

DIAS Volunteers



Handbook And Working Practice

Improving outcomes for children and young people by empowering them and their parents/ carers to take an active and informed role in their education.

Welcome to Devon Information Advice and Support

We are delighted that you have chosen to join our team as a volunteer and we hope you find your work with us to be rewarding, interesting and (sometimes!) challenging.

This handbook is designed to provide you with information and guidance regarding your role as a DIAS Volunteer. It looks at best practice and administrative requirements, as well as covering some of the challenges you may possibly encounter. We have tried to cover all angles but please do let us know if there are any other topics you feel it would be helpful for us to include. We are open to your suggestions.

Volunteers join us for all sorts of reasons – you might want to learn and develop new skills, work with new people, boost your CV credentials or make a difference in your own community. Whatever your reasons, we aim to support you to get the best out of this volunteering opportunity.

As you know, there are many ways you can support our work, from liaising directly with parents to attending networking meetings and from representing us at events to doing research. So please let us know which areas interest you the most so we can work better together.

The Devon Information Advice and Support comprises a small team which is based at Great Moor House in Sowton, Exeter.

Please remember that we are always happy to answer any of your questions or address any concerns, so do not hesitate to contact us:

Telephone: 01392 383080

email: devonias@devon.gov.uk

We look forward to working with you

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[Appendix 6 Glossary & Useful Abbreviations](#)

Devon Information Advice and Support

Mission Vision and Values

Mission:

- To provide accurate and impartial support and information to parents/ carers whose children may have additional educational needs, and to young people who may have additional needs.
- To ensure that parents'/carers' and young people's views are heard and understood
- To make sure that parents/ carers and young people understand their roles, rights, and responsibilities
- To work with staff and governing bodies in schools and a range of other settings, as well as across the Local Authority and other agencies, to develop policies which are accessible to parents/ carers and young people and partnership working with parents/carers and young people.

Vision:

- To provide a high quality, impartial and confidential service to support children, young people, families and carers and empower parents/carers and young people to play an informed and active part in their child's or their own education.
- To contribute to embedding partnership working with parents/carers and young people across all schools, agencies and other settings through a programme of training and information exchange that focuses on the achievement of positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Values:

Quality: We will have an unswerving commitment to high quality.

Partnership: We can best achieve our goals through collaboration: we will work with parents/carers and partner organisations in a positive and impartial way to achieve positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Equity: We will champion the right of all parents/ carers and their children to equitable treatment from our service and any other service that they wish to access.

DIAS Volunteer

Description of Role

A DIAS Volunteer is a volunteer who is trained, DBS checked, supervised and supported by Devon Information Advice and Support (DIAS). As a DIAS Volunteer, you will understand the mission, vision and values of the service and agree to adhere to these standards. There are a range of roles that can be undertaken by volunteers; these will always need to be agreed and supported by a DIAS Officer.

Parent /Carer Support Role

The DIAS Volunteer role is that of a facilitator rather than a representative or advocate. Everything about the role should work towards encouraging parents/carers to see themselves as an important and valued partner in working with others to meet the needs of their children, or, in the case of young people, to meet their own needs.

This will be achieved by:

- Enabling parents to understand the importance of contributing their unique perspective on their child or enabling young people to contribute their own perspective on themselves
- Listening to parents' and young people's views and concerns
- Reading and interpreting documents about their child or in the case of young people, about themselves
- Discussing options and the consequences of choices
- Explaining the SEN process
- Encouraging parents/carers and young people to tackle areas of conflict
- Identifying the right person to talk to or meet with
- Support with preparing for meetings and supporting at meetings if requested
- Promoting the inclusion of the child's or young person's view

Supporting Young People Role

Some of our volunteers will work directly with young people. This will require particular skills and additional training may be needed to carry out this role. Whilst many of the tasks are similar to those involved in supporting parents, more preparation work with the young person and specific support/resources may be required in order to ensure that they can access and engage with the SEN process.

DIAS Representative Role

As a DIAS Volunteer you may act as a representative for Devon Information Advice and Support. You will need to be able to explain the range of services offered by DIAS and to be able to feedback information gathered to DIAS.

The types of representation may include:

- Attending network meetings for professionals to explain the work of DIAS and to raise the profile of the parent's or young person's views
- Visiting schools and school events to promote DIAS, providing information and publicity materials
- Visiting parent groups to explain the range of services offered by DIAS, to listen and feedback the views of parents to DIAS and to take initial information for referrals to DIAS
- Meeting with groups of young people to discuss the services available to them

Research, Administration and IT Roles

DIAS has a responsibility to provide or signpost up to date and relevant information to parents and professionals. As a DIAS Volunteer you may support this work by:

- Assisting with the website to ensure that information provided is current and accessible
- Researching information on specific subjects on request
- Collating, checking and cataloguing information stored in the DIAS library
- Assisting with the development of DIAS leaflets

Desirable Qualities

Skills

There are a number of skills that are useful for a DIAS Volunteer to have when working with parents, young people and other professionals. Volunteer training will provide a framework for developing and enhancing the following:

- Good communication skills – listening, speaking and writing
- Ability to relate to different types of people
- Ability to ask for help when needed

Qualities

DIAS volunteers come with a variety of background experiences. You will bring a range of qualities but the following are essential:

- Confident, patient, honest and reliable
- Able to respect confidentiality
- Flexible and motivated
- Free of any potential conflict of interest (impartial)
- Empathetic towards parents of children with special educational needs and young people with special educational needs
- Committed to developing positive relationships between parents and young people and schools and the LA
- A recognition of the importance of safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults

Knowledge

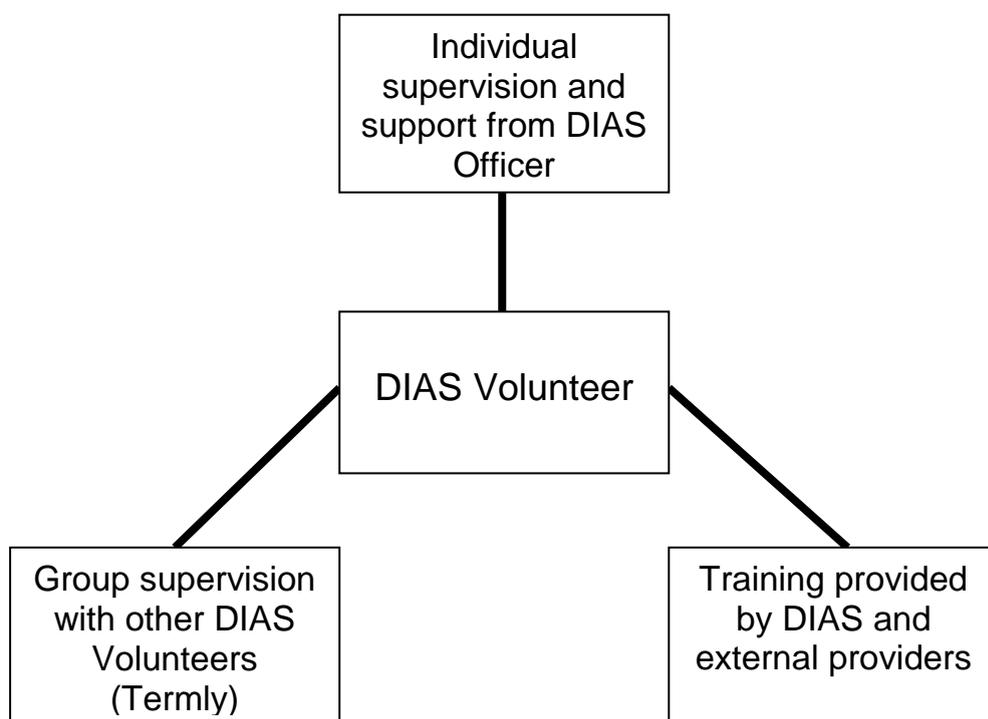
DIAS does not expect volunteers to be experts or to carry all the knowledge they need regarding special educational needs and disabilities. Volunteers participate in an initial training programme but we recognise that accumulating knowledge is a work in progress for all of us. By thinking about the following, you will help us to identify any additional training sessions that we may need to run:

- SEN process
- DIAS protocols
- Devon County Council SEN policies
- Local and national support agencies and groups

Our commitment to you

Support and supervision

At DIAS we recognise the importance of providing all staff and volunteers with support and regular supervision to enhance and monitor the quality of the support offered to parents/carers and young people and the training and information provided by the service. We are committed to providing appropriate levels of supervision to ensure that the service offered meets all the requirements to keep staff, volunteers and service users safe and supported.



How will I be supported?

Individual supervision sessions – termly face to face sessions and ongoing telephone and email support

Group supervision sessions – termly

Whole county DIAS Volunteer meeting and celebration - annually

What happens at supervision sessions?

You will have the opportunity to discuss what you have been doing, ask for advice, raise concerns, identify further training needs and share experiences. We will not give you roles that you do not feel comfortable with or are too complex. We will agree with you in advance the types of role that you are willing to be involved with, and will aim to provide opportunities to increase your skills and provide tasks that are rewarding, interesting and challenging.

- The DIAS Officer will talk to the families and professionals that you work with and seek feedback on how helpful they have found the support provided. They will then discuss this with you at your supervision and this will help you to identify areas where you feel you may require additional support or training.
- If you have not experienced supervision before and would like to ask more questions, let us know.

Training Opportunities

At your supervision session you will discuss with the DIAS Officer any areas where you feel that you need more knowledge and skills. The DIAS Officer will discuss with you what training you need and how it can be provided. This training may be at your individual session, in group sessions, at special events or training provided by other organisations.

Training

What kind of training will you do?

We will provide core elements that are essential for your role. In addition there will be ongoing training opportunities offered. Some of the training may be through online or personal study; for other external training sessions it may be necessary to travel.

Core elements

The 2 day Introduction for Volunteers will include the basics of:

- Safeguarding
- Record keeping
- Confidentiality and Impartiality
- SEN processes
- Working with Parents
- Understanding the range of DIAS Volunteer roles
- Representing DIAS Officers at meetings

Further training sessions will be included in termly group meetings on these and other agreed topics. Other specialist topics may be identified and offered at other times.

Expenses

We will monitor and reimburse reasonable agreed expenses incurred as a result of the DIAS Volunteer role.

Equal Opportunities

We are committed to ensuring that all volunteers and prospective volunteers are treated fairly on their relevant merits and abilities regardless of circumstance.

No user of our service, employee or volunteer should receive less favourable treatment because of: gender, colour, ethnic origin, age, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, or any other criterion not relevant to the point at issue.

We will take positive steps towards implementing and encouraging equal opportunities practices by monitoring and identifying any inequities in access, opportunity or participation and addressing our practice. If you consider equal opportunities are not being maintained or have ideas about how equal opportunities can be ensured please discuss these with your DIAS Officer.

Insurance

Volunteer insurance cover

Volunteers are covered under Public Liability insurance in the same way as Devon County Council employees.

The Public Liability insurance covers:

- employees and volunteers for any loss, damage or injury caused by the Council's negligence
- any loss, damage or injury caused as a result of the volunteer's actions if they have acted negligently

Volunteers have equal rights with paid staff regarding this cover. Further details of the Insurance Policy can be obtained on request.

However Volunteers are liable for any loss or damage to personal property that they use whilst volunteering for DIAS.

Motor insurance

It is the volunteer's own responsibility to ensure that any vehicle they use for the purpose of travel relating their role as a DIAS Volunteer has adequate and current insurance. In any accident you would need to claim from your personal car insurance.

Volunteers are advised to contact their insurers to inform them of the volunteer role. Volunteers are required to have a current, appropriate driving licence and to have motor vehicle tax for their vehicle.

If you will be using your own vehicle to carry out your volunteer role we will ask to see your insurance documents and driving licence.

Health and safety

We are committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of voluntary members as individuals and in groups.

We intend, as far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that the obligations of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and any other Health and Safety Legislation relevant to the work carried out by volunteers will be implemented and maintained by DIAS.

Our commitment to service users

Monitoring and evaluation

We have a statutory duty to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the support we offer, including that provided by our volunteers. The feedback we receive from children and young people, parents and carers, schools and professionals will help us support DIAS volunteers in their roles through individual supervision and their annual feedback meeting. It will also help us to improve our support to parents/carers and young people.

We use a questionnaire to assess whether the support given is:

- user-friendly
- effective
- relevant and accurate
- impartial

Monitoring and evaluation is undertaken by questionnaire* and telephone:

- When a parent/carer or young person has had telephone, email or face-to-face contact with a DIAS Volunteer we will sometimes contact the parent to ask for feedback on their experience of the service.
- When a parent /carer or young person has had support at a meeting from a DIAS Volunteer we may ask service users and the setting and/or professionals for feedback on the service.

*See appendix 4

Annual Feedback Meeting

The annual feedback meeting you have follows a set format. It is an opportunity to discuss what you have learnt and experienced during the year, identify any concerns and to identify areas that may need development. The discussion will inform an action plan for the coming year to include support, supervision, training needs and to set new challenges.

Report to the Reference Group

A Reference Group meets 3 times per year to monitor the delivery of Devon Information Advice and Support against the National IASS Quality Standards. This includes the provision of DIAS Volunteers. Nominated members of the Reference Group will include a DIAS Volunteer.

Reports will be given on volunteer training, activity and feedback from service users.

Your commitment to us

We have an expectation that as a DIAS Volunteer you will:

- Understand and follow the DIAS mission, vision and values statement
- Understand and follow the DIAS Volunteer code of conduct and working practice guidelines
- Familiarise yourself with and operate within the following policies:
 - Safeguarding
 - Lone working, including the safety protocol for home visits
 - Confidentiality, including data protection
 - Impartiality
 - Health and safety
 - Equal Opportunities
- Be willing to attend supervision and support meetings, training and team meetings as required
- Read and keep to the DIAS Volunteer Agreement (see appendix 5)
- Self-evaluate your role to identify training needs or gaps in knowledge
- Make risk assessments of your work environment to ensure your own and service users' safety
- Let us know if there is any change in your circumstances that could affect your role as a volunteer

