



Empowering Russia's Most Vulnerable Children and Young People

VOLUNTEER POLICY AND GUIDELINES



The faces you should see on arrival to Love's Bridge

Thank you for deciding to volunteer your time and efforts with the children and teenagers at Love's Bridge. Know that the children, staff and volunteers truly appreciate you, and we hope that this will be a rewarding experience for you!

As you begin volunteering with us, you will probably be eager to get involved and make a difference in the lives of the people with whom you will be working. We expect that you will view yourself as a representative of Love's Bridge, and as such, we ask that you carefully read through and abide by the following guidelines to ensure you will have the most meaningful and worthwhile volunteer experience possible.

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1. Statement of policy

Love's Bridge is dedicated to helping Russia's most vulnerable children and young people avoid a life of homelessness, drug addiction and crime. Our focus is in the city of Perm, where we carry out preventative and rehabilitative work with young people aged 8-25. The charity gives Perm's most underprivileged young people every chance to become healthy, independent adults.

Love's Bridge acknowledges the vital contribution made by volunteers to our history and to our ongoing work and recognizes that without them we would simply not achieve our goals. Volunteers are regarded as a valuable resource and encouraged to get involved at all levels of the organization and within all appropriate activities. We aim to train, support and supervise our volunteers to the best of our abilities, and to act quickly and fairly if difficulties arise.



At-risk children face a tough future in Russia

2. General principles

- **Responsibility**
- **Eligibility**
- **Relationship with paid staff**
- **Working conditions**
- **Working times**
- **Appropriate behavior**
- **Representation of the project**
- **Confidentiality**

Responsibility

The project coordinators at Love's Bridge have overall responsibility for the management in the project and act on the authority of the Directors of the Board. Project coordinators are responsible for ensuring that the policies and procedures in this document are implemented effectively and efficiently. All other staff and volunteers are expected to facilitate this process. Any complaints or problems can be discussed with project coordinators, and if you have problems with the project coordinators you can contact any director of the Love's Bridge board (see contact details below).

Eligibility

Love's Bridge welcomes all individuals seeking volunteering opportunities with the project. All individuals engaged in voluntary work for the project irrespective of their role must be able to demonstrate a commitment to the aims of the project and to avoid any volunteering position if they have a conflict of interest with any aspect of the project's activities.



Staff and volunteers work together to create a positive atmosphere for the kids.

Relationship with paid staff

The contribution of volunteers to the work in the project is valued equally to that of paid staff. Volunteers are appointed to enhance the capacity of paid staff, **not** as a substitute for them. Any instances of staff attempting to pass on their responsibilities to volunteers should be reported to the project coordinators.

Volunteers and paid staff are expected to work together harmoniously and cooperatively for the good of the project. Any differences in opinion or disagreements should be constructively and objectively discussed either during the weekly staff meetings or together with a project coordinator.

Working conditions

Volunteers are treated as full members of the project team. They are treated as equally and fairly as paid staff and are included in the organization's functions and decision-making processes. Volunteers are provided with appropriate work sites and have access to the space, equipment and facilities necessary to volunteer effectively.

Working times

Volunteers are free to decide how many hours they would like to commit every week and working times are negotiated between the project coordinator and the volunteer. Voluntary time commitment is never expected to match that of full-time paid staff, but unscheduled absences can create organizational problems. When expecting to be absent, volunteers should inform the project as soon as possible, so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Volunteers are also free to choose the length of their voluntary term, although we encourage volunteers to dedicate between 3-12 months to the project. We recommend that the minimum stay is 3 months, as it takes time getting to know the young people in our care, and also get used to life in Russia. Exceptions can certainly be made, and should be discussed with the project coordinators.

