

**Institute for
Volunteering
Research**

Assessing Voluntary Experiences

Volunteer's Pack

Name.....

Organisation.....

Introduction

People volunteer for all sorts of reasons. You may want to help other people or put something back into your local community. There may be a particular cause or organisation that you want to help. You may be looking to fill spare time, meet people and make friends. If you are thinking about getting into or returning to paid employment or changing career, volunteering can be way to gain valuable experience, skills and references. Whatever your initial motivations, the experiences you get as a volunteer should be of benefit to you.

If you are thinking about looking for work, you will need to be able to tell an employer what you have got out of volunteering. You will need to be able to interpret your experiences and show that the skills you have gained are transferable.

How can volunteering help you prepare for employment?

- You can develop both specific and transferable skills;
- It can provide you with general work experience, for example of an office environment;
- It can provide you with work experience in a specific field, for example, working in a hospital, working with young people, working in horticulture;
- It can help discover what you like doing and what you are good at;
- You can gain references;
- You can widen your networks and contacts;
- It demonstrates your ability to hold down position of trust and responsibility and proves you can function in a work environment;
- You can access training to help you do your volunteering role, for example in first aid, child protection, IT;
- You can gain awards and certificates that recognise the time you spend volunteering or for different activities you do as part of your volunteering, for example Millennium Volunteers, Duke of Edinburgh's Awards;
- You can work towards qualifications that formally assess and recognise what you have learnt through volunteering, for example NVQs, ASDAN certificates, Lampeter Certificate in Interpersonal Skills for Volunteers.

The idea of this pack is to help you reflect upon your voluntary experiences, to help you identify the skills you have learnt or developed and to help you to interpret these skills and experiences for potential employers. It also provides information and suggestions about other ways you can use volunteering to improve your job prospects, for example through formal accreditation programmes.

By working through the exercises in this pack you will create a document that can form the basis for preparing a CV, completing job applications and getting ready for interviews.

What is reflection?

Reflection is the process of thinking critically about an experience, of replaying what happened in order to lead to new understanding and learning. Reflection is important to your volunteering because it helps you get meaning from the experiences and enables you to learn from them. Reflection can help you understand how your volunteering has benefited you as an individual and the community.

Exercise 1a: Reflective Questionnaire

Take some time to think about what you have done in your volunteering so far and then answer the following questions as fully as possible:

1. What activities have you carried out in this voluntary role?

2. What strengths do you think you brought to the position?

3. What skills did you use in your volunteer role?

4. What new skills or knowledge did you pick up?

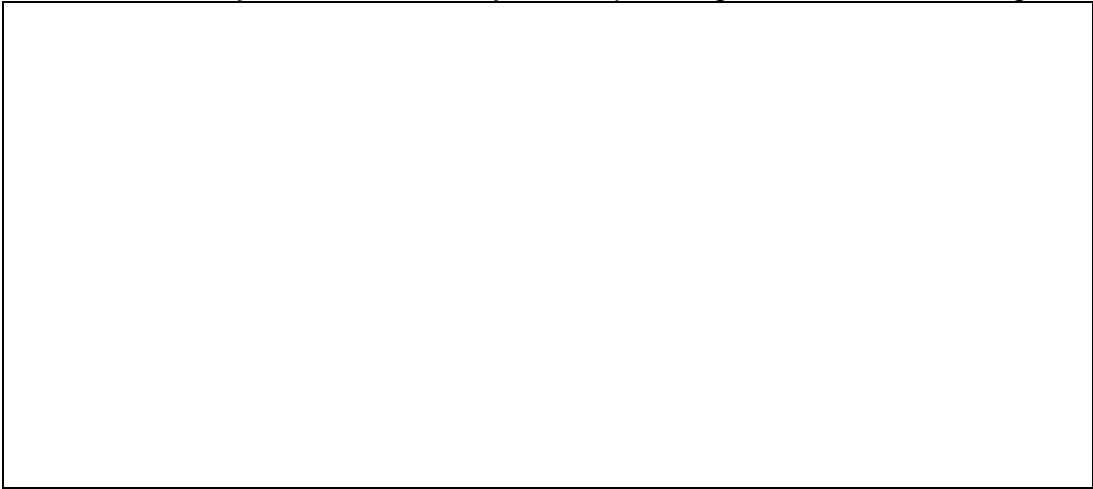
5. What did you find most rewarding about your volunteering?