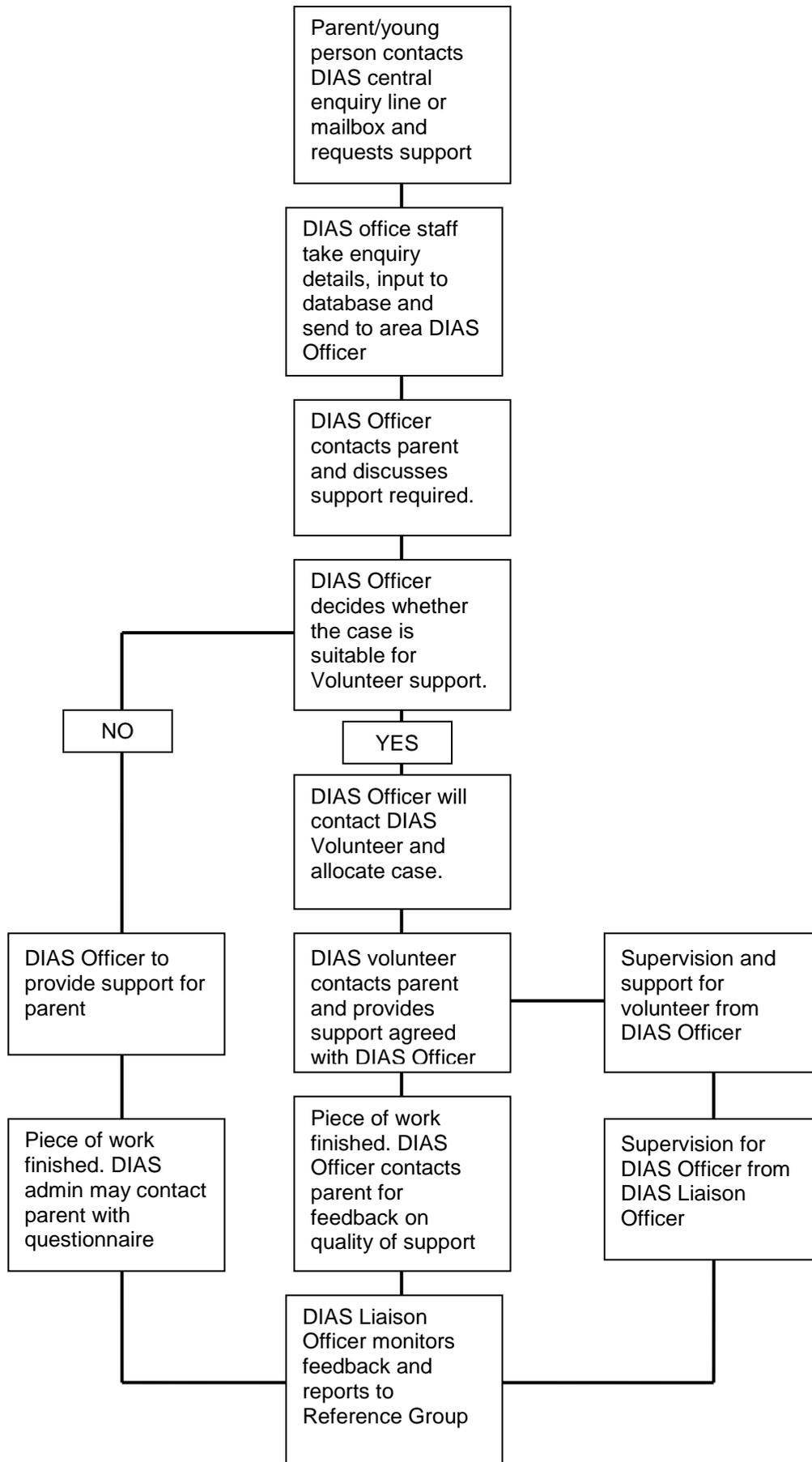
Policies

It is important for you to have a working knowledge of DIAS policies and that you adhere to these whilst you are representing DIAS. This handbook has a condensed version for volunteers (see the appendices). Full versions of our policies are available on the DIAS website:

<http://www.devonias.org.uk/policies-and-reports/>

Alternatively, paper copies are available from our office.

Volunteer Referral Process



Volunteering for DIAS in practice

Volunteer code of conduct and good practice guidelines

We greatly value the support of our team of trained volunteers. Their role strengthens the capacity of Devon Information Advice and Support to offer a high quality service to service users.

Volunteers may support DIAS in a number of different locations:

- Volunteering in the community
- Volunteering in our central office or from their own computer
- Volunteering at events
- Volunteering with parents or young people

This guidance will give you the information about practical arrangements for procedures in these roles.

Procedures

Practical arrangements when using a home computer

- Your DIAS Officer will email you information in a password protected attachment giving you a file number and initial to use to identify the case when emailing your record back to them. The password will be sent separately and must be stored securely.
- Any notes you wish to email to parents or professionals should be sent to your DIAS Officer, in a password protected document, who will forward them to the intended recipient in order to keep your own email address confidential.
- Ensure you have a password protected area in your computer to store all your DIAS information for the minimum time needed.
- Open and save DIAS emails to the password protected area immediately they are received.
- Ensure you either open DIAS sent items and save them to your password protected area or delete them and then delete them from your recycle bin.
- Adhere to the guidance in this document regarding our Record Keeping and Data Protection Act.

To set a password for a document: left click on Tools in the top of the toolbar, select options, this will open a window, select security, find 'password to open', write in password and click OK.

Practical arrangements for using a home telephone

- Always dial 141 before the parent's number to prevent service user identifying your home number.
- Ensure that you are speaking with the correct person, that it is a convenient time for them and that you are making calls within working hours, between 9am and 5pm weekdays.
- Use your 'introductory phrase' as a DIAS volunteer; explain confidentiality, impartiality and record keeping.
- Use your listening skills – be aware of safeguarding issues.
- Encourage the parent to seek the views and wishes of their child.
- Explain or offer to research options; compare potential action outcomes with the status quo.
- Remind parents that decisions are theirs.
- Summarise your discussion with any actions, responsibilities and timescales agreed.
- Ensure you have the parent's permission, if they have asked and you agree, to discuss their child with a specified professional or agency.
- Exit phrase – explain to parents they may contact you again if they wish by using our central telephone number or email.
- Type the agreed actions, responsibilities, timescales and permission and email as a password protected attachment to your DIAS Officer with the agreed file number – ensuring that there are no identifying details within the email or the summary bar.
- Use the excel sheet available from the office to make a list of each date you use your telephone as a DIAS Volunteer and every telephone number you use and how much time was spent. Save this on your computer in your password protected area.
- If you have a cost in making a call then please complete details of this on your claim form; date, length of call and charge per minute.
- Once the claim form period is finalised delete all records from your password protected area and from your deleted box.

When volunteering in the community for DIAS

- Carry your identity card and introductory letter.
- Carry copies of leaflet DIAS11 with you.
- Be prepared to introduce yourself at meetings and explain DIAS Impartiality and Confidentiality Policies, your role as a DIAS Volunteer role and DIAS monitoring and evaluation commitments.
- If you are approached for support by a family, DIAS must be informed on the same working day using the recognised route of referral; phone 01392 383080 with parent's name and telephone number.
- Email your DIAS Officer a brief summary of the event or contacts made, adhering to the record keeping guidelines.
- Smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs is not allowed at any time you are representing DIAS.

Practical arrangements for meetings with parents or young people

Once your DIAS Officer has agreed, you may meet with the parent or parents.

