

Volunteer for your Pre-school Committee

Why volunteer?

Is your child registered at a pre-school charity run by a parent committee? If so –

- Are you interested in learning new skills?
- Would you like to meet new people?
- Would you like to share your skills, time and ideas with others?
- Have you ever wanted to improve the running of your child's setting?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, the team at your child's pre-school would love to hear from you.

The benefits

Research shows clear benefits for children when parents become actively involved in their child's learning and development from an early age. Parental involvement has been recognised by the Government as being key to a child's successful development too.

Volunteering for your pre-school's parent-run committee offers an ideal opportunity for you to become more actively and practically involved in this aspect of your child's life. It will also make a real difference to how your setting is managed.

You will personally benefit from this experience by meeting with other parents, updating existing skills and learning new ones, as well as putting something positive back into your local community.

There are also long-term benefits should you choose to undertake further training or decide to return to full-time, paid work in the future.

Opportunities

Working as part of a pre-school committee is all about opportunities – for the pre-school, but also for yourself – and from small beginnings, you could find yourself taking a new direction in life.

What do parents think?

Some parents share their personal experiences of volunteering for their child's pre-school committee.

"I moved to a new area where I did not know anyone. My oldest daughter was attending school and I took my youngest daughter to the local parent and toddler group. I met people and then got involved with running the parent and toddler group, then St Columba's Church Playgroup. I then started doing some work for the Birmingham branch of the Alliance. The rest, as they say, is history... From my experience in pre-schools/playgroups I learnt that it was a fantastic time, not only for my daughter but it gave me so much. New friends, a support system, self-confidence and a route back into a whole new career."

Carole DaCosta, Head of Early Years in Walsall

"My experience at the local playgroup, as a dad, a helper and a committee member, sharpened my sense of the huge potential of parents to enhance the development of their own and their community's children... It was a vital part of our lives that enabled us and our children to move forward with confidence, with friends with whom we still keep in touch, after 25 years."

David Grugeon, Bedfordshire County Councillor

"It was in 1971 that I first went to Reedley Road Playgroup, where I found friendship, support and a different way of enjoying my young family. Life revolved around play dough recipes, glue, collage, finger painting and activity circuits. I was soon involved as a rota mum, regular helper and committee member. There were always new parents becoming involved. My experience working actively with young families and local communities ...undoubtedly helped me."

Sandra Fielding, former Head of Strategy and Policy, Bedfordshire Social Services

What is involved?

Your child's pre-school committee will be happy to tell you in more detail about how you can become involved. There are lots of ways you can contribute to the committee and you can choose to give as much or as little time as you can spare. The good thing is you don't need any experience to make a difference.

Your committee members are the charity trustees of the pre-school and together they are responsible for the overall management and smooth-running of the setting. This can mean anything from organising a summer fundraising event to negotiating with a landlord over the terms of a lease.

Your committee is the employer of staff in the pre-school so has overall responsibility for recruiting, training and developing staff, paying their salaries, and managing their contracts of employment.

Your committee also has responsibility for things like developing a business plan, managing the daily accounts and working with staff to ensure the setting follows health and safety, risk assessment, insurance and first aid guidance and procedures.

What you can choose to do

A lot of the work committees do is fun – building new partnerships with other parents and professionals, coming up with new fundraising ideas, getting exciting plans off the ground - but there are some regular jobs too.

The three main roles on the committee are Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. You may find the list below helpful as it explains briefly what each role does, along with some duties that are common to all committee members. The tasks can be shared between different parents, so all the work need not fall on any one person. Your pre-school may even have a budget for specific tasks to be done by paid professionals, for example the monthly accounts. However, overall responsibility for this work rests with the committee.

Chairperson

- Represents and acts as a spokesperson for the pre-school.
- Chairs meetings of the charity; including committee meetings, open meetings and general meetings, such as the Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- Sets the agenda for meetings together with the Secretary.
- Co-ordinates the work of the committee to ensure effective administration.

