



# **Volunteer Information and Policy Manual**

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# 1. Introduction

## **Australian- Syrian Charity (THE ASC)**

The Australian-Syrian Charity is a not-for-profit organisation that seeks to assist and support all genuine refugees. We are new, having been founded by Father Samir in 2012. ASC has a mission to offer a 'helping hand' especially to refugees from Syria who have escaped persecution and who, in all probability, have suffered psychologically from the horrors of war and lost all or most of their physical belongings. We want to support the most vulnerable in this conflict and our mission is to provide for them. We aim to rebuild Syrian lives toward self-sufficiency in order to restore dignity and hope.

## **The plight of millions of Syrians**

Syria's civil war is the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. Half the country's pre-war population — more than 11 million people — have been killed or forced to flee their homes. Families are all struggling for survival whether they are inside Syria, attempting to make a new home in a neighbouring country, or risking their lives in the hope of finding acceptance and opportunity in Europe or any other country which offers safe haven. Our charity is helping sponsor refugees to Australia and supporting them to settle here.

## **The Australia- Syrian Charity- its principles and values**

The Australian-Syrian Charity is committed to promoting the principles of justice, dignity, advocacy, compassion and respect. ASC values cultural diversity, integrity, accountability and best practice.

## **Programs at the Australian-Syrian Charity**

ASC presently helps refugees across the north of Melbourne: Epping, Roxburgh Park, Mill Park, Brunswick, Fairfield and Thornbury. (Volunteers can presently help in the Programs marked with an asterisk and we hope that very soon we can expand to offer more volunteer opportunities).

- The resettlement program
- Casework and support services
- A strong social and event program for all Syrian and Australian communities \*
- Referral
- Women's and children's support groups
- Marching band practice and performance (a Syrian tradition rekindled in Australia)\*
- Spirit of the East - an adult orchestra
- English language tutoring \*
- Administrative & reception programs\*
- Fundraising groups \*

## **2. Volunteering with the Australian-Syrian Charity**

### **2.1. Volunteer policy values & definitions**

The Australian-Syrian Charity (ASC) encourages and values the involvement of volunteers and the contributions that they make to the community. ASC is committed to involving and supporting volunteers to ensure a mutually satisfying experience for the volunteer, agency and community. Volunteers enable ASC to reach out to more families and individuals who are vulnerable and disadvantaged.

ASC commits to Volunteering Australia's formal definition of volunteering – that volunteering is an activity which takes place through not-for-profit organisations or projects, and is undertaken: to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer; of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion; for no financial payment; and in designated volunteer positions only.

### **2.2 Philosophy & objectives for involving volunteers**

ASC understands that volunteer involvement is a two-way relationship. Community involvement is across the charity's programs and services. It is essential to promote diversity, equality and inclusiveness among volunteers involved at ASC, just as we also ensure that opportunities for community participation are accessible to ASC's diverse communities. For us, volunteering provides the opportunity to achieve program and service goals and contributes to better social and community outcomes for our refugees and communities.

For volunteers, impacts and benefits from their involvement may be measured in a variety of ways (including but not limited to): supporting individuals' empowerment and self-worth, building general wellbeing, emotional resilience, pride, purpose and accomplishment, and expanding their skills and connection to the Australian community.

Involving volunteers is a practical way in which ASC realises its commitment to community engagement and ownership. Actively engaging volunteers at all levels of organisation (within appropriate activities and programs) encourages meaningful participation from volunteers that match their skills, interests and expertise. Developing the knowledge, skill set and networks of volunteers is important to us.

## 2.3 Principles of Volunteering

ASC commits to a set of beliefs or guidelines that are designed to protect the individual volunteer and also provide guidelines around volunteering. These principles define volunteering as:

- benefitting the community and the volunteer
- an activity that is unpaid
- always a matter of choice
- an activity performed in the not-for-profit sector only
- a legally accepted way to get involved in the community
- not a replacement for paid work
- respecting the rights, dignity and culture of others, and
- promoting human rights and equality.

## 2.4 Volunteers' rights and responsibilities

ASC strives to maintain the highest standards possible for the protection and promotion of the rights and responsibilities of volunteers. ASC commits to the following as the basic rights and responsibilities of a volunteer, as set out by Volunteering Australia and Volunteering Victoria.

