

If you get Disability Benefits

There are **no rules** to stop you being a volunteer while getting benefits like **Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)**, Universal Credit while sick, or **Personal Independence Payment (PIP)**, Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Attendance Allowance (AA).

However, **volunteering can sometimes affect your claim.**

Before you start any voluntary work, look carefully at the **decision letter** about your disability benefit. Check that you won't be doing something as a volunteer that you **scored points** for *not* being able to do!

Remember that you must tell DWP about any **changes in your circumstances** - especially improvements in your health.

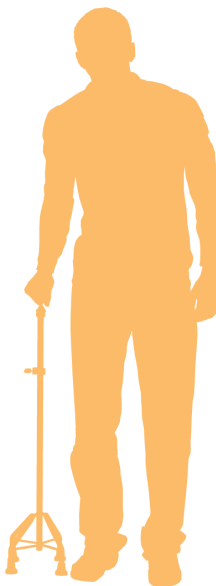
Example

Malcolm got PIP at the enhanced rate for mobility, because he could not reliably walk more than 20m.

He and a group of friends started volunteering as lock-keepers on the local canal.

The DWP find out about this when the local paper write a story about them.

Malcolm's PIP is stopped and he is investigated for benefit fraud because the DWP assume he must be doing a lot of walking in this voluntary role.



If **mental health** is the reason you get your benefit, volunteering where you have to meet people you don't know well may raise questions about the points you score.

Example

Janet is bipolar. At her ESA medical, Janet mentions she has been volunteering at a community centre. This is seen as evidence Janet can cope with change and socialise, so she scores no points for these activities.

The real picture is more complicated and Janet successfully appeals the decision.

Thinking of Volunteering?

We hope you won't be put off volunteering by this leaflet, but **get advice** before taking on any new commitments, or if you are concerned that what you already do might cause a problem. If you can explain how your volunteering fits around any health problems or work-search commitments, you should not lose your benefits.

For more information go to www.citizensadvice.org.uk or contact our **Citizens Advice Helpline: 0800 144 8848**



Potteries Gold is a **Citizens Advice Staffordshire North & Stoke-on-Trent** project to help people in Stoke-on-Trent cope with changes to the benefit system www.snsCab.org.uk/about-us/potteries-gold
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Benefits for Volunteers

Changes of Circumstances No 3



Staffordshire North & Stoke-on-Trent

Can I Volunteer?

You might want to volunteer for many reasons - to help a cause you care about, to make new friends, learn new skills, build your confidence or to improve your job prospects. Before you commit to anything, think about how any benefits you claim might be affected.

Benefits that are not affected

Some benefits aren't affected by volunteering, for example:

- State Retirement Pension
- Bereavement Support Payments
- Child Benefit

If you don't have to **look for work** or **prove you have health problems** to get your benefits, there should be no problem volunteering for anything.

Example

Gurmit gets State Retirement Pension, Pension Credit and Housing Benefit.

He volunteers as an adviser with Citizens Advice, who pay his travelling expenses to their office.

This does not affect his benefits at all.



If you have to look for work

If you get **Jobseeker's Allowance** or **Universal Credit** as a jobseeker there are rules about volunteering .

Your Work Coach can count some of the hours you spend volunteering as **time looking for work** under your Claimant Commitment, if they accept that volunteering will help you find paid work.



With your Work Coach's agreement, **up to half of your work-search time** can be replaced by volunteering.

Example

Pamela is a part-time carer for her father. She is also a jobseeker. Her Claimant Commitment states she must spend **20 hours a week** looking for work.

Pamela volunteers at her local foodbank for 15 hours per week. Her Work Coach accepts this is giving her skills that make her more employable. **10 hours of volunteering** can be counted as time spent meeting her **Claimant Commitment**.

She will still have to spend at least 10 hours per week carrying out other work-search activities.

If your work coach is not happy that your volunteering is improving your work prospects, there could be problems.

Example

Pete spends two days per week doing voluntary work in a local country park. He has been volunteering for six months.

His Work Coach thinks Pete's volunteering is not helping him to find work, so insists Pete spends a full **35 hours on work-search activity** every week, in addition to doing his voluntary job.

Pete risks being **sanctioned** if his voluntary work gets in the way of him finding paid work.

'Notional Income'

Volunteer's expenses are ignored as income but, if the DWP think you should be getting a wage for what you are doing, they can treat you as having **notional income**.



This is not likely to happen if you volunteer with a recognised charity.

You can appeal against this decision.

What if I am offered a Job?

Usually, you have to take up paid work at once, but the Jobcentre can allow you up to a week if you cannot start straight away due to volunteering commitments.