- Consider and agree an appropriate venue with the parent – a receipt for two hot or cold non-alcoholic drinks will be accepted for the use of a quiet café.
- Arrange meetings and visit times between 9am and 5pm on weekdays – be prompt or call if delayed. Allow no more than 90 minutes for the meeting.
- Occasionally it may not be appropriate to meet in a neutral venue. If following discussion with your DIAS Officer you decide to meet in the service user's home you must follow the DIAS lone working procedure for home visiting i.e. notify your DIAS Officer or the DIAS central number 01392 383080 of each visit, the venue, the contact details and your expected return time. You should never meet a parent or young person in your own home.
- If your plans change, let someone know.
- Notify DIAS staff when the home visit finishes. Someone from the DIAS office or your DIAS Officer will attempt to contact you if the deadline for calling following the end of the visit is not met. The DIAS office closes at 5pm.
- If no-one from the DIAS is available contact your nominated family member. Ensure DIAS has next of kin contact details.

Actions during and after a meeting with a parent or young person

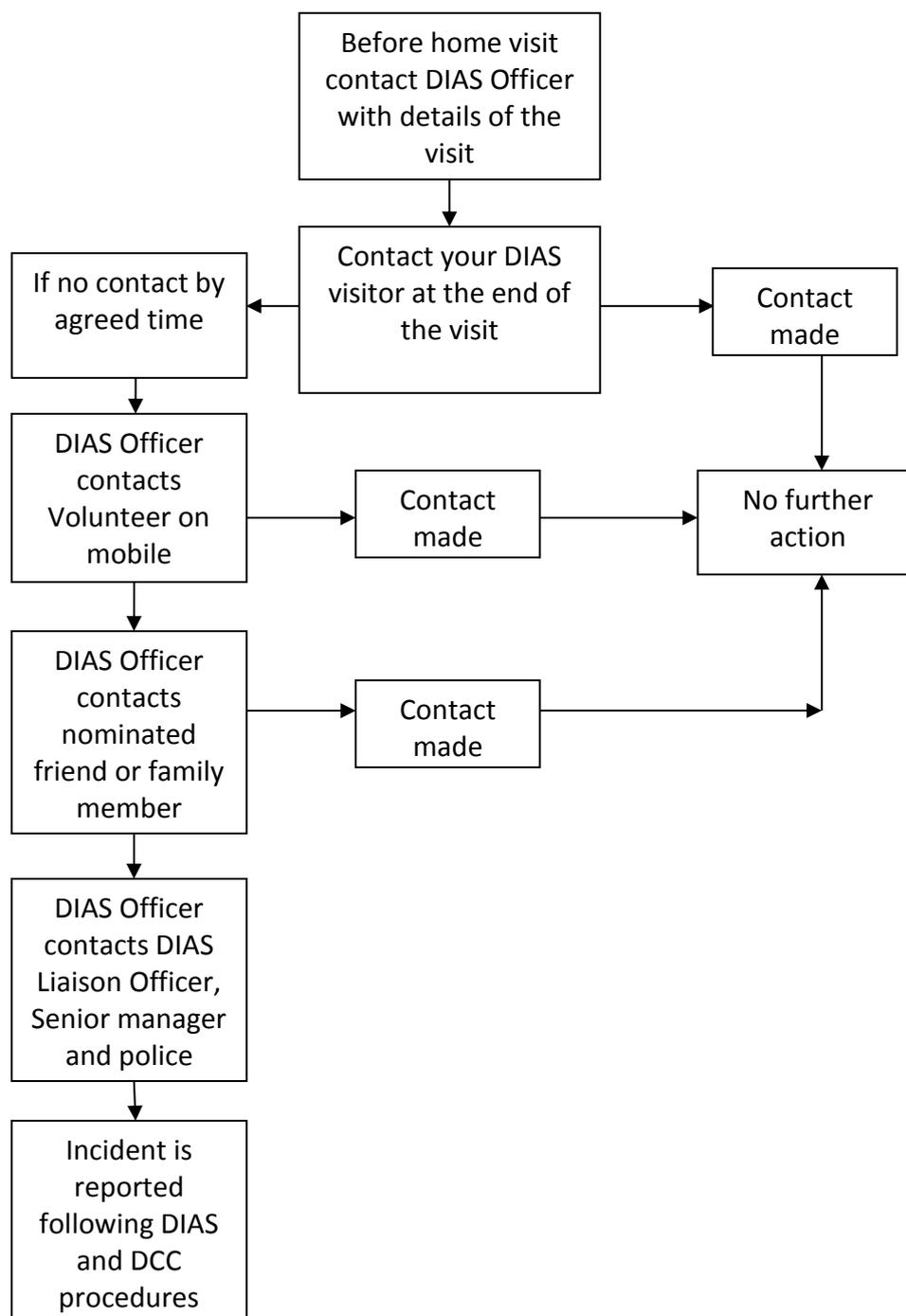
- Carry your identity card.
- Be prepared to take bullet point notes at the meeting of agreed actions, responsibilities and timescales.
- If it is agreed that you take responsibility for follow up work, ensure that consent is given to discuss the case with others and record this as a bullet point.
- Explain to the parent or young person that they will need to contact 01392 383080 for further support.
- Never give out your personal telephone number, email address or home address.
- Email your DIAS Officer your notes of the meeting as a password protected document.
- Save the notes for the minimum time required in a password protected area of your computer.

Personal safety

You are responsible for your own safety whilst undertaking DIAS Volunteer work. We expect you to follow these practice guidelines and the Lone Working Policy (see appendix 3).

The following 'safety procedure for home visits' flowchart shows how DIAS provides a reporting system for you to follow.

Safety procedure for home visits



Before the visit the DIAS Officer will make an initial risk assessment with information available to DIAS to ascertain that as far as we are aware it is safe for you to visit.

- You will need to make your own risk assessment during the visit using the Lone Working Practice Guidance for Home Visits.
- If you do not have a mobile phone use the nearest public phone to let the DIAS Officer know that you are safe.

What does a DIAS Volunteer do when supporting a service user?

In the role of supporting parents/carers or young people, these are the things that you could reasonably be expected to be involved in:

- Talking through worries and concerns in confidence and in a non-judgemental way
- Assisting with establishing and recording the child's view/parent's view
- Helping to explain the content of letters and reports
- Providing information on points of contact with professionals and voluntary organisations
- Supporting in meetings/discussions with professionals
- Supporting with responses to documents from the Local Authority
- Helping parents/carers or young people to express and record their views
- Offering pre-meeting support eg to formulate the right questions to ask at meetings
- Supporting at meetings
- Writing up notes and action points from meetings
- Providing information on rights and responsibilities, the law and local SEN procedures/policies
- Considering the options available and finding out more information if required
- Supporting at school visits
- Attending review meetings
- Reading literature connected with SEN
- Keeping case records following the guidance on page 21
- Contributing to the monitoring of the service

The nature of the individual activities of a DIAS Volunteer will be agreed between the DIAS officer, the parent/carer or young person and the DIAS Volunteer and will be kept under regular review.

Preparing for meetings and conduct in meetings

Meeting preparation

Discussion with the parent/carer or young person may take place on the telephone or by face to face meeting. This is an important opportunity to understand their concerns and current knowledge and to help them establish their aims for the forthcoming meeting. The purpose of the preparation is to enable them to clarify points they wish to raise and questions they want to ask. If you are going to attend the meeting with them this will help you to

ensure that the all the relevant points are discussed. In order to focus this meeting, it may be helpful to cover the following:

- Ascertain the purpose of the meeting and who will be attending
- Help the parent/carer/young person to organise topics into bullet points for discussion and formulate effective questions
- Discuss whether it would be helpful to circulate suggested topics before the meeting

Supporting a parent at a meeting

During all meetings it is the role of the DIAS Volunteer to ensure that the parent/carer or young person has their view heard. Always clarify what they have said if you or others have not understood. Offer to take bullet points of actions decided. If a parent/carer or young person has not raised all the questions that were prepared with you before the meeting, check whether they wish to discuss them before the meeting closes.