- Acts as the 'Nominated Person' for Ofsted purposes.
- Line manages the Manager of the setting.
- Supports other committee members and authorises the work of the Treasurer.

Treasurer

- Ensures the committee are aware of the financial position of the charity, providing an up-to-date written statement of accounts at committee meetings.
- Ensures that all committee members are aware of their financial responsibilities and comply with the charity's finance procedures.
- Ensures that the committee apply the charity's resources exclusively in pursuance of its charitable objectives.
- Presents accounts to the members at the AGM.
- Manages the charity's bank account, updating the list of signatories as necessary.
- Prepares in advance an annual budget, as agreed by the committee, and monitors it regularly.
- Issue bills and receipts on behalf of the charity and ensures that all necessary payments are made promptly.
- Ensures that the charity's financial records are maintained accurately and updated on a timely basis.
- Manages staff payroll and volunteers' expenses.
- Arranges for the accounts to be checked annually and independently.
- Reviews and returns any other financial reports as necessary.

Secretary

- Responds punctually to all correspondence; keeping proper records.
- Organises all meetings including booking venues, arranging refreshments, liaising with attendees to ensure they are informed etc.
- Draws up meeting agendas and circulates to all attendees punctually.
- Takes accurate minutes during meetings, types up and sends them out to all attendees in a timely manner.
- Ensures all office filing is kept up-to-date.
- Supports all committee and staff members, by ensuring the administrative function is efficient.

Shared responsibilities for all committee members

- Act in the best interests of the charity; promoting its values and working to achieve its charitable objectives.
- Work as part of a team with the other trustees; whilst bringing their own ideas, perspectives and experiences to the committee.
- Regularly attend committee meetings and contribute to the effective management of the charity.
- Read committee papers and contribute to the decision-making process of the committee.
- Work with the Treasurer to set priorities for the budget.
- Undertake Ofsted suitability checks as required.
- Use safe recruitment procedures and work to Early Years Foundation Stage requirements to employ suitable adults to work with the children.
- Employ a Manager to act as the person in charge of the early years provision; supporting them to successfully manage the childcare provision and ensure that the Early Years Foundation Stage and Ofsted registration requirements are met.
- Ensure all committee members and staff have clearly identified roles and responsibilities.
- Submit the annual update, or annual return and accounts, to the Charity Commission.

- Ensure that the charity complies with the rules in its constitution, charity law, and other relevant regulations that govern the work of the charity.

Support

If you decide to volunteer on the committee, there is a lot of help available to you. Many areas in England have Pre-school Development Workers to support you and your pre-school committee. They are happy to give on-going advice about any aspect of the work of your committee. The Pre-school Learning Alliance also run a programme of *Managing Effective Settings* workshops, aimed specifically at supporting pre-school committees.

We are fully committed to doing what we can to increase the participation of volunteers in pre-school committees, and have a volunteer strategy that helps us to support all parents involved with running committees by sharing the latest best practice – particularly to support the recruitment, retention and training of committee members.

We provide a number of resources, including the *Managing Effective Settings* workshops mentioned above and various factsheets on different aspects of committee work.

Further information

If you would like specific information about how to get involved with your local pre-school committee, please contact the Chairperson or Manager of the group. Alternatively, you might like to talk to another parent who is already involved with the committee.

The Pre-school Learning Alliance is a leading educational charity specialising in the early years. We provide practical support to over 15,000 early years settings and make a positive contribution to the care and education of over 800,000 young children and their families each year. We actively involve parents and families in all aspects of our work.

Our products and services include specialist publications, childcare services, quality assurance, campaigning, research, training and family programmes. We also offer a range of independent professional information, advice, support and guidance tailored especially to meet the needs of young children and their families, students, early years practitioners and professionals.

If you would like to find out more about the work of the Alliance, please do get in touch.

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