

## **Visits and outings**

**Visits and outings play an important part in the life of many charities, giving people the opportunity to undertake activities away from their normal surroundings. Outings can range from a simple trip to the shops, to a day out, to holidays lasting for a week or more.**

Whilst outings can be extremely beneficial, they must be carefully planned to ensure that all eventualities have been considered and things go smoothly and according to plan.

### **Risk assessment**

Visits and outings are no different to any other activity and the undertaking of a risk assessment is the starting point to ensure that potential risks are identified and the appropriate control measures put in place. Whilst a desk exercise could be undertaken for the simplest of visits, where the assessor is familiar with the trip to be undertaken, there is no substitute for a practical exercise. In most cases it will be necessary for the assessor, accompanied by colleagues where appropriate, to carry out a "test run" in order to identify all of the potential hazards which may be encountered. The findings of the risk assessment will need to be recorded and the procedures which are put in place will then need to be monitored and adjusted as necessary based on the actual experiences of the trip itself.

### **Areas to be considered when undertaking the risk assessment**

When carrying out the risk assessment, the following areas will need to be considered and the findings recorded. Some of these will be generic in nature and will apply in all cases irrespective of the nature of the trip. In other cases, however, the specific nature of the trip will need to be considered and the control measures modified accordingly.

### **Staff-volunteer /client ratios**

It is of the utmost importance that there are sufficient members of staff and/or volunteers to cope with the numbers of clients bearing in mind that, as a general rule, a higher ratio of staff to clients will be required for trips away. Clients will be unfamiliar with their surroundings and additional staff will be required to deal with any emergency while remaining staff look after the other clients. Clients' behaviour may also be affected by being away from their usual surroundings and consideration must be given to the needs of those clients with learning difficulties or who may exhibit challenging behaviour.

### **The journey**

Consideration must be given to the mode of transport and a decision taken as to the most appropriate mode depending on the length of the journey. For short trips for a small number of people, private cars may be suitable, whereas for longer journeys, the use of public transport will probably be required. Checks need to be made that, where appropriate, vehicles are fitted with seat belts and that access is possible for wheelchair users. Luggage space on some trains is now limited and it is essential that checks are made that all equipment needed for the visit can be accommodated. The length of the journey, together with the need for refreshment and toilet breaks, must be taken into account. The provision of adequate and suitable facilities along route is essential.

### **Medication and First Aid facilities**

The length and nature of the trip must be taken into account when deciding the level of First Aid skills required and the First Aid equipment that needs to be carried. Clients' medication will also need to be taken and a safety factor should be built in if, for some reason, the return journey is delayed. As a basic rule, the party should be self-sufficient and should not have to rely on obtaining medical supplies on route. A thorough investigation must be undertaken of the proposed destination, particularly bearing in mind clients with physical disabilities, including wheelchair users. The presence of uneven surfaces, large numbers of steps and stairs, and difficult access for wheelchairs needs to be noted and avoided if possible. General hazards also need to be considered, bearing in mind the particular client group. This would include such features as busy roads and unprotected areas of water.

### **Contingency planning**

The risk assessment needs to take account of things not all going according to plan. This would include vehicle breakdowns or trains being delayed. Alternative means of transport or means of looking after clients whilst delayed need to be considered. It is essential that members of staff have adequate means of communication such as mobile phones, and that there are members of staff remaining at the organisation's own premises who can be contacted and asked to put emergency plans into operation.

### **Documentation**

Following the risk assessment, detailed plans and procedures need to be produced noting exactly how the visit or outing is to be undertaken. This should include a check list of all the items which will need to be taken, including medication, emergency supplies, and contact names and telephone numbers.