RISK INFORMATION - CHURCHES VOLUNTEER WORKERS

> The information provided in this paper is intended to assist church staff in the critical process of engaging volunteer workers to carry out defined tasks/roles within a church community at the same time minimising the consequences of any risks that might arise.

Not all voluntary involvement or participation within in a church is considered to be voluntary work. The essential components of voluntary work are that it is authorised by and under the control of the church organisation in the form of its official representatives, such as a pastor or a member of the governing body (Eldership, Diaconate or Council) or an employed member of staff. Examples of voluntary workers might be a church cleaner or an office worker performing administrative functions. Examples of participation that does not constitute voluntary work might be reading the Bible in a worship service or attending a men's ministry function.

Develop church-wide Volunteer Management Policies and Procedures. For examples of possible policy wording, refer to the Policy Bank forming part of the Our Community website (www.ourcommunity.com.au/).

The engagement of volunteer workers to assist in delivery of services in a church environment can introduce risks of 2 types: risks caused by volunteers or risks affecting volunteers. To minimise the likelihood and consequences of both risk types, *activity risk assessments* should be undertaken to identify what could go wrong and to identify appropriate risk mitigation measures (refer to separate Churches Activity Risk Assessment Tool (www.baptistinsurance.com.au/Risk-Management-For-Baptist-Churches) .

Volunteers should be asked to register their interest by completing a personal details form, which includes assertions about any relevant convictions, disqualifications etc.

Gather information from volunteers relevant to the role(s) they will undertake, e.g. details of driving qualifications and history.

Police and Working With Children (WWC) checking should be completed before appointing volunteers to new roles - note that WWC checks are required for anyone who has a role with children. Ensure volunteers working in roles that do not require WWC are properly screened prior to taking on child focused volunteer roles.

In many respects volunteers should be treated the same as employees:

☐ All volunteer roles should have written task or Job Descriptions (these will help establish clear expectations of what is required by when and to what standard)

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- ☐ A standard recruitment and selection process should be adopted for new volunteers and for volunteers changing from one role to another
- ☐ References should be checked prior to appointment, e.g. background checks, reference checks
- ☐ Assess the capacity of each volunteer for any new task to be undertaken, e.g. skills, experience, strength, etc.
- ☐ Induction and orientation - church polices relating to volunteers, inc. WHS
- ☐ New longer term volunteer worker roles should have probationary periods followed by a formal appraisal process, prior to the roles being confirmed
- ☐ Volunteers should be provided with training specific to the role they will undertake
- ☐ All volunteers must be adequately supervised (this may need to be more direct than for employees)
- ☐ The performance of volunteer workers should be evaluated and feedback provided
- ☐ Any legitimate work related expenses incurred by volunteers should be reimbursed (all expenses should be approved in advance prior to being incurred)

Volunteer workers will be subject to some of the same risks as paid employees; make sure that volunteers are aware of church policies in relation to each of these topics:

- ☐ Discrimination
- ☐ Harassment, Bullying, etc.
- ☐ Privacy
- ☐ Health & safety (OHS/WHS) exposures - treat them as you would treat employees, educate volunteers in terms of church WHS policy, conduct specific activity risk assessment to identify things that could go wrong (e.g. fall off a ladder), tell them of their rights and responsibilities
- ☐ Conflict and its resolution
- ☐ Improper handling of copyright material

The Volunteer Health and Safety handbook published by WorkSafe Victoria contains examples of common injuries and illnesses associated with common volunteer activities.

Ensure that volunteers understand their responsibility to report any suspicions that they might have about the activities of others - complaint and whistle-blower policies apply to them as well.

Promptly investigate any allegations of wrongdoing by volunteers, particularly if engaged in child or vulnerable adult focused work. Ensure "natural justice" principles are not compromised.

Make sure that appropriate insurance cover is in place for voluntary workers. This can include: personal accident insurance; directors and officers insurance (not-for-profit directors are usually

volunteers); public liability insurance (includes volunteer coverage); professional indemnity insurance for where advice is given. Note that these covers are part of the standard insurance suite provided to churches by the Baptist Insurance Services. BIS insurance does not provide cover for minors under the age of 12 or older workers who have exceeded 85 years of age.

Under harmonised WHS legislation, obligations in relation to creating and maintaining a safe workplace apply equally to paid and unpaid (i.e. volunteer) workers. For jurisdictions not part of the harmonised legal approach (Victoria and Western Australia) it is recommended that churches treat volunteer workers the same as paid workers for Health and Safety purposes.

Volunteering Australia (http://volunteeringaustralia.org/) provides an extensive range of resources to help in the management of volunteers including risk management.

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References

Volunteering Australia website, http://volunteeringaustralia.org/

Baptist Insurance Services, "Working with Volunteers", ABIS news July 2012, http://www.baptistinsurance.com.au/sites/default/files/BIS%20Newsletter%20July%202012.pdf

WorkSafe Victoria, "A handbook for community service organisations - volunteer health and safety", October 2000, http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/forms-and-publications/forms-and-publications/a-handbook-for-community-service-organisations-volunteer-health-and-safety

Volunteering Australia, "Running the Risk? Risk Management tool for Volunteering Involving Organisations", 2003, http://volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1377053059VAManagersrunningtherisk.pdf

Our Community Policy Bank, "Volunteer Management Policy", http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/boards/boards_article.jsp?articleId=1453

Volunteering Australia, National Volunteer Skills Centre, "Model Code of Practice for Organisations Involving Volunteer Staff", June 2005, http://volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Model-Code-June-2005.pdf

State Government Volunteer resources:

Western Australia   http://wa.gov.au/information-about/jobs-economy/volunteers

South Australia http://www.ofv.sa.gov.au/

Queensland   http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/communityservices/volunteering

New South Wales http://www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au/

Victoria http://www.volunteer.vic.gov.au/

Queensland University of Technology, QUT Wiki, "Information for Committee Members and Volunteers", https://wiki.qut.edu.au/display/CPNS/Information+for+Committee+Members+and+Volunteers