

Volunteer Buddy Role Description

Reports to: **Courses Coordinator**

On courses reports to the Group Leader

Purpose

At Back Up we understand that spinal cord injury can be devastating but we believe it needn't prevent anyone from getting the most out of life. The aim of the role is to help all group members to have a positive experience on a course, by assisting, encouraging, listening to and supporting participants, group leaders and nurses/PAs alike. Buddies are not matched up with individuals but are there to support the whole group.

Our values

Volunteering with Back Up, as with everything we do, takes place in the context of our values:

- We embrace challenge
- We have fun
- We build inclusive communities
- We are ambitious for each other

Key tasks

- **Contribute to a positive atmosphere/experience with every person and across the whole group**
 - Spending time getting to know all members of the group
 - Being aware of other group members and sensitively/respectfully building links with all especially those who may be quieter or more hesitant, to enable them to be involved
 - Providing support and encouragement to all group members including spinal cord injured (SCI) participants and volunteers
 - Being part of the group and participating in general activities. You, like all group members, are there to get involved, learn, stretch yourself, and have fun!
 - Listening to and learning from others
 - Working as part of a team – work together with others, communicate, help out and muck in generally, to help things run smoothly on the course
 - Participate in course activities including social times
- **Practical assistance to spinal cord injured participants**
 - Pushing wheelchair users when requested/needed e.g. on difficult terrain/slopes
 - Supporting SCI participants during wheelchair skills training sessions
 - Helping individuals with items of outer clothing or at mealtimes if needed

- Helping SCI participants get ready for the day if needed, eg: pack their bag for them under their direction
- Assist wheelchair users transferring into and out of vehicles and equipment (with support from other course volunteers)
- Encouraging people to try new things with as minimal help as possible – where appropriate
- **General practical assistance to help a course run smoothly**
 - Looking after your own health & safety and wellbeing and that of others, especially in relation to manual handling
 - Sort out, prepare, put away or move equipment and luggage as required
 - Helping to prepare for or clear up after activities, mealtimes etc
 - Generally, communicate with and be aware of the needs of participants, the care team, group leaders and other volunteers, and be as helpful as possible

Buddies must not carry out or assist SCI participants with any personal or medical care as they are not trained to do this.

This includes:

- Anything to do with bowel or bladder management
- Skin care management, e.g. applying creams or dressings
- Giving medication
- Shaving
- Washing
- Helping SCI participants to turn during the night
- **Assisting a participant with moving and handling without the appropriate supervision and support from a trained group member (care team volunteers) or the course instructors. You should NEVER assist an individual on your own.**

The Person

- Able to empathise with others – patient, sensitive and considerate
- Encouraging, supportive and perceptive
- Excellent interpersonal skills including communication and listening
- Friendly, approachable and enthusiastic with a good sense of humour
- Respectful and able to keep information confidential where applicable
- Positive and flexible
- Able to use personal experience in a helpful way for others
- A confident and responsible team player
- Good time-keeping, flexible and adaptable

Time Commitment

- Attending Back Up courses when available

Support and opportunities provided

- Agreed expenses paid by Back Up
- Support and guidance from Courses staff team
- The chance to work as part of a dynamic team and to have a real impact on course attendees at an early stage, and to link them in with a lifelong network of support.
- Progression to other volunteering roles and fundraising opportunities

Things to consider

As courses progress, some participants may talk openly about how they have sustained their injuries and the effect that it has on their lives, this is a sensitive and personal issue. Empathy and a listening ear are so important. Please respect though that not all participants will want to share this information so be mindful of questions you ask. The course is a learning experience for all; we want you to be empowered and help empower others. We hope that you will feel you have developed yourself through volunteering with us. You will be very tired by the end of the course so make sure you plan in some rest time.

Back Up's ethos of integration

You will be supporting people within Back Up's ethos of integration – all group members are unique but equal – everybody including yourself will be contributing, participating, included in activities, and learning new things. If you are new to supporting people with disabilities, you may find it helpful to bear in mind some of these tips:

- Do not underestimate the intelligence or ability of the person you are talking to
- Do not assume that all participants require assistance. Ask if they need a hand or wait to be asked.
- When assisting someone, ask them how best to do this. They are the best person to know how they need to be assisted
- Always address the participant, not the PA they are with
- Be aware of personal needs and preferred ways of communicating and working and respect their requirements.
- Try and work around an issue, rather than avoiding it, so that everyone can be included in activities
- Don't interrupt, correct, speak for the person or be tempted to finish sentences off for them

- A wheelchair should be viewed as part of the user's body space. Keep an appropriate distance and never use the chair as something to lean on
- It is perfectly acceptable to offer to help guide the wheelchair or negotiate obstacles such as doors. But only push someone's chair if they have said that it is OK for you to do so
- Only assist with moving and handling tasks where you are clear on how to do it safely (pay careful attention in the first night briefing, and follow instructions from the person, the trained care team, activity instructors and group leaders).