6. What did you find difficult and why?

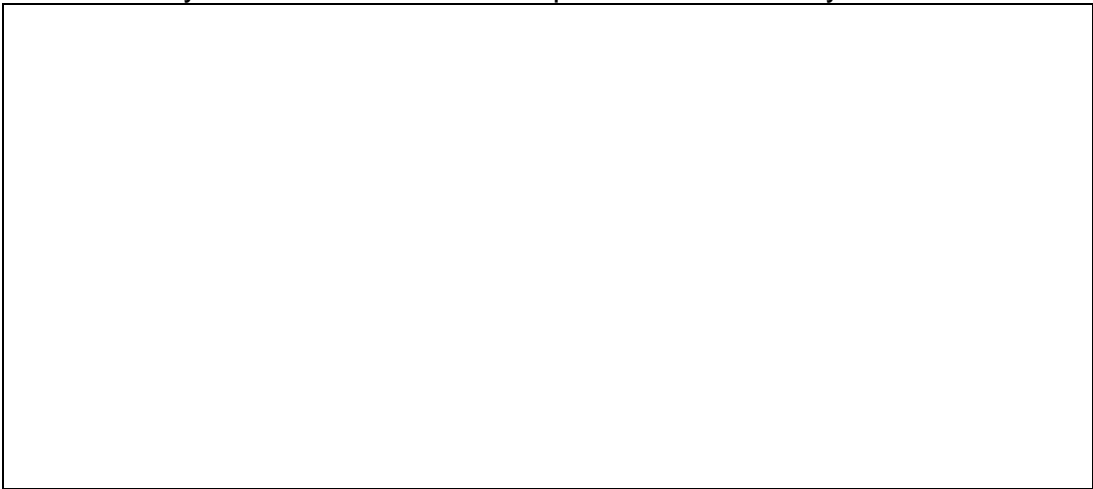
7. Did you learn anything unexpected?

8. What did you hope to get out of volunteering?

9. How far did you achieve what you'd hoped to get out of volunteering?



10. How do you think this volunteer experience benefited you?



11. What have you learned about yourself?



Identifying Skills

Volunteering can help you acquire new skills or use and improve existing skills. The aim of the following exercises is to identify what skills you have developed.

1b. Mind Map

You might find drawing a mind map helps to identify the skills you have developed through undertaking different activities as part of your volunteer role. In Exercise 1b we use a mind map to visually chart the skills you have developed through volunteering. You can either fill in the boxes below or draw your own mind map with a different number of boxes. You can do this to help you fill in the table below or as a separate exercise.

