



NEWS RELEASE

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Voluntary Work Option benefits jobseekers and organisations helping communities - Hanafin

“Community and voluntary groups can benefit greatly from the skills and experience of jobseekers who can volunteer their services and retain their entitlements while remaining available for and genuinely seeking work” said Mary Hanafin T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs who was outlining details of the **Voluntary Work Option** scheme.

Minister Hanafin said that **“there are many local and national organisations which can use the valuable skills and experience of men and women who are willing to help out. For the jobseekers concerned the voluntary work can help them keep their skills up to date, give them valuable experience as well as make new contacts which can help them in their on-going search for paid work.”**

In Department of Social and Family Affairs offices around the country, regular enquiries are made by jobseekers and groups about who and what is covered by the **Voluntary Work Option** – the aim is twofold:

- to encourage voluntary organisations to involve jobseekers to the greatest extent possible in their existing activities by creating new opportunities for voluntary work,
- to inform jobseekers of their freedom to involve themselves in voluntary work and to encourage them to do so.

Examples of voluntary work in which jobseekers may engage include helping the sick, older people or people with a disability or assisting youth clubs, church groups, sports groups, cultural organisations or local resident associations.

One such organisation is Special Olympics Ireland. This year the Special Olympic National Games are being held in Limerick in June 2010. The organising group will need 3,500 volunteers to plan, organise and run the games and are planning to hold recruitment events during February at various locations in the Limerick/Clare area. However, jobseekers from any part of the country may volunteer.

Minister Hanafin said **“jobseekers who avail of this opportunity to support the Special Olympics by volunteering their services may continue to be entitled to Jobseeker’s Benefit or Allowance provided that, in engaging in the voluntary work, the customer continues to satisfy the statutory conditions of being available for and genuinely seeking work.”**



Applying for the Voluntary Work Option

The jobseeker or the voluntary organisation/group involved should request an application form VW 1 from their Social Welfare Local Office. The completed application form should be sent to the Local Office and a Deciding Officer will determine whether the customer may take up the work in question without affecting entitlement to the jobseeker's payment.

In considering all applications under the Voluntary Work Option, a Deciding Officer of the Department of Social and Family Affairs has to determine whether the work concerned is voluntary within the meaning of the scheme and will have to be satisfied that the customer is available to take up employment, if offered it, and that genuine efforts are being made to secure employment. This applies whether the voluntary work is full or part-time. Some of the factors to be taken into account would include:

- the type of work involved,
- the aims and standing of the voluntary body,
- the weekly hours worked, and
- the amount of any payment received by way of out-of-pocket expenses.

The voluntary work would normally involve only a few hours a day or a few days a week but full-time involvement in voluntary activities would not necessarily be ruled out. However, there should be no implication of job replacement or cheap labour. Any reimbursement should generally be limited to out-of-pocket expenses such as travelling expenses.

More information is available on www.welfare.ie or at the following hyperlink
<http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Pages/JobseekersVoluntaryWorkOption.aspx>

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