Volunteers have the right to:

- have a position description and agreed volunteering hours
- be treated in accordance with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation
- have confidential and personal information dealt with in accordance with the principles of the Privacy Act 1988
- be given orientation and information about the organisation
- be provided with sufficient training and support to do the volunteering
- not to bring the Charity into disrepute through social media presence: refer to Appendix A: ASC Social Media Policy. !
- to act in an acceptable way which does not bring disrepute on the organisation !

- to always seek advance permission before bringing visitors into ASC premises
- be given a volunteer policy and other policies that affect the volunteering
- be supported and supervised in the volunteering role
- be adequately covered by insurance
- work in a healthy and safe environment
- have access to a grievance procedure, and
- decline a position previously held by a paid worker.

Volunteers have a responsibility to:

- be reliable
- respect confidentiality and privacy
- carry out the agreed volunteer position
- be accountable for the volunteering that is done
- be committed to the values of the organisation
- not to bring the Charity into disrepute through social media presence  
     'Please refer to Appendix A: ASC Social Media Policy'.
- to act in an acceptable way which does not bring disrepute on the organisation
- be willing to undertake training
- ask for help and support when needed
- be prepared to follow policies and procedures
- report any suspected abuse, on reasonable grounds to the volunteer co-ordinator
- give adequate notice before leaving the organisation
- value and support other team members
- carry out the agreed task responsibly and ethically; and
- carry out ASC policy, procedures and agreed practices that are designed to promote the rights of ASC's clients and service users to receive services that are:
  - free

- non-judgmental
- impartial and anti-discriminatory, and
- That respect the right of individuals to self-determination.

## 2.5 ASC rights and responsibilities

ASC management and staff are responsible for the involvement of volunteers. The agency is committed to making sure that staff have the skills, resources and authority to support volunteers to achieve the ASC's aims.

ASC has designated lines of responsibility to oversee volunteer involvement within the agency. These include a Volunteer co-ordinator, a case worker and the Rev Fr Samir Haddad, ASC President.

## 2.6 Management

Management will:

- take appropriate action in regard to unacceptable standards or behaviour
- arrange appropriate resources such as budgets and training to tasks required
- ensure the volunteer policy is given a priority across the agency
- Ensure volunteers have opportunities to be involved in agency decision-making processes through evaluations and review meetings.
- allow volunteers to carry out their volunteering in a healthy and safe workplace
- ensure that volunteers are provided with a position description
- ensure that volunteers are provided with initial orientation and ongoing training
- support and supervise volunteers
- inform volunteers about the lines of reporting, accountability and communication
- eliminate or minimise risks to volunteers, through the provision of information, training, support, supervision and monitoring and evaluation of volunteer practices
- ensure that volunteers understand and commit to ASC agency policies and procedures (eg Code of ethics, Confidentiality policy, Equal Opportunity, Non-discriminatory practices, Mandatory Reporting, OH&S).

### 3. Volunteer Recruitment, Selection and Orientation

ASC is committed to the principles of Equal Opportunity in its recruitment, selection and orientation of volunteers. ASC involves volunteers in a way that promotes fairness and equality, and that is consistent with non-discriminatory practices and guidelines (eg volunteers are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, culture, religion, sexual preference, ability or age).

#### 3.1 Recruitment of Volunteers

ASC is committed to a fair and clear way of recruiting volunteers. ASC encourages people from diverse cultural, religious, age, gender, ability and socio-economic backgrounds to participate as volunteers within the organisation.

A member of the ASC Volunteer Committee:

- Conducts an initial discussion with community members to determine potential volunteers' interests, skills and wishes with respect to volunteering
- Collects basic information from potential volunteers in order to assist with finding volunteer work (eg contact details, previous experiences, time availability)
- Provides general information about volunteering by supplying this booklet, and
- Provides specific position descriptions about the roles, tasks and requirements of specific volunteer positions if the volunteer is interested in applying.

Next Step:

- Conducting a volunteer interview
- Obtaining any other information needed by program staff, in addition to the information provided on registration.

### **3.2 Selection process**

ASC attempts to involve volunteers in roles that meet their needs, interests and aspirations, and is committed to developing the skills, knowledge, experience and confidence of volunteers by providing training so volunteers can be involved.

ASC staff assess the suitability of potential volunteers for the positions available against the position description. The selection criteria (requirements) for each volunteer position are listed in the position description. ASC staff regularly review each volunteer position description to make sure it is relevant and current. Where possible, volunteers will be encouraged to provide input to position descriptions.