Appropriate behavior

Volunteers are expected to work within the policies and procedures of project and adhere to its ethos. As volunteers of the organization, they are responsible for presenting a positive image of the project to the outside world. All the rules of the centers should be strictly adhered to during work time and also bore in mind during free time. Volunteers should try and avoid spending too much time with individual children on a one to one basis, and should refrain from making friends with children and teenagers on social network websites such as vkontakte. The rules and regulations for working at Love's Bridge will be discussed with all volunteers on arrival.

Representation of the project

Volunteers must seek prior approval from the project coordinators before undertaking anything which might significantly affect the organization. This includes, but is not limited to, statements to the press, joint initiatives with other bodies, and agreements involving contractual or financial obligations.

Confidentiality

Love's Bridge respects the volunteer's right to privacy and confidentiality. In turn, volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all privileged information to which they are exposed while volunteering with the project.

3. *Volunteer suitability*

- **The ideal volunteer**
- **Job descriptions**
- **Checks for suitability**
- **Probation**



Volunteers should be ready for anything at all times!

The ideal volunteer

Volunteers would ideally have some experience with difficult children, or at least be able to demonstrate capability in this field of work. The ideal volunteer would have the following characteristics: flexibility, excellent social skills, creativity, desire to learn about a new culture, motivation, organizational skills, patience and tact, a sense of responsibility, the desire to help those who have less opportunities in life, an easy going nature.

Job descriptions

Like paid staff, volunteers require a clear and accurate description of the tasks and responsibilities they are expected to undertake. This should include the title of the volunteering role, starting and finishing dates, hours and place of work and tasks to be undertaken.

Volunteers can get involved in a variety of activities, including but not exclusively:

- Arts and crafts
- Sports activities
- Cinema and theatre trips
- Mentoring program
- Organization of special events
- Getting involved in publicity work
- Outdoor activities (camping, rafting, picnics)
- Social work (visiting individuals at home, on the streets or in institutions)

Volunteers are also encouraged to bring new ideas to the project and are welcome to come ready with their own projects or program, as long as the contents are agreed in advance with the project coordinators

The job description may be amended in joint agreement with the volunteer and the project coordinator and can be used in supervision and evaluation sessions, if appropriate.

Checks for suitability

Volunteers are required to go through a formal application process which includes completing the volunteer application form and providing two references. References are always taken up. Police screening are also undertaken. Other checks may also be completed (for example, ascertaining professional qualifications). Volunteers are always informed in advance of the intention to make these checks. If they refuse permission and cannot provide an acceptable reason, they will not be placed.

Potential volunteers are always made aware of the risks and problems of working as a volunteer for Love's Bridge and also of the difficulties of life in Russia in general. Those that are prone to health problems are not advised to volunteer for the project. Volunteers who are coming from overseas will be given particular support in adjusting to life in Russia, although we do not advise volunteers to come if they are prone to difficulties adjusting to new environments, culture shock, homesickness or suffer from emotional problems.

Probation

All placements are subject to an initial trial period of one month. At the end of this period, the project coordinator meets with the volunteer to discuss both parties' satisfaction with the placement. At this point, volunteers may continue in their current role, be reassigned to more suitable role, or be asked to leave.

4. Training and Support

- **Induction**
- **On-the-job support**
- **Additional training**

Induction

All volunteers receive induction when they begin voluntary work with Love's Bridge. This consists of a general introduction to the organization, as well as a specific orientation on the purposes and requirements of their volunteering role.

On the job

Volunteers receive initial training on the specifics of working with our staff, children and teenagers and then receive ongoing on-the-job support to provide them with the information and skills necessary to perform their tasks well. Volunteers should expect to receive support and encouragement from staff and project coordinators, although we expect volunteers to demonstrate independence and initiative throughout their working day. Volunteers will never be asked to take responsibility for something unless they have specifically asked for it. Volunteers should always ensure that they are not hindering the staff from doing their job, and should always be ready to help in a variety of tasks.

Any questions or requests regarding day-to-day activities may be directed to the project coordinators at any moment. We believe that the more comfortable a volunteer feels in his working environment, the more he will be able to ultimately give to the project. Volunteers who feel unhappy or unsure in their role should address their concerns immediately to the project coordinators.

