

# **Information Sheet on the role of Branch Welfare Visitors**

## **Background**

For over 200 years the Oddfellows has supported its members in times of need and difficulty. Before the formation of the Welfare State, the NHS or government Legal Aid, members paid regular subscriptions to cover themselves and their families for when they needed help e.g. because of sickness, accident, unemployment, death of a breadwinner or old age. Membership of the Society enabled people to access financial benefits, healthcare and legal help. Historically, the Society had Sick Visitors who would visit members to support their welfare and pay them the benefits they were due.

In the mid 1990's the Society reviewed its activities and made a decision to go back to its roots in providing mutual support, reflected in its motto - 'making friends and helping people'. At this time, a national Care and Welfare Department was created, based in Manchester, to support Branches to deliver effective care and welfare support to their members. The heart of care and welfare in the Oddfellows and the main practical way that members are supported is through its volunteer Branch Welfare Visitors. There are currently over 300 registered Welfare Visitors supporting members throughout the Society's 151 branches around the country.

## **What is the role of a Branch Welfare Visitor?**

The main role of the Welfare Visitor is to make and keep in contact with members who need support by visiting or otherwise by telephone or letter. It involves befriending and also helping the member to access any practical support or benefits they may need.

The Welfare Visitor is the main link with the member, enabling them to access support from the Branch, the Care and Welfare Department and other agencies.

## **Who do Welfare Visitors support?**

The Oddfellows are about 'mutual support' or helping each other and we may all need help and support at different times either as a result of illness, bereavement, disability, accident, caring responsibilities, redundancy, old age or other unforeseen difficulties. Obviously older age can bring particular needs as a result of health problems, mobility difficulties, isolation or financial issues and so many of those supported by the care and welfare service are older members.

## **What do Welfare Visitors do?**

Welfare Visitors may undertake a range of tasks – the role is very flexible in that there are no requirements regarding how much or little you do, both in terms of

time and the level you take things to. If you feel a situation is getting more involved or requires more specialist knowledge than you feel comfortable with, you can always pass it on to the Care Department.



*See also Volunteer Role Description and Volunteer Policy*

## **Branch Welfare Visitor Role Description**

The provision of care in the Branches is usually undertaken by the Branch Welfare Visitor. The role is a flexible one in terms of time and tasks; visitors can allocate as little or as much time to the role and can involve themselves as much as they feel able to. (Most visits require a cup of tea and a chat only). Expenses such as travel, stamps and phone calls are usually paid by the Branch.

### **Knowledge and skills**

No prior knowledge of care issues is required, only some life experience

A friendly attitude, willingness to help and good listening skills

Awareness of the necessity of confidentiality and of compliance with the Data Protection Act.

### **Duties**

Sign a basic Declaration Form as a screening procedure and obtain an ID badge by sending a passport sized photo to the Care Department

Attend an Induction Training session and read the Training Pack and Welfare Visitors Handbook

Contact any member known to require care and welfare input; this contact can be by letter, email, phone or a visit.

Respond to any needs and issues which arise out of the contact within the boundaries of the role. This may include signposting or referring to other agencies or passing any case they feel is beyond their scope to the Care Department.

Write very brief reports on any contact made and present them to the Co-ordinator if available or to the Committee of Management, taking account of confidentiality and Data Protection procedures.

Attend any care and welfare meetings organised by the Care Co-ordinator/ Branch

Attend additional training or seminars organised by the Care Department or other agencies as available/needed

### **The role of the Care Department**

The department acts as a support system to the Branch, providing training, information and advice when asked or taking over complex cases that the Visitors feel are too sensitive or complex.

## **Volunteer Policy – Care and Welfare**

The Oddfellows is a Branch based Mutual Society formed on the principles of “Making Friends and Helping People”. Much of the work undertaken by the Branches relies on the services of volunteers. We wish to recognise the commitment and contribution of these volunteers to the Society by setting out in a policy, what the Care Department can provide to support and encourage volunteers and how our volunteers integrate with the Society.

This policy is underpinned by the following considerations:

- Volunteer rights and responsibilities
- Recruitment and Selection
- Screening
- Insurance
- Induction, Training and Support
- Grievances and Complaints.

### **Volunteer Rights**

All Volunteers are entitled to;

- Equal treatment, irrespective of sex, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, religion, community background or political beliefs.
- Adequate training and support for the tasks they undertake.
- Health and Safety information to maximise their safety and welfare; obtainable from the Branch.
- Reimbursement of reasonable, agreed out of pocket expenses such as travelling, telephone calls and postage.
- Receive a brief description of the role of the Welfare Visitor.
- Be valued by the Society and acknowledged to provide a most important service.

### **Volunteer Responsibilities**

All volunteers have the responsibility to:

- Respect Confidentiality
- Be reliable, honest and mindful of the Society's good name
- Report back as required and keep in contact with the Committees of Management, other Society Care and Welfare officers and Unity office staff.

- To undertake only the elements of the role with which they feel most comfortable and to pass on to the Care Department any case or query they may feel is beyond their remit, or which they feel unable to address.
- Treat members with courtesy and respect.

### **Recruitment and Selection**

Recruitment will normally involve an informal interview with an officer of the Branch and selection will be dependent on approval by the Committee of Management.

The selection criteria will usually include being an active member of the Branch, being known to the Committee of Management as being of good character, and possessing the relevant basic skills.

### **Screening, Declaration Form and ID Badge**

Following dialogue with the Society Legal Liability Insurers, other voluntary agencies and volunteering organisations, the Society's current view is that only a minimum screening process is necessary. Therefore all Welfare Visitors are required to be known to the Committee of Management and to sign a Declaration form and hold an Identity Badge. The Declaration Form asks volunteers to declare whether there is anything in their background that may have a bearing on their suitability to deal with vulnerable people. This situation may change in accordance with any future government ruling and professional advice.

Volunteers who have not signed a Declaration Form may not be covered under the Society's liability policies.

Volunteers are also required to have an Identity Badge, to minimise risk to themselves and reassure those they are visiting that they are registered Oddfellows Welfare Visitors. The Care Department will produce ID badges on production of a passport sized photograph.

### **Insurance**

Providing the volunteer has completed a Declaration form and is registered with the Care Department, cover is provided under the Society's legal liability policies. This is because the volunteer is acting on behalf of the Society in one of its core business areas. Unity covers Employers' Liability is covered by Unity and Public Liability by the Branch. Volunteers should check with their Branch that Public Liability is in place.

### **Induction, Training & Support**

All Volunteers are issued with a Welfare Visitor's Handbook outlining the role's remit and containing basic information and advice.

All new volunteers should attend an induction training session delivered either by the Branch or Unity Care and Welfare Department.

Staff at the Care Department are always available to answer any queries or problems that may occur while undertaking the role of Welfare Visitor.

### **Grievances & Complaints**

If volunteers have a grievance, the Society will endeavour to resolve any issues as soon as possible. They should speak to their Care Co-ordinator or Committee of Management to try to resolve the matter. If no solution can be agreed, the matter should be referred to the Care and Welfare Department.

If a complaint is made by a member against a Welfare Officer, the Branch should record the complaint on the Care and Welfare complaint form and acknowledge the complaint in writing immediately giving a timescale for it to be dealt with. If the member is not happy with the response from the Branch, they can be referred to the Care Department.

The Care Department can be contacted for a copy of the Complaint form or for any further support with dealing with grievances and complaints.