



CLUB VOLUNTEERING HANDBOOK

Rugby club guide to volunteering onboarding and
retention in community rugby

2026 -2028

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Their investment has enabled the Welsh Rugby Union to develop a modern, inclusive and people centred approach to volunteering. One that recognises the vital role volunteers play in sustaining community rugby across Wales.

This resource has been designed to:

- Support volunteers to feel confident, valued and supported
- Help clubs create positive, sustainable volunteering environments
- Strengthen the long-term resilience of community rugby

The Welsh Rugby Union is grateful for the commitment shown to volunteering and community sport, and for the opportunity to work in partnership to support volunteers at every level of the game.

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CROESO! WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOUR CLUB

Volunteers are essential to the survival and success of community rugby clubs.

Every training session, match day, junior programme, social event, and safe environment depend on people giving their time freely.

Without volunteers, clubs cannot function and when volunteers are not supported properly, clubs feel the impact quickly.

Across community sport, most volunteer problems do not start with a lack of goodwill.

They start with:

- Unclear expectations
- Informal onboarding
- People being asked to do too much, too quickly
- Volunteers feeling unnoticed or unsupported

When this happens, volunteers rarely complain. They simply stop turning up.

Volunteer turnover creates real risks for clubs:

- Disrupted teams and activities
- Increased pressure on a small number of people
- Safeguarding vulnerabilities
- Reputational damage
- Long term sustainability issues

This guide exists to help clubs avoid those risks.

Good volunteer experiences do not happen by chance.

They are created deliberately through clear roles, proper onboarding, regular support, and a culture that respects people's time and boundaries.

This document is not about blame or criticism.

It is about giving clubs a clear, practical way to do volunteering well. In a way that is realistic for volunteer led organisations.

Clubs that support volunteers properly:

- Keep people involved for longer
- Reduce burnout and conflict
- Create safer environments
- Build stronger club cultures

Volunteers don't leave rugby.

They leave environments.

This guide is here to help you create one they want to stay in.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to support your club.

It recognises that:

Most community rugby clubs are volunteer led

Time and capacity are limited

People are doing their best in challenging environments

You are not expected to:

Read this cover to cover in one go

Implement everything at once

Have perfect systems in place

This guide works best when it is:

Used as a reference

Shared across the committee

Revisited at key points during the season

Used to support improvement, not assign blame.

Some sections set minimum standards that all clubs must meet.

Other sections describe good practice that clubs can work towards over time.

Progress matters more than starting point.

If your club recognises itself in some of the challenges described, that is not a failure! It is common across community sport.

The purpose of this guide is to provide clear, practical steps to improve the volunteer experience in ways that are achievable.

Use this guide to:

Clarify roles and responsibilities

Improve how volunteers are welcomed

Reduce burnout and pressure

Create safer, more sustainable environments

This document should support conversations, not replace them.

Volunteering works best when expectations are clear, responsibility is shared, and people feel valued.

THE CLUB'S DUTY OF CARE TO VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers give their time freely.

That does not mean clubs have no responsibility for their experience.

Every club has a duty of care to the people who volunteer on its behalf. This duty is not just about safeguarding.

It is about how volunteers are treated, supported, and protected from unnecessary pressure or harm.

Volunteers are not:

Free labour

A limitless resource

Responsible for fixing every problem

They are people who choose to help because they care about the club and the game.

The club's duty of care includes:

Being clear about what is expected of volunteers

Providing appropriate support and supervision

Respecting personal time and boundaries

Creating safe, welcoming environments

Taking concerns seriously when they are raised

When duty of care is overlooked, clubs often see:

Burnout among a small number of people

Conflict within committees

Volunteers leaving quietly

Increased safeguarding and reputational risk

Looking after volunteers is not an optional extra.

It is a leadership responsibility.

This responsibility does not sit with one individual alone. It sits with the club as a whole, led by the committee.

Clubs that take their duty of care seriously are more resilient, more welcoming, and better placed to grow.

They create environments where people are willing to help and to keep helping.

The pages that follow explain what this responsibility looks like in practice.





**VOLUNTEERS DON'T
JUST HELP A CLUB
FUNCTION.**



**THEY ARE HELPING TO
CREATE THE KIND OF
RUGBY EXPERIENCE AT
YOUR CLUB THAT PEOPLE
REMEMBER FOR THE RIGHT
REASONS.**

WHAT GOOD VOLUNTEERING LOOKS LIKE

Good volunteering does not happen by accident.

It is the result of clear expectations, shared responsibility, and consistent support.

When volunteering works well, clubs typically have:

Clear, agreed roles

Named points of contact

Realistic time commitments

Open communication

Respect for personal boundaries

In these environments, volunteers:

Know what is expected of them

Know who supports them

Feel comfortable asking questions

Feel valued for their contribution

Good volunteering is not about doing more.

It is about doing the basics well, every time.

This includes:

Welcoming volunteers properly

Explaining roles clearly

Checking in regularly

Saying thank you often

Allowing people to step back when needed

Good volunteering environments are proactive, not reactive. Issues are spotted early, conversations happen sooner, and pressure is shared rather than concentrated on a few individuals.

