

Volunteer Policy

Volunteering with Oak Tree Animals' Charity (registered Charity Number 1169511)

About Us

Our pre-cursor, the National Equine Defence League, was founded by Francis Cox in 1909 with the objective of securing reforms in the treatment and conditions of Pit Ponies. Since then we have evolved into a multi species rehoming centre operating from our centre at Oak Tree Farm and in the heart of our local community.

Our future depends upon our ability to meet ever more complex demands and we can only do this with the help of volunteers. Your gift of time and energy is invaluable to us.

Purpose of our Volunteer Policy

Our volunteer policy has been created to show our volunteers and potential volunteers that we have spent time and care in planning how volunteers will be welcomed at OTAC. It outlines that all volunteers will be treated in a fair and consistent way, and it should help our volunteers understand what support is available to them and what they can expect from us.

Our vision and mission for volunteering

Volunteering is a great way to share your enthusiasm, skills and ideas whilst having fun and meeting like-minded people. By volunteering for OTAC you will be making a positive contribution to community development and animal welfare in our region. Volunteers are vital to our work.

Attracting volunteers and volunteer agreement

We have a range of opportunities for volunteers. Our website has information about the various roles where volunteers make a difference. Alternatively, contact our Volunteer Coordinator or come and visit. We advertise specific roles and invite applications. Once we receive a copy of your completed application form, a member of our team will get in touch with more information on the specific opportunity and we can decide together how the role can match your interests and time availability and also our needs. Your help will be greatly appreciated and really will make a difference.

Volunteering is a non-contractual agreement whereby an individual offers their time, skills and knowledge without the expectation of reward (other than reimbursement for previously approved expenditure) or the establishment of a contractual obligation conferring employment rights other than in areas covered by discriminatory practices.

Access DBS (Disclosure and Barring) Checks

Some volunteer roles may require a DBS check to inform OTAC of any criminal convictions that a person wishing to volunteer may have. For example, any volunteer position which involves regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults will be subject to a DBS check. We will advise you if such checks are necessary.

Induction and training

It does not matter how much you already know as there will be opportunities to learn and we have roles to suit every level of expertise.

There will be an induction prepared and delivered by one of our staff. This will include:

- information about OTAC, our vision, mission and our future plans;
- the role of the volunteer;
- a tour around our facilities to see some of our initiatives;
- copy of the Health & Safety Policy and the Volunteer Policy;
- essential procedures such as timekeeping and absence;
- information about training and ongoing learning opportunities together with role specific training;

There will be a trial period of three months to give OTAC and you time to discover if we are suited to each other. A review will take place during and at the end of this trial period. This is not an assessment: it is so we can be sure that you benefit the most from the volunteering experience and maximise the time you are giving freely.

Support

Our Volunteer Coordinator will offer support to you. They will remain a key contact throughout your volunteering with us. Regular monthly drop-in sessions are held giving volunteers the chance to discuss any general concerns and an opportunity to come forward with ideas and suggestions to improve any area of the Charity. The Supervisor/manager for the team you volunteer in will, on an on-going basis, discuss with you how you are getting on, consider any training needs and deal any with issues arising. This will also ensure that the OTAC team are doing all we can to make your volunteering experience an enjoyable and meaningful one.

Recognition and reward

We could not do our work without our volunteers. To acknowledge this, we will always say thank you and show appreciation for a job well done. There will always be a listening ear or shoulder to lean on.

We hold social events each year to celebrate our achievements; these include a volunteer celebration. During these events you will get an opportunity to meet other volunteers and supporters of our work and share our plans for the future.

We will take opportunities on our website, Facebook page, and local press briefings to praise the achievements of our volunteers.

Expenses

We value our volunteers and want to ensure that there are no barriers to volunteer involvement. Reasonable out of pocket expenses, approved by the Volunteer Coordinator will be reimbursed. Unfortunately, we cannot pay travel to and from the centre in pursuit of normal duties.

An Expenses Form must be completed, and a valid receipt provided and this should be handed in at the finance office or to the Volunteer Coordinator.

Insurance, health and safety, accidents and risk assessment

OTAC has a valid insurance policy so that volunteers are covered by public liability insurance. It covers the volunteering activities you will be doing. We will regularly remind you of our Health and Safety Policy and give simple instructions on how to perform each task safely. We have clear procedures for accidents and emergencies and will always have designated first aiders on site.

Resolving problems

We hope that you will have a very enjoyable experience volunteering with us. However if your role as a volunteer does not meet with your expectations or with the commitments we have made to you, we want you to feel comfortable about letting us know.

