Opportunities Policy is to ensure that no job applicant, volunteer applicant, employee, volunteer or service user receives less favourable treatment than any other on the grounds stated above.

Birchwood Highland is committed to taking positive steps to provide genuine equality of opportunity to enable the organisation to make full and effective use of its staff and volunteers and to provide a high quality service for users.

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## **Other Things You Should Know**

### **Dealing with Problems**

During your time as a volunteer you may find you have cause to make a complaint against a member of staff, another volunteer or a service user at Birchwood Highland. If such a situation arises, there is a written procedure which should be followed by all concerned. This procedure will also be followed if a complaint is made against you as a volunteer. The Volunteering Co-ordinator will support you in such situations.

Note that Birchwood Highland's Volunteering Co-ordinator will always provide opportunities for volunteers to offer more general feedback on their supervision and management.

The Volunteer Complaints Procedure is based on the following principles:

- Complaints should be dealt with fairly and as quickly as possible.
- Complaints should be kept as informal as possible.
- All complaint related information and proceedings should be handled in confidence.
- Complainants should be kept informed throughout.
- Complaints by employees and service users are subject to separate procedures as described in the Staff Handbook.

## **Insurance and Risk**

Birchwood Highland will ensure that adequate levels of Public Liability, Employer’s Liability (which includes volunteers) and Professional Indemnity Insurance are maintained at all times.

Volunteers are advised to restrict their duties and tasks to those set out in their role description or volunteer agreement, and to adhere to the policies and procedures of the organisation outlined in this document in order to ensure that they remain insured. If you are unsure, please speak to the Volunteer Co-ordinator.

Birchwood Highland is unable to accept responsibility for the loss, theft or damage of personal possessions or valuables.

While it is not envisaged that volunteers would be asked to use their private motor vehicles for conducting Birchwood Highland business, should the necessity occur and be agreed by the volunteer, it is the volunteer's responsibility to inform his/her insurer in writing that the vehicle is being used for voluntary work.

Birchwood Highland will take appropriate steps to ensure that any risks associated with your volunteer role are identified and minimised.

## **Volunteering While Receiving Benefits**

Volunteers who are receiving unemployment or other benefits should seek the advice of the Volunteer Co-ordinator as to their rights to engage in voluntary work and the impact on benefits.

The Department of Work and Pensions has published a useful guide. Generally speaking those receiving benefits are entitled to volunteer and their benefits should not be affected by doing so, although we do advise any volunteer who is receiving benefits to inform their benefit office and / or their job centre about their commitment to volunteering.

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# **Keeping You Informed**

## **The Volunteer Contact**

Valerie Cameron is the Volunteering Co-ordinator. She is happy to answer any questions you may have about volunteering at Birchwood Highland and can also provide support if any difficulties arise. Contact her by phone on 01463 236507 or by e-mail [valerie.cameron@birchwoodhighland.org.uk](mailto:valerie.cameron@birchwoodhighland.org.uk).

## **Contacting Staff**

You will be provided with a list of all telephone numbers for your Supervisor and relevant staff along with those of Birchwood Highlands Head Office.

Volunteers in a long-term role within office hours will also be given a Birchwood Highland user name and e-mail address which will give them access to the Extranet and internal e-mails, helping them keep up to date with any changes in the organisation.

## **Change in Personal Details**

Please update the Volunteering Co-ordinator or your Supervisor about any changes to your personal details so that we can continue to keep you updated about the charity's news, events and opportunities. It is also important that we are able to contact you or your designated person in case of an emergency.

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# **Moving On**

## **Applying for Work**

The Volunteering Team is happy to assist with job applications, CVs etc where possible.

## **Paid Employment within Birchwood Highland**

We encourage volunteers to apply for paid positions within Birchwood Highland .Do keep an eye on the web site if you are interested as all opportunities and vacancies within the organisation are advertised at:

[www.birchwoodhighland.org.uk](http://www.birchwoodhighland.org.uk)

## **References**

The Volunteer Co-ordinator is happy to provide you with a reference during or after your time as a volunteer if you would like one.

Please note that when we are contacted by a potential employer looking for an 'employer's reference' we must advise the person making the request that this is not possible and will offer a volunteer reference instead.

## **Leaving Birchwood Highland**

Please do give your supervisor as much advance notice as you can that you intend to leave your role. You will be invited to complete an exit questionnaire or interview as your feedback will help us to improve our volunteer management and other practices.