Importantly, good volunteering does not require:

Large committees

Complex systems

Significant extra time

It requires clarity, consistency, and care.

Clubs that get this right find that:

Volunteers stay involved for longer

Fewer crises arise mid season

Safeguarding risks are reduced

Club culture improves

This guide is built around creating this kind of volunteering experience to ensure volunteers feel like they belong, safe and for the long term.

One that is realistic for community clubs and sustainable over time.

WHY VOLUNTEERS LEAVE

Most volunteers do not leave because they dislike rugby or the club.

They leave because, over time, volunteering becomes confusing, overwhelming, or unmanageable.

Common reasons volunteers step away include:

- Unclear roles or expectations

- Being asked to do more without agreement

- Feeling taken for granted

- Not knowing who to speak to when issues arise

- A lack of support or feedback

In many cases, volunteers do not raise concerns before leaving.

They do not want to cause tension or feel awkward.



Instead, they quietly reduce their involvement or stop altogether.

When volunteers leave in this way, clubs often experience:

- Increased pressure on a small number of people

- Gaps in delivery and organisation

- Last minute crises

- Frustration and fatigue within committees

This creates a cycle where:

- Fewer people are doing more

- Pressure increases

- Burnout becomes more likely

The good news is that most of these issues are preventable.

Clear onboarding, realistic expectations, regular check ins, and a culture that respects boundaries significantly reduce volunteer dropout.

This guide focuses on preventing the conditions that cause volunteers to leave rather than reacting after they've gone.



WHAT THIS FRAMEWORK CHANGES

Many clubs already rely on goodwill, tradition, and people “stepping up” when needed.

While this has kept rugby going for years, it often comes at a cost.

Burnout, pressure on a few individuals, and volunteers leaving quietly.

This framework does not remove goodwill.

It replaces uncertainty with clarity.

What changes with this approach:

- Volunteering becomes agreed, not assumed
- Responsibility is shared, not concentrated
- Support is planned, not improvised
- Issues are addressed early, not after people leave

Instead of:

- Rushing to fill gaps
- Asking the same people repeatedly
- Reacting to problems mid season



Clubs begin to:

- Prepare before recruiting
- Onboard volunteers properly
- Check in regularly
- Normalise reviewing and adjusting roles

This framework also creates consistency.

Volunteers joining different clubs should receive a similar standard of welcome, support, and clarity. (Even though every club has its own identity and culture.)

Importantly, this approach:

- Reduces pressure on committees
 - Improves safeguarding confidence
 - Makes volunteering more attractive
 - Supports long term sustainability
- This guide is not about adding work.

It is about doing the right work at the right time.

The next section focuses on preparing properly before recruiting volunteers.

The step that prevents many problems later on.



ARE YOU READY TO RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS?

Before asking anyone to volunteer, it's important to pause and check whether the club is ready to support them properly.

Recruiting volunteers without preparation is one of the most common reasons people leave early.

When expectations are unclear or support isn't in place, even well intentioned volunteers can quickly feel overwhelmed.

Before recruiting, your club should be able to answer the following questions clearly:

Who will welcome and support this volunteer?

What exactly will the volunteer be doing?

How much time is realistically required?

Who does the volunteer speak to if something feels unclear?

What safeguarding requirements apply to this role?

If the answer to any of these is "we'll work it out later", recruitment should pause until clarity is in place.

Being ready to recruit does not require complex systems. It requires:

A named point of contact

A clear, simple role description

An agreed time commitment

Basic onboarding arrangements

Taking time to prepare before recruiting saves significantly more time later.

It reduces confusion, protects volunteers from unnecessary pressure, and helps clubs build a more stable and supported volunteer base.

The next pages explain how to define roles clearly and recruit volunteers in a way that encourages them to stay.



DEFINING VOLUNTEER ROLES CLEARLY

One of the most effective ways to support volunteers is to be clear about what a role actually involves.

Many volunteer issues start when:

- Roles are vaguely defined

- Expectations change over time without discussion

- People take on more than they originally agreed

Clear roles protect:

- Volunteers from overload

- Clubs from confusion

- Committees from avoidable conflict

Every volunteer role should be defined simply and honestly before recruitment.

At a minimum, each role should be clear about:

- What the volunteer will do

- What the volunteer will not be expected to do

- The realistic time commitment

- Who supports the role

Roles do not need to be formal job descriptions. In fact, overly complex role descriptions often put people off.



Good practice is to use a one page role snapshot that:

- Uses plain language

- Focuses on practical tasks

- Sets clear boundaries

- Can be reviewed and adjusted

Clarity at the start makes it easier to:

- Welcome volunteers confidently

- Have honest conversations later

- Adjust roles when circumstances change

If a role cannot be explained simply, it is usually a sign that expectations need to be reduced or broken into smaller parts.

Clear roles make volunteering feel manageable and manageable roles are far more likely to be sustained

SAFER RECRUITMENT



Safer recruitment is about putting the right people in the right roles and supporting them properly once they are there.