Volunteers must have a police and working with children check done (because volunteer roles will probably include direct and unsupervised contact with vulnerable members of the community, including children). ASC has included how to apply for a Police Check and a Working with Children check in volunteer information. All information gained from a check will be treated as strictly confidential. The completion of both checks must be complete before voluntary activity can begin with ASC. The only exemption will be if the volunteer possesses an up to date VIT registration, which will be photocopied and kept.

Where volunteers do not meet the selection criteria for a volunteer position, or there is no volunteer role available to meet their interests, staff will provide feedback to the prospective volunteer.

Any personal information collected from prospective volunteers will only be for the purpose of assessing suitability for the volunteer position and will be kept confidential and secure by staff. Information will be destroyed after a period of 2 years of the volunteer leaving ASC.

### **3.3 Volunteer Orientation**

ASC makes sure that volunteers are appropriately orientated when they begin volunteering with the agency. This should occur prior to, or on their first day of, volunteering, and be conducted by the relevant ASC staff member.

## 4. Work and the Workplace

The Australian-Syrian Charity ensures that volunteers are supported in the work they do while volunteering, and that they volunteer in a healthy and safe workplace.

### 4.1 Volunteer roles

ASC involves community members in selected volunteer roles and recognises that volunteering supports and extends the work done by ASC staff.

All ASC volunteer roles are outlined in a position description that includes

- Position title
- Contact details of staff member
- Description of position (including areas of responsibility)
- Skills/qualifications/qualities required for the position
- Times the position can be undertaken
- Orientation, training and support provided, and
- Other details.

Volunteer position descriptions are reviewed regularly, and volunteers are encouraged to contribute to this review. ASC also records all volunteer hours.

### 4.2 Volunteer Satisfaction

ASC values ongoing two-way communication with volunteers and as much as possible is committed to making sure that volunteers have a satisfactory experience while volunteering with the agency. This is achieved through providing volunteers with:

- Regular information and training sessions
- Ongoing communication (social activities with the Syrian community, meetings and updates)
- Ongoing support and supervision
- Their involvement in roles that meet their interest, needs and aspirations
- Social events, and

- Opportunities to give feedback during meetings, surveys, in supervision sessions and in weekly or monthly evaluations.

Exit interviews may be conducted and are an opportunity for volunteers to provide feedback prior to leaving the agency. A staff member, who has not supervised the volunteer, will conduct the exit interview to ensure fairness.

Information collected regarding volunteer satisfaction is to be discussed by relevant staff and management, and where appropriate, changes and improvements suggested will be made in line with the agency's policies and procedures.

### **4.3 Reimbursement for Out-of-Pocket Expenses**

The ASC is a very small organisation and asks volunteers to only ask for reimbursement for any volunteering related out-of-pocket expenses which they cannot cover personally.

Travel costs to and from ASC facilities and childcare expenses are not normally reimbursed. In special circumstances, volunteers are provided with the opportunity to discuss any other out-of-pocket expenses with the co-ordinator. Checks essential for volunteer roles can/will be reimbursed.

### **4.4 Volunteer Insurance**

ASC Volunteers are covered by Public Liability and Personal Accident (Volunteer) insurance. Volunteers who are involved in an accident or who are injured while volunteering at ASC should complete an Incident Report form immediately. ASC's insurance does not cover volunteers' personal belongings. It is the owner's responsibility while volunteering at ASC to ensure the security of their possessions. If you need further detail please refer to the website where the policy is included.

### **4.5 Debriefing (talking about a difficult experience that may have occurred)**

ASC is committed to providing volunteers with the opportunity to talk about any issues or experiences they have while volunteering, as volunteers feel they need. ASC believes debriefing is important and under no circumstances will a volunteer be judged or criticised for seeking assistance. If a volunteer has experienced a difficult situation and would like to discuss it further, opportunity is available to talk with a staff member (the volunteer's direct supervisor or the Volunteer Co-ordinator or Father Samir, president of ASC) who will discuss the situation and offer support.

## 4.6 Confidentiality Policy

Australian-Syrian Charity aims to provide a free, confidential, impartial and independent service. In the course of fulfilling this aim staff and volunteers obtain information about clients, which they would not have if they were members of the public. This information is gained because of the trust placed in them as providers of a confidential service. The following confidentiality procedures apply to this information.

