

How to Find Volunteer Roles After Leaving Prison

(A Step-by-Step Guide)



Why Volunteering Can Help

Volunteering is a great way to rebuild your life after prison. It can help you:

- Gain work experience and new skills
- Build confidence and routine
- Meet new people and make positive connections
- Show employers you're serious about moving forward
- Give something back to your community

You don't need to have a job first — volunteering can be a first step towards one.

What You Might Need

Before applying, it helps to have:

- An idea of what you'd like to do (helping people, working outdoors, animals, etc.)
- An address or contact number (hostel, probation office, or support service)
- Photo ID or proof of identity (if available)
- References (if you can get one from a key worker or previous job, great — but not always needed)

Many organisations understand that people leaving prison might not have much paperwork — honesty and willingness to help matter most.

Be Honest About Your Background

You don't always need to tell an organisation about your record — but if asked, be honest.

- Some roles (especially with children or vulnerable adults) require a **DBS check** (criminal record check).
- Having a record doesn't automatically stop you from volunteering — many groups have experience supporting people in recovery or resettlement.

If you're unsure how to explain your background, ask your probation officer or support worker for help preparing what to say.

Where to Look for Volunteer Opportunities

Option 1: Search Online

Use trusted volunteer websites such as:

- **Do-it** – the UK's biggest volunteering site (www.doit.life/volunteer)
- **Volunteering Matters** – supports people rebuilding their lives (www.volunteeringmatters.org.uk)
- **Reach Volunteering** – for skill-based roles (www.reachvolunteering.org.uk)

Search by **postcode** or **town** to find roles near you.

Option 2: Ask Your Local Volunteer Centre

Every council area has a **Volunteer Centre** that helps people find roles. To find yours:

1. Go to www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/find-your-local-volunteer-centre
2. Enter your **postcode** or **town**
3. Contact them by phone, email, or visit in person
Tell them:
"I've just come out of prison and I'd like help finding a volunteering role."

They can match you with organisations that welcome people with criminal records.

Option 3: Ask Your Probation or Support Worker

Your probation officer, resettlement worker, or key worker may have links with:

- Local charities
- Community projects
- Councils and recycling schemes
- Animal shelters, food banks, or charity shops

They can often introduce you directly to safe and supportive placements.

Option 4: Visit Local Charities or Community Projects

Many small charities are open to people rebuilding their lives. You can walk in or call and ask if they take volunteers. Examples include:

- Charity shops (British Heart Foundation, Oxfam, YMCA, etc.)
- Food banks or community kitchens
- Homeless shelters or recovery centres
- Parks or community gardens
- Churches or faith-based charities

Get Support from Specialist Charities

Some charities specifically help people with convictions find volunteering or work, such as:

- Nacro: www.nacro.org.uk
- Unlock: www.unlock.org.uk
- St Giles Trust: www.stgilestrust.org.uk
- The Forward Trust: www.forwardtrust.org.uk
- Shaw Trust: www.shawtrust.org.uk

They can help with disclosure, finding supportive placements, and building confidence.

Preparing for Your First Role

When you're offered a volunteering position:

- Ask what the role involves and when it starts
- Make sure it fits your probation conditions (if any)
- Arrive on time and stay in touch with your supervisor
- Ask for a reference after a few months — this can help you apply for paid work later

If You Need Extra Help

If you find searching or applications difficult, you can:

- Visit your local library (staff can help you go online)
- Ask your probation office or Jobcentre for one-to-one help
- Contact your local Volunteer Centre directly — they can arrange a chat and help you apply

If You Need Help Applying

If you struggle with forms, reading, or phone calls, there are organisations that can help you apply for PIP and explain what to do.

Government and Local Support

- **Jobcentre Plus** – staff can help with benefits forms.
- **AP keyworkers, Probation Service or Offender Manager** – can confirm ID and address for your claim.

Charities and Reentry Support

- **Citizens Advice** – free advice and help filling in your PIP form.
www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- **St Giles Trust** – support for people leaving prison with benefits and ID.
www.stgilestrust.org.uk
- **Nacro** – advice on benefits, housing, and resettlement.
www.nacro.org.uk
- **The Salvation Army** – practical help for people rebuilding their lives.
www.salvationarmy.org.uk
- **Mind** – if you have a mental health condition, they can help with evidence and forms.
www.mind.org.uk

Keep Your Information Up to Date

Once you're getting PIP:

- Tell DWP if your address changes.
- Tell them if your health improves or worsens.
- Keep your bank details current.

If you move from temporary housing or a hostel into a permanent home, update DWP right away.

Quick Checklist

Step	Task	Done
1	Think about the kind of volunteering you'd enjoy	☐
2	Search online or contact your local Volunteer Centre	☐
3	Talk to your probation or support worker for help	☐
4	Be honest if asked about your background	☐
5	Start your first volunteer role	☐
6	Ask for a reference after a few months	☐

Helpful Contacts

Service	What They Do	Contact
Do-it.org	Search volunteer roles across the UK	www.do-it.org
Nacro	Support for people with convictions	www.nacro.org.uk
Unlock	Help explaining criminal records to employers	www.unlock.org.uk
St Giles Trust	Training, volunteering, and mentoring	www.stgilestrust.org.uk

Who we are

New Connections is an organisation which provides support for prisoners and ex-offenders with addiction and mental health challenges who are preparing for Parole or release after a substantial period of imprisonment.

New Connections provides support and guidance in prison through individual and group sessions and the agreement of individual recovery plans to give the ex-offender the opportunity to recover from their addiction and change the direction of their life away from drugs and crime.

If you are interested in hearing more about our work, have any questions, or know someone who could benefit from our services, please contact us via our website.



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