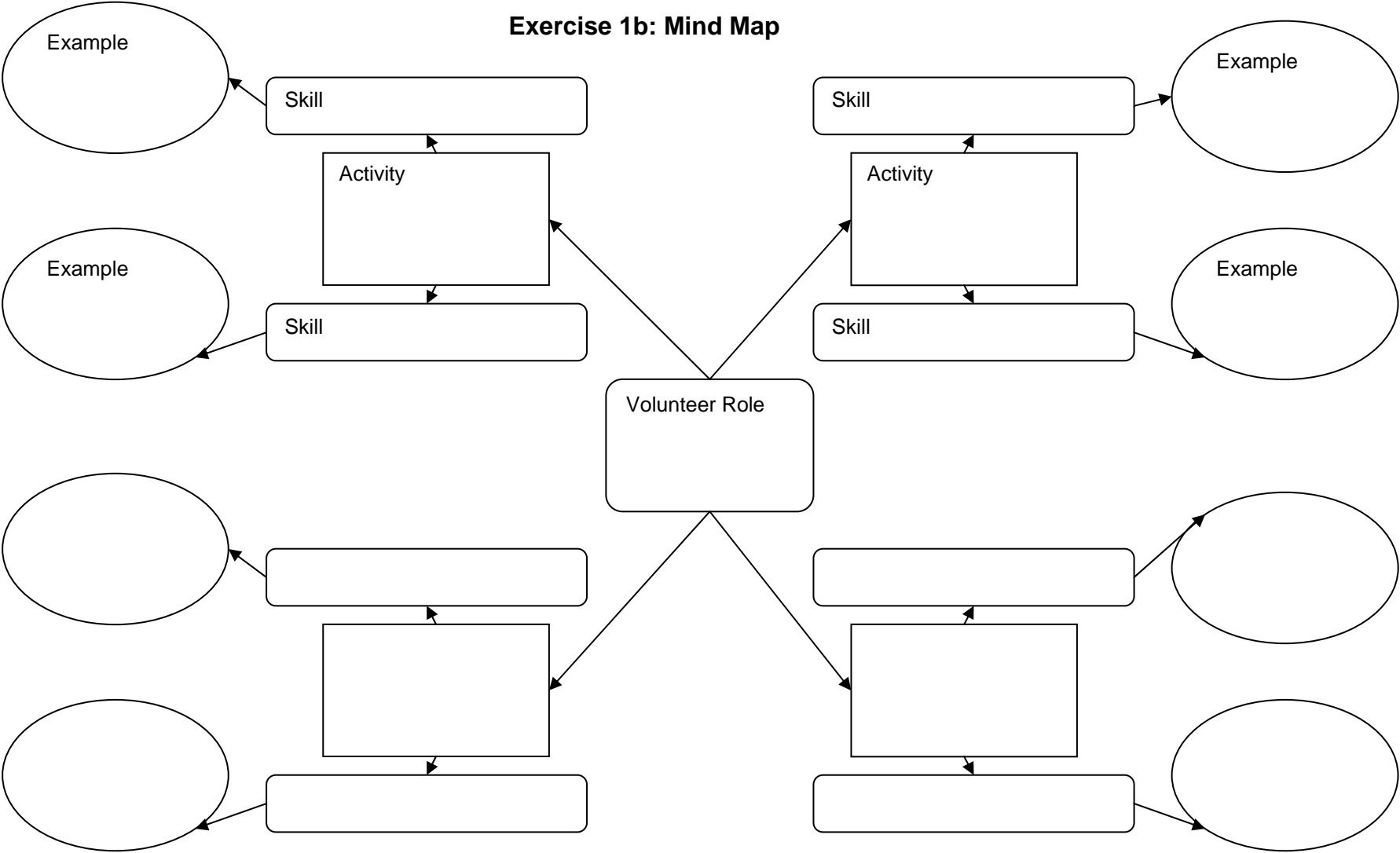
1c. Skills Table

The table below provides a list of general skills you may have gained or developed through volunteering. These include core and transferable skills that are recognised by employers as necessary in the workplace today. Thinking of the volunteering you done, think of an activity through which you might have developed each skill.

You will also need to be able to prove that you have developed or increased this skill by providing specific examples. For example, you could mention the number of times you have done a certain activity or job, describe a piece of work you have done or mention an event or training you attended.

Not all the skills listed below will be relevant to your volunteering. There is also space to include additional transferable skills specific to your volunteer-role, such as childcare, mentoring, driving, horticulture etc. In addition to those listed, choose 2-4 role-specific skills.

Exercise 1b: Mind Map



Exercise 1c: Skills Table

Skill	Volunteer activity through which skill developed	Level	Example
Example: Oral Communication Communicating information to other people, speaking in front of a group, being able to listen to and respond effectively to others	Mentor to young person	<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	Six months mentoring a young person increased my confidence in communicating with people from different backgrounds / ages. Improved public speaking skills by giving a talk on my experiences of mentoring at a Volunteer Recruitment Day
Oral Communication Communicating information to other people, speaking in front of a group, being able to listen to and respond effectively to others.		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	
Written Communication Being able to understand and present information and ideas in written form.		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	
Numeracy skills Being able to work with numbers.		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	
IT Skills Being able to use standard computer applications e.g. word-processing, e-mail, Internet		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	

<p>Self-management skills Being able to organise your time, manage your work, show initiative, set goals, complete tasks.</p>		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	
<p>Inter-personal skills Able to get on well with others (volunteers, staff, clients, users) and work with variety of people.</p>		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	
<p>Teamwork Able to work effectively as part of a team.</p>		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	
<p>Leadership skills Being able to encourage, motivate or supervise others.</p>		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	
<p>Decision-making Being able to identify possible options and choose best outcome</p>		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	
<p>Problem-solving Being able to identify problems and challenges, come up with workable solutions.</p>		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	