In the first instance, talk to the person who leads the team where you volunteer and s/he should be able to resolve things before it becomes a problem. If you do not feel this is suitable you can speak to the Volunteer Coordinator. We operate a Problem Solving in Volunteering procedure, which has been designed and written to ensure a consistent and equitable means of resolving issues across all levels of the organisation. A copy is available on request from the Volunteer Coordinator.

Confidentiality

While you are a volunteer with us you may have access to and be entrusted with information related to the Charity, its finances, processes, plans, clients, customers or affairs of the Charity. This information may be confidential and important to our operations. This is regarded as “Confidential Information”.

You should neither during your time as a volunteer with us nor after leaving us disclose (directly or indirectly) any confidential information to competitors of the Charity, to the press, other media, to the public or any part of it so as to could cause damage to the Charity or our reputation.

We ask that you consider your actions and statements made about the Charity carefully. We ask all our employees and volunteers never to knowingly say or do anything which will bring the Charity into disrepute.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

OTAC is committed to embracing diversity and promoting equality and inclusion. When representing OTAC as a volunteer we expect you to support our commitment to promoting equality.

Volunteering whilst on benefit

You can still volunteer with us if you are receiving benefits provided that we follow the legal guidelines. We have information from the Jobs and Benefits Department which we can talk through with you regarding the hours you can do and what you can claim for expenses incurred through volunteering.

This is the Volunteer Policy of Oak Tree Animals' Charity.

Dated: 03/06/2022

It will be reviewed every twenty four (24) months.

Date of next review: 13th June 2024

Signed:



Position: General Manager

Problem Solving in Volunteering

Occasionally, there may be a problem arising or complaint made about a volunteer's behaviour. Although this is very rare, Oak Tree Animals' Charity believes it is important that problems or complaints are dealt with fairly, openly and consistently.

We hope that most problems or complaints can be solved informally and the Volunteer Coordinator and Supervisor or Manager will privately and informally discuss the matter with the volunteer. However, if it is felt necessary, an informal warning may be issued with steps agreed, between the Volunteer Coordinator, Supervisor/Manager and the volunteer, to amend conduct.

Formal

Formal procedures will be followed where it is believed that a volunteer's behaviour has not been in keeping with Oak Tree Animals' Charity's aims, policies, procedures or our Health & Safety Policy.

The Volunteer Coordinator and/or Supervisor/Manager will raise the issue in a formal meeting with the volunteer, and if it is felt necessary, a formal written warning may be issued with steps agreed to amend conduct within an agreed timeframe.

- If the issue is not resolved after the agreed timeframe, a review meeting involving the volunteer and Volunteer Coordinator and/or Supervisor/Manager will be called. There will be further discussion of the issue and the steps previously agreed to amend conduct will be reviewed and a new timeframe for amended behaviour established.
- If the issue is still not resolved after the reviewed timeframe, a meeting involving the volunteer, Volunteer Coordinator and/or Supervisor/Manager will be called. This may result in the volunteer being asked to leave if the issue cannot be resolved.
- At any time where a volunteer is believed to have behaved in a manner that has, or could have, seriously affected: Oak Tree Animals' Charity; its reputation; its staff; volunteers; or members of the public using our services – for example, theft, bullying or violence – they will be asked to stop volunteering while the matter is investigated by the Volunteer Coordinator and General Manager.
- A decision will normally be made within 14 days.
- If the complaint is upheld against the volunteer, they will be excluded from volunteering.

- Volunteers can appeal decisions by writing to the General Manager. A final decision will normally be given within 14 days.
- All formal complaints will be responded to in writing, recorded and confidentially stored for a period of 2 years.

At all stages, volunteers have the right to put their case forward, and be accompanied at meetings on these issues by a fellow volunteer, member of staff or a friend.

It is Oak Tree Animals' Charity's policy to report, to the relevant authorities, a suspected criminal offence.

Social Media Volunteer Policy

It is important to remember that we are all ambassadors for the Oak Tree Animals' Charity and that social media is never private. This policy aims to:

- Give clear guidelines on what volunteers can say about the organisation.
- Comply with relevant legislation and protect volunteers.
- Help volunteers draw a line between their private lives and their volunteering.
- Protect Oak Tree Animals' Charity against liability for the actions of volunteers.

Policy statement Oak Tree Animals' Charity recognises that the internet provides unique opportunities to participate in interactive discussions and share information on particular topics relevant to our work using a wide variety of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and wikis etc. This policy aims to protect individuals volunteering with us in any role and to encourage you to take responsibility for what you write, exercise good judgment and common sense.

