

7 Best Practices to Support Community Volunteers

Community Volunteers are Often the First to Identify Children at Risk and Provide Immediate Support



1 Get to Know the Community

There are always natural helpers in a community - men, women, or youth - who help children and their families. Seek out the community's natural helpers, and spend time listening to them about how they are protecting children.

2 Work With the Community to Select Volunteers

Include girls, boys, and young people in the process of identifying and selecting volunteers. Invite caregivers, community groups and leaders, and marginalized community members into the process. When selecting volunteers, be sure to prioritize trusted people who have communication and interpersonal skills.

3 Think Carefully How to Work Together with Volunteers

Talk to different groups (including children and their caregivers) and the volunteers themselves about the tasks they could take on and the time they have to give. Keep in mind that volunteers are also members of a vulnerable community and will need time for their families and for economic activities.

If a community member is doing full-time work, and expected to take responsibilities for child protection case management, they are no longer a “volunteer,” and should be considered a caseworker. They must be trained, provided supportive supervision and paid a fair wage.

4 Support Ongoing Learning with Volunteers

According to the tasks agreed with volunteers, develop a learning plan together. Child protection staff and volunteers should share learning according to complimentary expertise. Ensure regular support, supervision and coaching to volunteers.

What can we, as child protection actors do to support volunteers?

5 Link Volunteers to the Child Protection Team

Incorporate volunteers as members of the child protection team, consider ways to manage the power dynamics between staff and volunteers. Involve them in decision making and team discussions, incorporating the valuable insight and knowledge community volunteers bring to the team. If volunteers support with identification or monitoring of cases, they must be continuously supported by a trained caseworker.

6 Ensure Adequate Resources for Volunteers to Be Successful

Child protection actors must have suitable funding for volunteer programming. This includes funds for ongoing training, coaching and supervision. If sustained funding is not available, child protection actors should carefully reconsider the recruitment of community members, and the need to avoid disrupting existing community mechanisms such as ‘natural helping’.

7 Prioritize Volunteer Safety and Well-being

Community volunteering can be risky. Make sure community volunteers are safe and protected. Set up regular dialogue groups to listen to volunteers, and encourage support circles where volunteers meet regularly to share knowledge and support each other. Hold regular ‘appreciation’ activities so volunteers know they are valued by the child protection organization and the community.