Role-specific skill:		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	
Role-specific skill:		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	
Role-specific skill:		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	
Role-specific skill:		<input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Improved slightly <input type="checkbox"/> Improved greatly	

Exercise 2a: Creating a Volunteer Portfolio

You might want to think about compiling a volunteer portfolio. This is a personal record of your experiences as a volunteer that can help you organise and save evidence. Keeping an up-to-date file of your achievements is a way of seeing how you have gained new skills and developed existing ones through volunteering. It can serve as a basis for a CV, job applications and interviews or can be shown to potential employers or volunteer co-ordinators

Once you have identified the skills you have gained through volunteering, you can complete a Volunteer Summary Sheet below for your current volunteer role and, if applicable, for previous voluntary roles.

You can also include in your portfolio:

- References from your supervisor or volunteer co-coordinator;
- Examples of your work;
- A record of training – what courses you attended, what you learnt, any certificates you received;
- Awards or qualifications you received as part of your volunteering;
- Press cuttings or newsletters;
- Other documents relating to your volunteering such as letters of thanks and appreciation, photographs, annual reports, records of attendance.

Volunteer Summary Sheet

Name: _____

Organisation: _____

Volunteer role: _____

Dates of volunteering: _____

Approximate number of hours worked: _____

Main activities and responsibilities:

Skills developed:

Key achievements:

Specific training attended (if applicable):

Signature of supervisor / manager: _____

Title of supervisor / manager: _____

Date: _____

Accrediting Voluntary Experiences

Would you like to have the skills you have learnt through volunteering accredited? There are a number of nationally recognised awards and qualifications you can gain through volunteering.

You can gain qualifications that recognise:

- Specific vocational skills you have learnt and practised through volunteering (e.g. childcare, retail, mentoring, cultural heritage);
- The general and transferable skills you have developed through volunteering;
- The time you have spent doing voluntary work.

You can work towards qualifications at a range of different levels, depending on your skills and previous educational experience. The National Qualifications framework operates at 8 levels of attainment:

NQF Level*	Equivalent secondary level	Higher Education Level	Example certificate for volunteers
1	GCSE grades D-G		ASDAN Certificate in Community Volunteering I; NVQs, OCN certificates
2	GCSE grades A* C		ASDAN Certificate in Community Volunteering II; NVQs; OCN certificates
3	A levels		NVQs; OCN certificates
4		C (certificate)	Lampeter Certificate in Interpersonal Skills for Volunteers; Birkbeck College Volunteering Certificate
5		I (intermediate)	
6		H (honours)	
7		M (masters)	
8		D (doctorate)	

*These are the revised NQF levels from 2004

Below are some examples of qualifications you could work towards as a volunteer.

1. Vocational Qualifications

a. **National Vocational Qualifications** (NVQs) are work-related, competence based qualifications. They show that you can do certain work to national standards. They can, for example, help people returning to work, as they can draw on previously acquired skills to reach an NVQ level of competence.

NVQs are flexible as in many cases you can work towards them as part of your volunteering role.

For more information: www.dfes.gov.uk/hvq
www.learndirect-advice.co.uk

b. The Open College Network offers accredited training designed to overcome the anxiety some people have about the more formal aspects of training. The emphasis is on high-quality, accessible, learner-centred training rather than on the qualification. The learning programmes are designed for the specific working role or interests of learners and are locally accountable.

Learners receive a certificate showing the learning outcomes they have achieved at nationally recognised levels of study. OCN certificates recognise learning achievement rather than competence in a work task, as is the case with NVQs, though OCN certificates are currently not as widely recognised by employers or colleges.

For more information: www.nocn.org.uk
www.learndirect-advice.co.uk

2. Volunteer Qualifications

a. ASDAN Certificate in Community Volunteering (Level 1 and 2)

The qualification recognises the general skills and good practice that volunteers need to show to work effectively in the community. It is run by a number of local voluntary sector organisations, colleges or training providers. It is relevant for you if you:

- Are seeking a level 1 or 2 award;
- Wish to develop skills and confidence in accessing modern vocational awards before progressing on to specialist vocational training;
- Are seeking formal quality assured recognition irrespective of any plans for further progression;
- Are seeking recognition for generic skills, and might be exploring a range of options before choosing a pathway;
- Wish to develop your role within the organisation you volunteer for.