Inappropriate use of social media can pose risks to our confidential and proprietary information and reputation, and can jeopardise our compliance with legal obligations. To minimise these risks, to avoid loss of work time and to ensure that our IT resources and communications systems are used only for appropriate business purposes, we expect volunteers to adhere to this policy.

Who is covered by the Policy? This policy covers volunteers. There is a separate policy for paid staff, consultants, contractors etc.

Scope and purpose of the Policy

- This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and all other social networking sites, and all other internet postings, including blogs.
- It applies to the use of social media both for volunteering and personal purposes, whether while volunteering or otherwise. The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using our IT facilities and equipment or equipment belonging to volunteers.
- If a volunteer is found to be in breach of this policy the Volunteer Coordinator will address this using the procedures for Problem Solving in Volunteering.
- Volunteers may be required to remove internet postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy.

- This policy links to all other policies therefore social media should never be used in a way that breaches any of our other policies such as equal opportunities, data protection etc.

Personnel responsible for implementing the Policy

- The Volunteer Coordinator has a specific responsibility for operating within the boundaries of this policy, ensuring that all volunteers understand the standards of behaviour expected of them and taking action when behaviour falls below this.
- All volunteers are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any misuse of social media or questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be reported to the Volunteer Coordinator.
- Any content which raises a safeguarding concern must be reported immediately to the Volunteer Coordinator or Team Supervisor/Manager.

Guidelines for responsible use of social media

The following sections of the policy provide volunteers with common-sense guidelines and recommendations for using social media responsibly and safely.

We want you to help protect our business reputation. Volunteers must not post disparaging or defamatory statements about:

the Charity;

a) Oak Tree Animals' Charity staff, our Trustees, other volunteers or members of public past or present;

b) suppliers and vendors; and

c) other affiliates.

- Volunteers should also avoid social communications that might be misconstrued in a way that could damage our Charity's reputation, even indirectly.
- Volunteers are personally responsible for what they communicate in social media (as part of their role or on personal sites). Remember that what you publish might be available to be read by the masses including Oak Tree Animals' Charity, colleagues, volunteers, future employers and social acquaintances for a long time. Keep this in mind before you post content.

- Publicity consent must be obtained prior to posting images or text which may be used on social media.
- Oak Tree Animals' Charity does not permit tagging of vulnerable adults or anyone under the age of 18.
- There is no obligation for volunteers to link their personal social media to any Oak Tree Animals' Charity social media.
- Volunteers are not permitted to set up social media accounts for Charity purposes without prior agreement from the Volunteer Coordinator or Communication & Fundraising Manager.
- If you disclose your affiliation as a volunteer of Oak Tree Animals' Charity, you must also state that your views do not represent those of the Charity. For example, you could state, "the views in this posting do not represent the views of Oak Tree Animals' Charity." You should also ensure that your profile and any content you post are consistent with the image you present to those you work with as part of your volunteering role.
- You can only use Oak Tree Animals' Charity email address on social media if your volunteering role involves using social media on behalf of the Charity.
- You are responsible for the security settings of any social media sites you use and should ensure they are set to the appropriate level if you wish to limit who can see your information.
- Remember that you must respect confidentiality at all times and protect confidential information. You should be mindful of Data Protection issues, if in doubt speak to the Volunteer Coordinator or the Communication & Fundraising Manager. Confidential information includes things such as unpublished details about our work, details of current projects, future projects, financial information or information held about our supporters, staff or volunteers.
- Avoid posting comments about sensitive Oak Tree Animals' Charity related topics, such as our performance. Even if you make it clear that your views do not represent those of our charity, your comments could still damage our reputation.

- If you are uncertain or concerned about the appropriateness of any statement or posting, refrain from making the communication until you discuss it with your Volunteer Coordinator or Communication & Fundraising Manager.
- If you see content in social media that disparages or reflects poorly on Oak Tree Animals' Charity or our supporters, you should report it to your Volunteer Coordinator and/or the Fundraising & Communications Manager. All volunteers are responsible for protecting our reputation.
- The contact details of business contacts made during the course of your volunteering are regarded as our confidential information, and as such you will be required to delete all such details from your personal social networking accounts, should you finish volunteering with Oak Tree Animals' Charity.

Personal use of social media in the office environment We recognise that volunteers may occasionally desire to use social media for personal activities in the office or by means of our computers, networks and other IT resources and communications systems. We authorise such occasional use so long as it does not involve unprofessional or inappropriate content and does not interfere with your volunteering role. You should not use Oak Tree Animals' Charity IT resources and communications systems for any matter that you wish to be kept private or confidential.