ASC's management committee is fully committed to protecting everyone's right to privacy. ASC's representatives in collecting information will comply with all aspects of the Victorian Information Privacy Act 2000 and the Health Records Act 2001.

The Macquarie Dictionary defines "confidential" as "spoken or written confidence; in secret; entrusted with secrets or private affairs." Confidentiality exists when private matters are revealed in complete trust. To keep that trust, this agency provides a confidential service.

***No details learned from a client, or the fact that the client has contacted the agency, will be passed on to anyone outside the service, without permission from the client.***

A staff member who is faced with a situation where there appears to be a conflict between the duty of a responsible citizen and the need to preserve confidentiality, must first consult the Volunteer Coordinator or president to clarify the situation. All volunteers are encouraged to read the details of the policy on the web site.

ASC will only collect personal and health information that is required for its activities:

- Information will only be used for the purpose for which it was collected
- If information is required for other purposes other than those for which it was collected, agreement will be sought beforehand.
- Information will only be accessed by management
- Information will be securely stored and destroyed if it is no longer needed.

Storage of volunteers Information:

On the ASC's Volunteers Registration Form a consent statement is given (This must be signed by a parent if for a minor). This statement includes the likely distribution e.g. the provision of health information to the administration staff, sharing contact details amongst team members for example. Where consent is not given to distribute information, the member's details will be stored securely and kept in a separate database to avoid error.

Volunteer records are kept in a secure and confidential location, with all paper and electronic copies of volunteer information being stored in a locked filing cabinet and/or in a secure file on the computer network. This information is only accessible to relevant staff (eg: Team Leader, Volunteer Coordinators, and Directors). All staff have access to volunteer

Emergency contact details, with the permission of volunteers. Volunteers have the right to access their own records.

Upon request by the volunteer who has worked for six months at ASC, staff can provide verbal and/or written references for the purposes of employment, study/training and/or to obtain another volunteer role. Other references may be provided at the discretion of the appropriate staff member/Manager. A record of references given will be kept in the volunteer file.

#### **4.7 Working with Children, Police Check Reports, Mandatory Reporting**

Information provided in these reports is strictly confidential and will only be brought to the attention of the Committee when the report content requires some action.

Volunteers should be reminded that if you, as a volunteer hold a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed against a child under the age of 16 in Victoria you must report that belief to police, unless you have a reasonable excuse (defined in the Act) for not doing so. Please inform ASC supervisor asap.

#### **4.8 Occupational Health & Safety**

ASC is committed to ensuring that all volunteers carry out their activities in a safe work environment. ASC has a policy on Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S), which

- Complies with all relevant OH&S legislation and guidelines
- Includes the process of informing volunteers of their rights and responsibilities in regards to OH&S at the time of induction and through ongoing training
- Which includes a Health & Safety representative, whose role it is to represent staff and volunteers on health and safety matters
- Health and Safety Committee, comprising staff and volunteers, develop procedures and improve health and safety in the workplace and formally address OH&S issues

## 4.9 Sexual harassment, Discrimination and Bullying

Sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying in any place are unlawful. ASC does not tolerate this behaviour in any form. Every volunteer, staff member and supervisor has a responsibility to ensure that it does not occur. Please, discuss any problem immediately with the volunteer coordinator. More details of the policy are on our web site.

## 4.10 Dispute settlement (disciplinary & grievance procedures)

The ASC is committed to ongoing communication with volunteers to prevent disputes and grievances from arising. However, in the event of a dispute or grievance occurring, ASC recognises the volunteer's right to have their grievance carefully considered, and staff will make every effort to resolve the dispute co-operatively, informally and confidentially.

All ASC volunteers have the right to expect:

- Supportive and constructive criticism
- Clear details regarding an appropriate or unsatisfactory work performance or behaviour
- Suggestions regarding how to improve their work behaviour, and time and opportunity to demonstrate improvement after each stage
- Written record of any unsatisfactory work performance.

All ASC volunteers have a responsibility to;

- Carry out their agreed volunteer role
- Ask for assistance & support when needed
- Respond to support & feedback provided.

In the event that a dispute arises, the following process will occur:

1. ASC staff or team leader will discuss the issue with the volunteer, and provide support towards improving their performance/resolving the issue
2. A third person (usually the President) may then be involved to assist the volunteer and staff in the process. Where appropriate, the President may also consider an external mediator.
3. In the event that a volunteer has not responded to feedback regarding a grievance, a verbal warning, followed by a written warning, may then be issued.