It does not mean treating volunteers with suspicion or creating unnecessary barriers.

When handled well, safer recruitment protects:

Children and adults at risk

Volunteers themselves

The club and its reputation

A key principle is proportionality.

Different roles carry different levels of responsibility and contact.

Clubs should clearly distinguish between:

Roles that require safeguarding training and checks: Coaches, Team Managers, 1st Aid/ Medical staff and referees.

Roles that do not

For example:

Coaching, team management, and welfare roles will usually require safeguarding training and appropriate checks

One off helpers, occasional match day support, or behind the scenes roles often will not

Over checking can:

Put people off volunteering

Create unnecessary delays

Increase pressure on a small group of “approved” volunteers

Under checking can:

Create safeguarding risks

Expose volunteers and clubs to harm

Lead to serious governance and reputational consequences

Good safer recruitment practice includes:

Explaining clearly why certain checks or training are required

Supporting volunteers through the process

Keeping requirements proportionate to the role



Volunteers should never be left to navigate safeguarding requirements on their own or made to feel they have done something wrong by being asked to complete them.

Clarity, explanation, and support are what make safer recruitment effective and not complexity.

Further support and advice can be sought from your club safeguarding officer.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS WITHOUT PRESSURE

How a club asks for help directly affects who comes forward and whether they stay.

Volunteers are far more likely to commit when they feel invited, supported, and respected, rather than pressured or guilted into helping.

Language that creates pressure often includes:

“We’re desperate for someone”

“If no one does this, it won’t happen”

“It won’t take much time” (when it will)

While usually well intentioned, this approach can:

Put people off coming forward

Create unrealistic expectations

Lead to early burnout

More effective recruitment focuses on clarity and choice.



Good practice is to:

Explain clearly what help is needed

Be honest about the time commitment

Offer flexibility where possible

Make it clear that support will be provided

For example:

“We’re looking for someone who could help with this one task.”

“The role can be shared or reviewed after a few weeks.”

“Support and guidance will be available.”

Recruitment should feel like an invitation, not a rescue mission.

Encouraging people to try a role on a trial basis can also reduce pressure and help volunteers decide what works for them.

Volunteers who feel respected at the point of recruitment are far more likely to feel valued once they are involved.



THE VOLUNTEER ONBOARDING STANDARD

Every volunteer deserves a consistent, supportive start regardless of their role or the size of the club.

This onboarding standard sets out the minimum experience that all volunteers should receive.

It is designed to reduce early drop out, improve confidence, and create safer environments.

Within 7 days of agreeing to help clubs should ensure that the volunteer:

- Is contacted personally

 - Knows who their main support person is

 - Has a clear explanation of their role

- Knows who the Club Safeguarding Officer and Volunteer Coordinator

Within 14 days clubs should:

- Introduce the volunteer to key people

- Provide basic safeguarding signposting

- Reassure the volunteer about expectations

Within 30 days clubs should:

- Check in informally

- Confirm the role feels manageable

- Adjust expectations if needed

This standard is not about bureaucracy.

It is about preventing confusion and isolation.

Clubs that meet this standard consistently see:

- More confident volunteers

- Fewer early dropouts

- Fewer issues escalating later

The next pages explain how to deliver this standard in practice during the first weeks and months.



THE FIRST DAY/EVENING

A volunteer's first experience sets the tone for everything that follows.

If the first day feels welcoming and organised, confidence grows quickly.

If it feels rushed or unclear, doubts can set in just as fast.

On a volunteer's first day or first evening, clubs should ensure that:

Someone is expecting them and greets them

They are shown around relevant facilities

They are introduced to a small number of key people

They understand what will and will not be expected of them

.The focus at this stage should be settling in, not delivery

Volunteers should not be expected to:

Lead activities

Take responsibility on their own

Make decisions without support

Know how everything works

Good practice on the first day includes:

Encouraging observation

Answering questions patiently

Keeping tasks simple

Reassuring the volunteer that learning takes time

Clubs should avoid the temptation to "make use" of a volunteer immediately.

Early overload is one of the quickest ways to damage confidence and reduce retention.

A calm, welcoming first experience tells volunteers:

They are valued

Support is available

They are not expected to get everything right straight away

This sets the foundation for a positive and sustainable volunteering experience.



THE FIRST MONTH

The first month is about building confidence, clarity, and trust.

During this period, clubs should begin to gently move volunteers from observation into agreed involvement without pressure or assumption.

Good practice during the first month includes:

- Agreeing one small, manageable responsibility
- Making sure expectations remain clear
- Checking in informally to see how things are going
- Encouraging questions and feedback

This is also the point where clubs should actively listen.

Simple questions such as:

- "How are you finding things?"
- "Is the time commitment what you expected?"
- "Is anything unclear?"

Can prevent issues from developing later.

Clubs should avoid:

- Adding extra responsibilities without discussion
- Assuming availability has increased
- Relying on a volunteer to "just step in"



Early clarity makes later conversations easier.

The aim of the first month is not to increase output.

It is to increase confidence and comfort. Volunteers who feel supported at this stage are far more likely to remain engaged as the season progresses.