If using social media while volunteering, circulating chain letters or other spam is never permitted. Circulating or posting commercial, personal, religious or political solicitations, or promotion of outside organisations unrelated to Oak Tree Animals' Charity work is also prohibited.

General H&S Check list

General information

- Go through the signing in/out procedures in Reception.
- On arrival use the main front door. ANIMAL CARE VOLUNTEERS if main door is closed access the site through the main gate and go to the reception through the side door (by the gravelled area in front of the Tea Room).
- First Aiders and First Aid boxes are available. One in Reception, Tea Room, the kitchen in the cattery, in the dog kennel kitchens and staff room.
- Report any accidents to the Manager/Supervisor/First Aiders on duty. They will organise for an accident report to be filled in.
- Beware of moving vehicle on site. 5 mph speed limit.
- Smoking is not allowed on site apart from smoking shelter.
- Please make the volunteer aware not to approach dogs being walked without checking with the dog handler first. Not all dogs are comfortable with people they don't know.
- Only volunteers who have been trained/inducted in the correct use of cleaning chemicals should be handling these.
- Hats are to be worn when volunteering in Equine.

On site

- Show/point out the fire assembly points (top of Car Park and next to the Margaret Heatley kennel).
- Show where smoking is permitted (shelter by the Margaret Heatley kennel).
- Show/explain where staff room, toilets and changing facilities are (in the stable yard and top building).

Policies

- Inform that the volunteer will receive a number of policies and your (team supervisor) contact details by email from the volunteer coordinator.

Animal Care & Gardening volunteers

- To gain access (in/out) of main gate when walking dogs use code 1979.

- Main gate should be locked at all times to stop unauthorised access.
- We strongly advise that animal care and gardening volunteers have an up-to-date tetanus vaccination.
- Dog Walkers – Follow signing in/out procedure in the kennels if taking dogs off site.
- Dog Walkers – remember to always wear a Hi-Viz vest when walking dogs off site.

Lone Working Volunteer Policy

Statement of Policy

Occasionally volunteers at Oak Tree Animals' Charity will carry out duties by themselves. Working alone carries additional risks due to incapacitating injury or personal attack therefore, on the occasion that a volunteer is working alone, the following policy outlines the necessary measures in place to minimise risks and keep them safe.

Implementation

Volunteers must consider if the task has to be carried out alone. This should be done in consultation with an Oak Tree Animals' Charity member of staff.

Once a decision has been made that the task will be carried out alone, volunteers **MUST**:

Always inform the Team Supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator that they are carrying out a task alone.

The Team Supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator must be informed of: where you are working, what you are doing, when to expect you back, your mobile phone number and what to do if you don't appear.

Take a charged mobile phone.

The phone must be switched on and include numbers for the Team Supervisor (please check with your Supervisor) and/or Volunteer Coordinator (01 228 560082 ext. 224), Oak Tree Animals' Charity Office (01228 560082 ext. 225) and Emergency Services (999).

- Always wear a hi-vis vest when walking off site and on the roads.
- Avoid becoming involved in confrontational situations.
- Do not deal with a member of the public who appears to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs or is displaying threatening behaviour.
- Abandon a situation if you feel your own health and safety is at risk.
- If dog walking, please be aware of livestock in fields and do not approach them.
- If walking dogs, make sure the dog is safely secured with a lead to the collar/harness and keep a distance from other dogs you may meet to avoid a dog fight breaking out.

- **Return to the Oak Tree Animals' Charity (or agreed location) at the agreed time** – if you are going to be late, inform the Team Supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator. If you have agreed to go home/elsewhere after the task, you must inform the Team Supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator when you have arrived at your alternative destination.
- On your return, all cases of violence, aggression or incidents resulting in injury or near misses must be documented with the Team Supervisor, Volunteer Coordinator or General Manager.

If the Team Supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator has not heard from you half an hour after given return time:

- They will phone the mobile number or home number of the volunteer.

If the Team Supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator has not heard from you an hour after given return time:

- They will phone the mobile number or home number of the volunteer.
- If there is still no contact, the Team Supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator will phone your emergency contact.
- If there is still no contact from the volunteer and the emergency contact, or if the emergency contact deems it necessary, the Team Supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator will proceed to search the area in which the volunteer is carrying out lone-work.

If the Team Supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator, and/or your emergency contact, has not heard from or found you after two hours, or if it is dark or compromising weather:

- If there is still no contact from the volunteer and they are not found, and if their emergency contact deems it necessary, the police will be informed and the volunteer details and lone working site information will be given to assist in a search for the volunteer.
- Use your mobile phone to assist being found.

Volunteers under the age of 16 years old must never carry out lone-working volunteering.