4. Volunteers will be asked to leave the ASC if the above procedures have not resulted in a satisfactory outcome for the agency.
5. If the President cannot resolve the grievance/issue, then the matter should be brought to the attention of the Committee of Management.
6. Any issues that might impact significantly on the program (eg public image, funding arrangements) must be reported to the Committee of Management. All disputes will be recorded, including the process by which the grievance/dispute is resolved. Outcomes will also be recorded and retained in a confidential file.

Dismissal of volunteers will be a last resort, applied only when other actions have been tried. In the event a volunteer is asked to leave the agency, support will be provided to assist the volunteer to access relevant support.

In the most serious of circumstances, immediate dismissal from a voluntary position may occur at the time of first incident (examples include: breach of confidentiality; being under the influence of alcohol or drugs; theft; illegal, violent or unsafe acts; or serious unacceptable behaviour).

## 5. Training, Skill Development & Recognition

The Australian-Syrian Charity is committed to making sure that volunteers get the knowledge, skills, and feedback on their performance necessary to effectively carry out their responsibilities. Volunteers are expected to take part in training relevant to their role, and, where possible, existing volunteers are encouraged to train and mentor new volunteers.

ASC is committed to recognising the contributions that volunteers make:.

- Highlighting volunteers' achievements and input through the annual report (eg listing the names of each volunteer) and at the Annual General Meeting
- Annually provide volunteers with excellence in volunteering participation certificates
- Holding regular charity events that recognise volunteers, refugees and community members
- Participation in municipality-wide events that celebrate volunteering (eg International Volunteer Day).

### 5.1 Volunteer training and skill development

The ASC is committed to providing initial training for volunteers, as well as ongoing opportunities for skill development, and has a budget allocated for this training. Each volunteer position description lists minimum training requirements for the role, and volunteers might be expected to participate in other training to assist their voluntary work. This might include specific sessions to improve knowledge and skills, eg completing an AMES course before working in the English language tutoring program (fully government funded).

### 5.2 Training and support needs of volunteers

Volunteer training is developed to meet the needs of the volunteer position. Training needs are also identified through volunteer feedback, supervision sessions, volunteer meetings and training needs surveys. Volunteers are actively encouraged to identify their own training and development needs and to tell relevant staff members about them.

ASC is committed to assessing the performance of, and providing feedback to, volunteers about their performance. This is done through: regularly reviewing volunteer roles in a diary written each week; individual feedback in supervision sessions; group feedback at volunteer meetings; and by identifying and responding to barriers to effective performance as needed.

## 6. Service Delivery

The Australian-Syrian Charity is committed to making sure that services delivered by volunteers are planned, delivered, reviewed and improved to ensure that client needs are satisfactorily met.

ASC staff are responsible for making sure services are provided effectively, under the support and supervision of ASC management. ASC ensures that services provided by volunteers are of acceptable and satisfactory standard by providing volunteers with:

- Adequate information, orientation and training to undertake their volunteer role (including any legal requirements such as Privacy Act, Equal opportunity)
- Agreement, understanding and adherence to all ASC policies (eg confidentiality policy, Code of Ethics).
- Updated training sessions to improve existing skills
- Ongoing supervision, support and volunteer meetings including debriefing
- Updated information on program/service evaluations.

## 7. Continuous Improvement

Australian-Syrian Charity regularly reviews and improves its volunteer policy and procedures to make sure the best possible outcomes are achieved for the volunteer, community and charity.

Team leaders and staff are responsible for identifying any areas for improvement of volunteer service delivery. Where an incident arises that requires immediate change in ASC policy or practice, Management will address and review the policy and make any changes necessary.

The Management will undertake an annual review of ASC's volunteer policy, for the purpose of making continuous improvements to the support provided to volunteers and to ensure the agency is in line with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. This review includes:

- Feedback from volunteers, staff and program evaluations
- Volunteer meetings and satisfaction surveys
- Client feedback on services provided by volunteers
- Recording the numbers of volunteers leaving the agency, and the reasons
- Participation, attendance and/or absenteeism at volunteer training.

This review will evaluate the current volunteer policy and practices. Recommended changes and improvements to existing volunteer policy and practice would be tabled at the Committee of Management for adoption. Relevant information and training would then be provided to all staff and volunteers in order to implement the changes.

Thanks for opening your heart to volunteer with ASC. We look forward to meeting with you.