- Remember confidentiality.
- Ensure everyone is in agreement about the time and length of the meeting and clear on the agenda.
- Be prepared to introduce yourself at the meeting and explain the purpose of your attendance
- Be prepared to call for a short break in the meeting or bring the meeting to a close if necessary. If the situation remains unresolved ensure another meeting is arranged.
- Make it clear that any notes you have taken form part of the DIAS record of support provided and are not the official record of the meeting.
- Leave the meeting with the parent/carer or young person

If you are meeting in a school

- Ensure the school has been made aware that the parent/carer will be accompanied by a DIAS volunteer (this may be done in advance by a DIAS Officer or by the parent)
- Take your identity badge and letter of introduction.

Equal Opportunities for service users

All young people with SEND and parents/carers of children with SEND have a right to equality of opportunity with regard to the use of the Service.

If you consider a child or young person or their parent/carer is being discriminated against during a meeting or at any other time please raise your concerns. If appropriate to do so, this should be done when the discrimination occurs. If not, the DIAS Volunteer should report the incident to the DIAS Officer who will decide on what further action is required.

Safeguarding

As a DIAS Volunteer you have a duty of care to raise and pass on any concerns you may have about the wellbeing and/or safety of a child, young person, parent or carer who you become aware of through your role. It is not, however, your responsibility to initiate any proceedings.

These are the steps you should take if you are worried by a situation. If you are supporting a parent or carer, it is unlikely you will meet face-to-face with a child or young person, but your concerns could be triggered by what you hear from the parent/carer or other people working with the child. However, if you are working directly with a young person, they may share information with you directly that raises concerns.

- If your concerns are raised do make notes (mentally if not initially written) but do not ask leading questions of the people concerned. If you are unable to make notes at the time, do this as soon as possible.
- Contact your DIAS Officer* by telephone as soon as possible with the information you have gathered and the reasons why you are bringing this to their attention.
- It is then the responsibility of the DIAS Officer to look into the situation further, gain more information and decide if a referral needs to be passed to the relevant agency.
- *If your DIAS Officer is not available then you can contact another Officer or the DIAS Liaison Officer.
- If your concerns are raised out of hours and you do not feel you want to leave things to the next day (i.e. you feel that a child, young person or adult is at immediate risk) then you should call the Emergency Duty Team or the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to discuss the issue. You will need to note down your actions and any discussions and pass this to your DIAS Officer as soon as possible.

List of numbers

DIAS Central Office

01392 383080

DIAS Liaison Officer (Manager)

Sue Brealey 01392 383957 mob. 07812100187

DIAS Officers

Liz Batchelor 01803 527849/ 07855 215944

Cath Butland 01566 784986/ 07540 671331

Debbie Wheeler 01392 383080/ 07545 420357

Melissa Clark 07540 671331

Vicci Worthy 01392 380592/ 07967 803203

Emergency Duty Team 0845 6000 388

MASH – 0345 1551071

Record keeping

DIAS Volunteer record keeping and data protection

You are expected to carry out your role in a manner which meets the requirements of the **Data Protection Act 1998**, as determined by the policies of the Local Authority and DIAS.

Much of the information handled and processed by DIAS volunteers is sensitive data and there are procedures that must be followed. With respect to Data Protection, a DIAS Volunteer is viewed in the same way as a paid employee and is expected to comply with organisational policies that support legal requirements.

Data protection

The Data Protection Act 1998 sets standards for obtaining, recording, holding, using or disposing of personal data. All information given to DIAS Volunteers and the DIAS officer comes under the Data Protection Act. There are eight Data Protection Act principles as follows:

Personal data must be:

- 1) Processed fairly and lawfully
- 2) Processed for specific purposes
- 3) Adequate, relevant and not excessive
- 4) Accurate and kept up-to-date
- 5) Not kept for longer than necessary
- 6) Processed in accordance with the rights of data subjects
- 7) Protected by appropriate security
- 8) Not transferred outside the European Economic Area without adequate protection

To work within the Data Protection Act DIAS Volunteers are expected to:

- Keep objective, succinct and careful records of all meetings and telephone conversations with parents.
- Use your home computer to type these records and save them to a password protected area on your computer.
- Email your password protected record to your DIAS Officer identifying the parent/ carer or child using only the DIAS reference number.
- When emailing your DIAS Officer, you should maintain confidentiality by using initials instead of names.
- Destroy your handwritten notes as soon as the record is typed.
- Delete your computer record as soon as you have finished your work with that family; then delete those records from your recycle bin.
- All reports, notes and papers given to you by the parent/ carer or young person should be kept safely and securely to ensure confidentiality and should be locked away at home. Discuss the handling of these documents with your DIAS Officer before they are returned or destroyed. When working with a parent/ carer or young person in the community or school, all papers should be kept securely, not left in unattended cars or placed where others can see them.

- When working with a parent/carer or young person in a public venue it is important that names of professionals or other parents or children are not used in case you are overheard; use roles instead e.g. class teacher, educational psychologist.

Disagreements/complaints procedure

Complaints, grievance and disciplinary procedures are ways in which the quality of any service is maintained and developed.

We hope that most things that you are concerned about can be settled quite easily by discussing the problem with those directly involved at the earliest opportunity.

Complaints about another service

There are different routes for complaints about issues in schools, the Local Authority etc. The first step would be to discuss your complaint with your DIAS Officer. They will inform you of the appropriate channel for your complaint and may support you with the process.

Complaints about DIAS

The procedure below outlines how you would express a complaint or grievance about the working practices of

- The Devon Information Advice and Support (DIAS)
- Your DIAS Officer
- The DIAS Liaison Officer (service manager)
- Another DIAS Volunteer

Step One Contact your DIAS Officer who will listen to your complaint, make a written record of the discussion and suggest appropriate action. They will record this and give you feedback within an agreed timescale after relevant investigation with a senior officer if necessary.

Step Two If the matter has not been resolved or you are not satisfied with the response from your DIAS Officer you can discuss the matter with the DIAS Liaison Officer.

Step Three If you are still not happy that the matter has been resolved you should contact the Senior Manager of Strategic Commissioning 0-25 SEN team, John Peart 01392 383000. At this point the Steering Group will be informed.

If the complaint is about your DIAS Officer begin at **Step Two**. The DIAS Liaison Officer will investigate the complaint by talking to both parties and decide what action should be taken.

If there is a disagreement with a parent/carer or young person, you should inform the DIAS Officer and a support session will be arranged. You will be supported if they feel the most appropriate course of action is to withdraw from that particular case.

In the event of the parent/carer contacting DIAS to inform them of a disagreement with the DIAS Volunteer, the DIAS Officer will offer the following options:

- Bringing the parties together to resolve the disagreement informally
- Withdrawal of the current DIAS Volunteer
- Offer an alternative DIAS Volunteer
- Explaining the formal complaint procedure

Concerns about a DIAS Volunteer

If a parent/carer or a member of staff makes a complaint about a Volunteer:

Step One: the DIAS Officer will initially look into the complaint. An explanation of the role of the DIAS Volunteer may be sufficient to alleviate the problem.

Step Two If this is not the case the complaint will be taken up with the DIAS Volunteer to try and resolve the complaint informally.