Additional training

Volunteers are actively encouraged to identify training courses, seminars, conferences, and so on, which would help them to perform their roles better and which would aid their personal development. When additional training is offered to staff (Love's Bridge conducts monthly training and team building sessions for staff), volunteers are actively encouraged to take part.

5. Supervision

- **Lines of communication**
- **Line manager**
- **Supervision**
- **Dismissal**
- **Concerns and grievances**
- **Exit interviews**

Lines of communication

Lines of communication should operate in both directions and should exist formally and informally. Volunteers will have access to all appropriate information, memos, materials and meetings relevant to their assignments, and will be consulted on all decisions which would substantially affect their volunteering conditions.

Line manager

Volunteers are overseen and mentored by one of the project coordinators, who is responsible for the day-to-day management of volunteers. All staff receive training and guidance on how to involve volunteers effectively in the work of the organization, and will provide on-the-job advice, help and support to volunteers.

Supervision

Volunteers will have regular formal and informal meetings with the project coordinator. They are a vital opportunity to raise individual questions and look at the overall work of the organization and individual volunteer. Evaluation sessions take place between the volunteer and project coordinator at agreed periods between starting and finishing the volunteer period. These review the performance of the volunteer, suggest any changes in work style, seek suggestions from the volunteer, convey appreciation to the volunteer, and ascertain the continued interest of the volunteer in serving in his or her role. The sessions also serve as an opportunity to plan future tasks. If appropriate, corrective action may be taken following evaluation sessions. Examples include the organization of training for an identified training need, the reassignment of a volunteer, or the dismissal of a volunteer. Volunteers should always be prepared for supervision meetings and ready to discuss possible changes in their work.

Discipline and dismissal

Volunteers who do not adhere to the organization's rules or who fail to perform their volunteer assignments satisfactorily may be subject to discipline and/or dismissal from their post. Conduct with the children and teenagers at Love's Bridge is taken seriously, and rules on behavior within the centers are taken seriously. All volunteers and staff must be made aware of the rules within the centre and all volunteers and staff must actively stick to the rules. Volunteers (or staff) who do not adhere to the rules are subject to disciplinary measures (usually a verbal or written warning) and maybe be subjected to dismissal from the project. No volunteer or member of staff will be dismissed without their having the chance to discuss the situation with a project coordinator. Any instance of a volunteer or member of staff breaking rules should be reported confidentially to a project coordinator.

Concerns and grievances

Any concerns or grievances should be addressed to one of the project coordinators, who will listen in confidentiality any problems and do their best to resolve any issues. If volunteers do not feel that they can turn to any of the project coordinators, they are welcome to address any of the members of the board. Complaints, grievances and criticism of the project are taken seriously and constructive criticism is welcomed if it is made to improve the project and work we do.

Exit interviews

Every volunteer will have an informal talk with the project coordinator before leaving in order to tie up loose ends and appraise the overall experience of the volunteer. We greatly rely on the experiences of volunteers to help improve our preparation, training and support of future volunteers, and many of the initiatives developed in the project are as a result of ideas brought in by volunteers. Throughout the volunteering period and particularly at the end, we ask that all volunteers objectively analyze their time here and share their feelings, both positive and negative, about their experience.

On completion, every volunteer is asked to fill in an evaluation form of the project, which gives us a useful insight on how to further improve work with volunteers.

6. After volunteering

On completion of the volunteering project, we actively encourage volunteers to stay in contact with the project in several different ways. Volunteers may maintain contact with the children and teenagers in the centers by email (via the Love's Bridge email), send parcels to the project, act as ambassadors for the project in their own country and raise awareness on the problems of underprivileged youth in Russia. Volunteers interested in continuing with the project and taking on a different role in the organization should talk to the project coordinators about the current possibilities.