



## Value your volunteer

Volunteers are the key to everything we do as an organisation, so we need to make sure that new volunteers are welcomed and supported. Making sure that existing volunteers feel valued is also key to retaining them and in turn, to retaining girls. This section contains lots of ideas for keeping all of our volunteers, including young leaders, happy and in guiding.

### Key Search Terms:

- Volunteer
- Warm Welcome • Flexible

Information online: *Building your team, Commissioners' checklist, Recruiting and retaining volunteers, Volunteer roles in guiding.*

4

[www.girlguiding-midlands.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding-midlands.org.uk)

# Value your volunteer

## Young leaders

Young leaders are our leaders of the future. They need access to training and development opportunities and support networks to help them develop and thrive.

Talk to young leaders about their future role, what section do they want to work with? What unit role would they be happiest in? Avoid making assumptions based on their current unit.

Young leaders' lives change significantly as they move through their study and on to university or working life. If they move away, help them by finding units in their new local area with whom to link up. You can do this on GO by using the Transfer tab and inserting the postcode of the new area above the map to expand the search. Something familiar may be a comfort as they adjust to their new independent world so stay in touch while they're away and include them in their former unit on their return for holidays.

Set up a young leader network. Hold half-termly meetings for young leaders to get to know each other, share ideas and support each other, and to find out about opportunities open to them.



# Value your volunteer

## New volunteers

To grow guiding we need more volunteers. Being a new volunteer can be an overwhelming and daunting experience, so here are a few tips to help you maximise your new volunteers' potential:

- Introduce each volunteer to several people so that they have a support network in place from the start and different personalities to get to know. Chose people who can provide support across different aspects of Girlguiding.
- Encourage volunteers to visit different units and sections so that they can identify the role, section and unit that best suits them.
- Stay in touch with your new volunteers. It may be that they haven't settled into a particular unit, so you may need to help them to find one that suits them better. Being a familiar point of contact will help them to feel comfortable reaching out for support.
- Not all new volunteers will want to be or are ready to be leaders straight away. They may want to help in the background, or on an ad-hoc basis. Perhaps they can help with fundraising, unit administration or look after the unit's accounts (see Roles in units card).



4

## Value your volunteer

- District meetings can be intimidating places. Offer to take your volunteer to their first meeting, introduce them and explain the agenda items as you go through, avoiding jargon as far as possible or being careful to explain it. Perhaps find a leader who could bring them next time.
- Talk about training opportunities. Some people think they lack the skills and don't have the confidence to be a leader. However with a good mentor, training and support over time they may surprise themselves.
- Take time to talk about the local and wider structure of Girlguiding. When your volunteer has chosen the role that they feel best suits what they're looking for, request a mentor. Keep in touch with your volunteer to make sure that the mentor relationship is working well. If in doubt, seek advice.
- You may find a buddy system beneficial for your volunteers. Matching people with similar ages and backgrounds may be a starting point. For example, matching two volunteers who both have young children, or are both in university, may give them a common understanding and perspective.



4

## Value your volunteer

### Division and district teams

Share the load by breaking district and division roles into tasks and dividing the tasks. For example, have a unit visitor, a minutes' writer, or an events team. This activity may make roles such as that of commissioner more achievable.

Have social events to help build relationships within districts and divisions, building up support networks for volunteers and for you.

### District meetings

Make a note of key discussion points from division meetings and email them to leaders prior to the meeting. This gives them time to develop their views, allows them the option to send in their thoughts if they can't be there, and it may reduce meeting times!

Consider including leaders who can't physically attend by using Skype.

Reduce the meeting time to encourage more to attend.

Vary meeting days and venues to make it as fair as possible for all to attend.



# Value your volunteer

## Thank you

Encourage leaders in your area to nominate people for thanks and recognition, but also think about how leaders in your district are acknowledged more informally for their contributions and dedication to the organisation.

You can thank volunteers for their hard work in many ways: the giving of a small gift; going to their unit to say thank you; an afternoon tea, perhaps with a wall made from good things that have been said about them; a surprise party, or by sending out Christmas, World Thinking Day or National Volunteer Week cards.

## Awards

Find out what awards are available nationally, regionally and locally and what the criteria is for each award.

Present service awards in a special way, perhaps at an event, or at their unit meeting in front of their girls. You should try to include them in this decision if possible.

Nominate people for your own county and division awards, as well as for the region Chief Commissioner Award for services at the unit level. Share the process with your local area when nominations are requested each year.



# Value your volunteer

## Roles in units

Encourage leaders to share the load, create a team and use everyone's strengths and experience to reach their unit's full potential. There may be other leaders, unit helpers or parents with skills they would be willing to share, for example, accounts, risk assessments, administration, or fundraising. You can look online at *Roles working with girls for guidance (see the PR and Marketing section for ideas)*.

As life changes and brings new challenges for our volunteers, it's important to recognise what they're able and willing to do. Recognise when a change is needed and support this transition so that volunteers stay with us.

Encourage volunteers and existing leaders to visit other units to see what works for them and to share best practice.



4

# Value your volunteer

## Opportunities

There are many opportunities in Girlguiding, from social events to international camps. Getting involved with opportunities locally and further afield enables you and fellow volunteers to get the most out of guiding.

Read national, regional, county and local newsletters to find out about all the different opportunities available and how you can get involved.

Help keep other volunteers up-to-date with opportunities, particularly new volunteers and young leaders.

Try flexible guiding. If leaders and girls are struggling to commit to a weekday night, try running a unit that meets monthly at the weekend for a few hours. This could enable girls who share time between parents in different places and leaders who work till late on weekdays to take part in Girlguiding. In high-demand areas, you could even consider running parallel units to reduce waiting lists and to ensure all girls get the same opportunities. For example, leaders could hold weekday meetings for one unit in the first week and weekend meetings for another unit in the second week using similar programmes but girls need to be involved in decision-making.

You could also encourage leaders to create unit teams including leaders who are available on an ad-hoc basis to step in to cover illness but who may not wish to run their own unit every week, for example students who are home in longer holidays or local Trefoil members. You never know when an extra pair of hands might come in handy!

[www.girlguiding-midlands.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding-midlands.org.uk)