Step Three If this is not successful the complaint will be taken to the DIAS Liaison Officer who will consult with both parties and decide what further action should be taken. The complainant will be notified in writing of the outcome.

Step Four If the complainant is not happy with the outcome, the complaint will be dealt with by the DCC Customer Service Complaints Process.

Complaints can be seen as a way of increasing good practice and should be viewed in a positive light.

Disciplinary procedure

When our monitoring, evaluation or complaints procedures find a breach of the working practice described in this document, including safeguarding, we will take the necessary action to:

- Modify the practice and support of the DIAS Volunteer
- Support the family who have been affected
- Report illegal activity to the police

All investigations and actions will be recorded in writing and the reference group will be informed.

If any complaint or allegation is of a serious nature (e.g. breach of confidentiality, child protection issues, accusation of theft) it will be necessary to discuss the situation with a senior officer. Depending on the nature of the complaint, as a volunteer it may be necessary to suspend you from your volunteering role. This action is taken to protect the parent/carer/ child or young person from harm and to protect you from further allegations being made.

You will be supported by a member of DIAS who will keep you up-to-date with the progress of the investigation.

If the allegation is proved you will no longer be able continue as a DIAS volunteer. Disciplinary procedures are designed to support the parents /carers, young people and professionals we work with as well as guiding our DIAS Volunteers to maintain high standards of practice.

Termination procedure

DIAS would only consider terminating the service of a volunteer for serious misconduct e.g.

- Conviction of a serious criminal offence
- Falsification of facts/evidence at application, reference or interview
- Inappropriate conduct towards DIAS staff, including another volunteer, client or the client's family
- Discriminatory behaviour or breach of confidentiality

Then the supervising DIAS officer has the right to suspend the DIAS Volunteer while the DIAS Liaison Officer investigates the case.

The DIAS Volunteer will be informed of the DIAS Liaison Officer's decision within one month of the suspension and has the right to appeal against the decision.

If the DIAS Volunteer is not happy with the outcome, Devon County Council's complaints procedure can be used.

Expense claims

As a DIAS Volunteer you will be reimbursed for relevant, out of pocket expenses. However it is your responsibility to submit your claims promptly.

- Ideally, expense claims should be posted to the admin team at DIAS on a monthly basis. At the discretion of DIAS, expenses more than 4 months old may not be reimbursed. Claims cannot be made for expenses incurred in the previous financial year.
- Expenses will only be paid with an appropriate receipt for legitimate expenses; stamps, car parking, bus or train travel, hot or cold non-alcoholic drinks for the use of a quiet café.
- Car use will be reimbursed based on mileage, and all journeys made should be recorded.
- Use of a personal telephone can be reimbursed, so all phone calls should be documented to include purpose and duration.
- Fines for overstay in a car park or illegal parking will NOT be paid by DIAS.

Guidance for completing expense forms

Claims are to be made using the DCC form 'CT/PumaV', FOZ reference TM7S

NB: DIAS Volunteers should complete sections 1, 2, 3 and the top box on the reverse of the form

(DIAS admin completes sections 4 and 5)

Section 1

This should be completed **every time** a claim is made and signed as the claimant (The next box to be signed by Georgie Cridland (admin) with our telephone number)

(The fourth box is for signing off and dating by the relevant DIAS Officer)

Section 2

Check you use the correct month; e.g. April = month 1, May = month 2,

Section 3

This should be completed for the **first claim only** to include:

National Insurance number

Details of car, registration, exact cc capacity

Date started claiming in this role

Section 4

Completed by DIAS

Section 5

Completed by DIAS

Reverse of the form – top box

Volunteer records

- Dates and purpose for individual return journeys and accurate mileage

- Postage cost with a receipt
- If you have a cost to making a phone call please complete the details of this on your claim form: date, length, name of person called (or case file name for a parent/ carer) and charge per minute.

Columns 1 and 2 will always be completed; Column 3 for mileage
Column 6 or 7 for postage or telephone or meeting beverages

Wherever possible we will need copies of receipts to accompany your claims. Any un-receipted expenditure will be paid at the discretion of Devon County Council but must include the date the expense was incurred, the nature of the expense and the exact amount.

Without this information all expenditure reimbursed should be subject to PAYE. The completed form should be returned to the relevant DIAS Officer.

Ending your time as a DIAS Volunteer

We hope you will enjoy volunteering for DIAS and that you will benefit from the experience. We understand that there will come a point when you will no longer wish, or are able, to volunteer for the service. If you are considering leaving the service we ask that you discuss this with your DIAS Officer, with as much notice as possible and inform them of the date you intend to leave.

We will be happy to provide you with a reference identifying your experience as a DIAS Volunteer as well as any training you have undertaken with our service.

Appendix 1

Devon Information Advice and Support Impartiality Policy Summary for Volunteers

In all our work we seek to ensure that information and support is given in an impartial way. The SEND Code of Practice states that the information we provide “should be impartial and provided at arm’s length from the local authority”, and that it “should be free, accurate, confidential and in formats which are accessible and responsive to the needs of users”.

SEND Code of Practice 2014 2.8

Whilst we are an ‘in house’ DCC service we also sit at ‘arms length’ and maintain our impartiality by having someone sufficiently independent of the Local Authority (LA) to line manage the service but also have a close enough relationship to contribute to local policy and practice.

We aim to be impartial, not favouring any person or party more than another and striving to be fair and unbiased. We will endeavour to present factual information in order to bring about a resolution to the issues which are presented.

DIAS ensures the impartial delivery of our service in the following ways, which Volunteers should support:

Removing barriers to impartiality

- Be committed to positively opposing discrimination.
- Acknowledge and respect every person as an individual and endeavour to be responsive, courteous and helpful to all service users, professionals, employees and volunteers.

Relationship with the Local Authority

- When parents/carers and young people disagree with the LA, provide impartial information and support to explain policy and help them understand their entitlement.

Monitoring Impartiality

- We have established a Reference Group that will include parent representatives. It will have responsibility for steering and safeguarding the effectiveness and impartiality of the service.
- The-Reference Group, Parent Forums and service users will be asked to regularly review the impartiality of DIAS.

Networking and Collaboration

- When working with other professionals, make them aware of the impartial nature of our service.
- Whether working with parents /carers and young people or professionals, consider factors that may be affecting their behaviour which may influence our impartiality.
- Ensure, when attending meetings, that the impartiality of our role is made clear.
- Where necessary, offer constructive challenge to perceptions of events when supporting parents/carers, young people and professionals.

Reflective Practice

- We are aware that other factors may have an impact on our impartiality and we will provide training and supervision to enable volunteers to monitor standards and encourage reflective practice.
- Support parents to prepare and present their own views so that they can be understood by others but avoid advocating on their behalf so as to promote or defend any particular point of view.

Working Practice of Challenge

- Seek to resolve any conflict between the views of the school, Local Authority or the parent/carer or young person rather than promote any of them.
- Support parents/carers and young people, individually or collectively, to convey their views to schools, the LA or other agencies
- If you are unhappy with any aspect of our service, including our impartiality, you can make a complaint. We will provide you with information about how to do this.

Training and Supervision

- Follow the guidance in the Impartiality Policy. This will be part of Volunteer training and will be monitored through supervision.
- The Impartiality Policy will be introduced to new volunteers and staff through induction and training.

Information and Publicity

- DIAS leaflets and publicity materials, and the DIAS website will provide accurate and neutral information which meets the requirement to be impartial. They will be regularly reviewed by staff, the Reference Group and Parent Forums.
- The Impartiality Policy will be published, accessible on the DIAS website and reviewed annually.

Location

- The central office is located in a LA building but not with the SEN Team.
 - Staff and volunteers will use working practices to ensure that DIAS work is not seen or overheard by other departments.
 - Drop-in facilities will be used around the county to provide independent access for parents.
 - When working away from any DIAS base, staff and volunteers will ensure that the confidentiality and impartiality standards are maintained
-
- We recommend that you read a full version of the DIAS Impartiality Policy on our website: <http://www.devonias.org.uk/policies-and-reports/>

Appendix 2

Devon Information Advice and Support Confidentiality Policy

Summary for Volunteers

Devon Information Advice and Support (DIAS) is a confidential service for young people with SEND and parents/carers of children with SEND – this means that the principles of confidentiality must operate in all areas of the service and management.

- Nothing will be shared outside DIAS without permission unless it could cause harm.
- DIAS can be entrusted with information and will treat it with respect and discretion.

These are the ways that as a DIAS Volunteer you will help to ensure that DIAS is being confidential:

- Any information given to a DIAS Volunteer should be regarded as confidential to the DIAS Volunteer and DIAS Staff. Volunteers are expected to discuss their work and any issues of concern with a DIAS Officer or the DIAS Liaison Officer to ensure that they are able to provide appropriate support to parents.
- If a DIAS Volunteer finds that a service user wishes to confide in them and asks them not to pass information on, the DIAS Volunteer needs to explain the limits of confidentiality (see DIAS Confidentiality Policy and exception below*). A DIAS Volunteer will only be expected to support parents with matters relating to SEND.
- A DIAS Volunteer must not pass on information about a service user to any agency without the informed consent of the individual and having discussed this with the DIAS Officer or the DIAS Liaison Officer.
- Care should be taken to ensure that discussions, conversations and telephone calls with, or relating to, service users cannot be overheard by anyone outside DIAS.
- Any written records of meetings or telephone conversations must be stored securely to prevent accidental or intentional viewing by anyone who is not involved in DIAS. These will be sent to the DIAS Officer or Liaison Officer at the earliest opportunity and once passed to DIAS no records will be kept by the Volunteer.
- Volunteer application forms and other confidential information in relation to them will be stored securely in the DIAS office.
- Volunteer home addresses and telephone numbers should not be disclosed to service users.
- Volunteers may have access to their own personal records, including their application forms, supervision records, police checks and references. This can be arranged with a DIAS Officer or the DIAS Liaison Officer

***Confidentiality will need to be breached if there is serious risk of harm to any individual.**

We recommend that you read the full version of the DIAS Confidentiality Policy on our website

Appendix 3

Devon Information Advice and Support Volunteer Practice Guidance for Home Visiting

SAFE WORKING

These guidance notes are for Volunteers who have arranged to visit Service users or parents in their home. It is DIAS policy that wherever possible a meeting with a parent will take place in a public place. If this is not possible then a home visit can be arranged with the agreement of the DIAS Officer and the following practice guidance must be followed. In no circumstance should you arrange to meet the parent in your own home.

Home visits should finish no later than 5.00 p.m.

Volunteers should prepare for home visits by:

- Making sure that their movements (including information about place and time and expected attendees) are clearly known to the DIAS Officer.
- Always their identification badge
- The DIAS Officer will check existing records to find out as much as possible about the home circumstances before the DIAS Volunteer visits. If no records exist, check with the referring school/agency.
- If there is anything of concern the DIAS Officer will advise the DIAS Volunteer that the case is not suitable for their support.

Carrying out a home visit:

- Plan your introduction
- Speak slowly, gently and clearly
- Maintain eye contact
- Stay calm yourself
- Listen and empathise
- Be aware of your body language
- Be aware of exits
- Try to keep yourself between the client and the door
- Watch for signs of rising tension

- In addition:
- Avoid entering a house if the person you are expecting is not there.
- If a parent or carer is judged to be improperly dressed or in no fit state to conduct an interview or to co-operate, tell them that you will arrange another appointment, and then leave.
- If there is an animal present which appears to you to present a health hazard or a threat, do not hesitate to ask for it to be removed. If this is not done, explain your view and tell the person that you will make another appointment to meet at an alternative venue.

- If the occupants are smoking and you consider this to present a health risk through passive smoking, ask them to stop and if they refuse you may remove yourself from the premises.
- The presence of other people should not inhibit the interview. If that presence is clearly with the agreement of the person you have called to see, that is acceptable but if the presence of a 3rd party causes concern, remove yourself from the situation.
- In particular, the person you are visiting is entitled to have a friend or representative with him or her to assist the conversation.
- In exceptional circumstances additional facilities or services may be required to enable the interview to take place, for example, an interpreter or a signer. DIAS volunteers should make requests for such support through their DIAS Officer.
- Other than a cup of tea/coffee or a soft drink you should politely refuse all other hospitality (in particular alcohol).
- Under no circumstances should you accept gifts.
- Make sure you sit at a reasonable distance from the person (it may be wise to sit on the door side of them).

During the visit:

- A handshake on arrival and departure may be appropriate. You should avoid other physical contact as this may be misunderstood.
- If at any time during the interview there appears to be a risk to your health and safety, leave immediately. If appropriate, arrange an appointment to continue the interview at a later date in a neutral location.
- Do not reveal your home address or telephone number.
- Try to be sensitive to non-verbal signals and react accordingly.
- Similarly try to avoid giving signals that may be open to misinterpretation (e.g. hands on hips, folded arms, raised arm, physical contact, raised voice etc).
- Where service users show signs of becoming aggressive, try to remain calm and confident. Try to walk your way out of difficulties and seek a compromise whilst planning a potential escape if necessary. **Do not** meet aggression with aggression as this can easily lead to confrontation.

After the visit:

- You should record the meeting in line with DIAS Volunteer practice guidance. The person you met can have a copy of the points raised and any plans that have been agreed.
- If the meeting has been difficult you should draw the circumstances to the attention of your DIAS Officer so that others visiting may be suitably forewarned.
 - The DIAS Officer should mark the file accordingly.
 In some circumstances the continuation of a service to the Service user may be reviewed. If any DIAS Volunteer is threatened with, or subjected to violence, they should make a full written report to their DIAS Officer. This must be drawn to the attention of the Senior Manager. Form PO3 (Appendix B) must be completed.

RISK ASSESSMENT

When carrying out a home visit the DIAS Volunteer must consider the following risk factors:

- Animals on the premises
- Aggressive occupants
- Bad reception areas for mobile phones/no communication back-up
- Gender issues
- Difficult parking areas/ visiting in the dark
- Dangerous locations – such as areas of high crime
- Restricted entrance and exit – eg blocks of flats
- Asking difficult questions

Animals

Do not enter without first making contact with the owner of the animals to ensure that it is safe to do so. Always pre-arrange your visit. If in doubt, **do not** enter the premises or ask the client to shut the animal in. If you are bitten, you should arrange for an immediate tetanus injection (check that your tetanus jabs are kept up to date – a jab will be effective for 10 years).

Carrying passengers

In exceptional circumstances, you may be in a situation where you are asked to transport a parent / carer to a meeting. If you are unsure about this, always contact your DIAS Officer, and do not give a lift if you are uncomfortable. It is not appropriate to transport children.

- Your car must be insured to allow you to carry other people for business use.
- Your car must be roadworthy.
- Seatbelts must be in working order.

Consider gender issues when transporting a lone parent. It may be necessary to ask a colleague to accompany you. All clients being taken by car must be known to the Service and to the best of your knowledge have no history of aggressive behaviour.

Aggressive clients

If the person is known to be aggressive a DIAS Volunteer will not be allocated to the case.

If the person you are with starts to become aggressive or you feel intimidated, indicate calmly that this is not a good time to discuss the particular issue and leave. Inform your DIAS Officer and they will decide if it is appropriate for you to continue with the case. This will only happen if you are happy to do so.

Signs of threatening behavior

It is helpful to anticipate signs of threatening behavior, so that you are able to avoid being put in a difficult or dangerous situation. Some of the signs are outlined below:

- Rising tension in face and body, shouting, swearing, kicking/banging furniture and walls
- Personal insults intended to cause distress or harassment
- Verbal threats, gestures, stances or obstruction
- Possession of any kind of weapon regardless of the overt threat to use it
- Being incapable whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Racial harassment/sexual harassment/disability harassment
- Deliberate silence
- Bullying
- Assault, grasping, pulling clothes, poking, punching, shouting
- Any unwanted physical contact
- Threatening use of dogs/animals/minder

RECORDING AN INCIDENT

- All incidents must be reported to your DIAS Officer who will help you record what happened on Form PO3.
- The DIAS Officer has a statutory duty to report relevant incidents to the Health and Safety Executive within 10 days (see Form PO3).

COMMUNICATION

We are not able to issue DIAS Volunteers with a mobile phone but if you have your own we advise you to take this with you. Store emergency contacts under ICE. If you have more than one, then ICE (1) ICE (2) and ICE(3).

- Ask yourself 'Who knows where I am?'
- Phone the DIAS Officer when the visit is finished

In areas of known poor reception, telephone beforehand to alert the DIAS Officer that you will have no communication back up.

- State where you are
- Estimate the time of your visit
- Arrange to make contact after completion of the home visit

If at any time a DIAS Officer becomes concerned about the whereabouts or safety of a DIAS Volunteer it is essential to inform the DIAS Liaison Officer or Senior Manager and if necessary, the police.

Appendix 4

Devon Information Advice and Support

Questionnaire for service users

Following parent /carer or young person support being provided by a DIAS Volunteer the DIAS Officer may contact the service user by phone to obtain feedback on the service provided. This is a check list of questions that can be used as a guideline. All comments will be discussed with the DIAS Volunteer and ways to improve or enhance the service offered by DIAS will be explored.

Name of parent :

Date of questionnaire:

Name of Volunteer:

1. How did the DIAS Volunteer support you?

- Support by telephone
- Researching information
- Preparation for meetings
- Support at meetings
- Sent information
- Support with letters/forms

2. Have you received the DIAS leaflet about the role of Volunteers?

Yes/No

3. Did the DIAS Volunteer contact you during office working hours? Yes/No

If No please explain when.....

4. Our policy is that staff and volunteers do not provide childcare service, due to safeguarding implications. We can however direct you to services that provide childcare and respite. Did the DIAS volunteer offer to provide childcare? Yes/No

5. Do you think that the DIAS Volunteer support offered was unbiased Yes/No

6. How would you describe the DIAS Volunteer support you have received?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Brief description of what was helpful.....

7. Did the DIAS Volunteer give you their personal contact details? Yes/No

8. How could the service be improved?.....

.....

Thank you for your time as your answers are valuable to us. We may contact you again to ask your views about Devon Information Advice and Support.

Appendix 4a

Devon Information Advice and Support Questionnaire for professionals following a meeting

Name of professional:.....

Date of questionnaire:

Date of meeting:

Name of DIAS Volunteer:

Name of parent/child:.....

1. What role did the DIAS Volunteer take at the meeting?

- Supporting parent to express views
- Taking notes
- Explaining jargon, roles or SEN processes to parent
- Other (please state).....

2. Did the DIAS Volunteer contact you directly either before or after the meeting?

Yes/No

If yes, was the contact:

- Helpful
- Polite
- Other (please state).....

3. Do you think the DIAS Volunteer Support offered was unbiased?

Yes/No

4. How would you describe the DIAS Volunteer support you witnessed?

Excellent Good Fair Poor

Brief description of what was helpful.....
.....

5. Have you seen the DIAS leaflet about The Role of Volunteers (DIAS12)?

Yes/No

6. How could the DIAS Volunteer service be improved?

.....
.....

7. Is there any other information you require at this point (e.g. leaflets)?

.....
Thank you for your time as your answers are valuable to us. We may contact you again to ask your views about Devon Information Advice and Support

Appendix 5

DIAS Volunteers

An agreement with Devon Information Advice and Support

As a Volunteer with DIAS you can expect:

- Training and an induction period to help you meet the responsibilities of this role.
- Ongoing support and regular supervision meetings to help you to develop your volunteering role with us and provide feedback.
- Fair treatment under our equal opportunities commitment
- Reimbursement of legitimate out-of-pocket expenses.
- Adequate public liability insurance in keeping with the Devon County Council Policy.
- An assurance that we will try to resolve any difficulties or complaints you may have as soon as possible.

In return we ask that you:

- Remember you are a representative of DIAS, treat people with respect and be aware of the boundaries of your role.
- Perform your role to the best of your ability.
- Read the DIAS Volunteer handbook and follow all the DIAS procedures, standards and policies included within it.
- Adhere to the DIAS confidentiality and impartiality policies.
- Meet agreed time commitments and give reasonable notice if you need to change any arrangements.
- Provide referees and agree to a Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) check.
- Attend regular supervision and volunteer team meetings.
- Assign any DIAS Volunteer written work or photographs, undertaken as part of your role, to DIAS.

This agreement is binding in honour only and is not intended to be a legally binding contract. It may be cancelled at any time by either party. Neither party intends for any employment relationship to be created by this agreement.

Agreement explained and discussed on

DIAS Volunteer signature.....

Date

DIAS OFFICER signature.....

Date

Our volunteers are an important and valued part of our organisation and we hope that you will enjoy volunteering with us and being part of our team.

Appendix 6

Glossary & Useful Abbreviations

Throughout this document the terms 'parent and carer' are taken to include all those with a direct responsibility for parenting. These might be birth parents, step-parents, grandparents or other members of the family, foster or adoptive parents or other adult caregivers.

DIAS Devon Information Advice and Support
DIASO Dias Officer
IS Independent Supporter

DCC Devon County Council
EP Educational Psychologist
EWO Education Welfare Officer
EMA Ethnic Minority Achievement
LA Local Authority
DAF Devon Assessment Framework
EHCP Education Health and Care Plan
AECO Area Education Commissioning Officer

Health and Social Care

JAT Joint Agency Team
ICS Integrated Children's Services
TAC Team around the Child
SLT Speech and Language Therapist
CAMHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CCG Clinical Commissioning Group

School Personnel

SENCO Special Education Needs Co-ordinator
PSA Parent Support Adviser
TA Teaching assistant

Special Educational Needs

SEN Special Educational Needs
SEND Special Educational Needs & Disability
AEN Additional Educational Needs
CoP Code of Practice
C&I Communication and interaction
C&L Cognition and Learning
S&P Sensory and Physical
EP Educational psychologist