For more information www.asdan.co.uk

b. University of Wales, Lampeter Certificate in Interpersonal Skills for Volunteers

A distance learning course available to anyone. This course offers the opportunity to gain recognition for the interpersonal skills volunteers use in their work, through a series of written assignments which encourage students to reflect on their role in the voluntary sector. It facilitates students' learning of a range of communication skills to deal with a variety of situations.

Units consider issues pertinent to all volunteers, such as confidentiality, working alongside professionals and communicating in group contexts.

Several interpersonal skills are explored including verbal and non-verbal communication and an introduction to the use of counselling skills is provided.

There are 8 modules and assessment is by coursework at the end of each module and is designed to enable students to relate theoretical knowledge to their own voluntary or working experience.

You may be interested if you:

- Are over 18 and;
- Have a minimum of six months' experience working as a volunteer (or paid worker) in a caring environment and;
- Have a minimum of five hours to spare each week.
- Want to gain 40 credits at HE level I

For more information: www.volstudy.ac.uk

3. Awards recognising time you have spent volunteering

a. Millennium Volunteers

An award for young volunteers recognising 200 hours of volunteering. You may be interested if you:

- Are aged between 16-24 years;
- Want a certificate that recognises your sustained commitment;
- Can commit to 200 hours volunteering within a twelve month period.

For more information: www.millenniumvolunteers.gov.uk

b. Duke of Edinburgh Award

Duke of Edinburgh is a voluntary, non-competitive programme of activities for anyone aged 14-25. It offers an individual challenge and encourages young people to undertake exciting, constructive, challenging and enjoyable activities. It is a four section programme (Skills, Service, Physical Recreation, Expeditions) with three progressive levels (Bronze, Silver, Gold). Volunteering is recognised through the award as part of the Service section. You may be interested if you:

- Are aged 14-25;
- Want your volunteering recognised as part of a structured programme of activities;
- Can commit to a minimum of 6 – 12 months (depending on award level).

For more information: www.theaward.org

c. Other Awards

- Organisations often have their own awards such as long service awards, Volunteer of the Year etc. They may also give out certificates for attending events or training, or volunteer's week certificates.
- Volunteer centres and volunteer bureaux may offer other certificates that recognise the number of hours you have given.

Exercise 3a: Action Plan

By working through the exercises in this pack you have reflected upon what you have learnt as a volunteer and identified the skills you have been able to develop.

By creating a volunteer portfolio and summarising skills, achievements and training on the Volunteer Summary Sheet you will be able to provide evidence of what you've learnt through volunteering. This process should make it easier to interpret your volunteer role for the benefit of potential employers on a CV, application form or in an interview.

Skills development is an ongoing process, and you may want to set some personal targets to help you develop additional skills or skills which you think will be directly relevant for the sort of jobs you are applying for or to increase your confidence in particular activities.

As a starting point look back over the skills you felt you had only 'improved slightly' as a result of volunteering and also think about:

- Does your volunteering provide you with opportunities to develop the skills you will need in your choice of paid employment?
- What skills do you need to develop further?
- Are you interested in working towards a more formal qualification or a recognised award as part of your volunteering?

It is important to set realistic, achievable goals that you can put a time limit on in order to measure progress. Identify the key goals you want to achieve through volunteering and then list them on the action plan below. Choose a time by which you want to have achieved the goal. You can fill in the progress column at this later date and decide if you need to take further action.

To help you do this you may want to:

- Find out what skills and experiences employers are looking for in the jobs you want to apply for;
- Talk to your supervisor or volunteer manager about possible changes to your role / duties;
- Investigate possible accreditation opportunities.

The goals you choose will be personal to you, but we have provided some examples below:

Exercise 3a: Action Plan Examples

Goal (skills to develop, awards, qualifications you want to gain)	Action to take (volunteer activities / tasks to do, courses to take, training to attend etc.)	Time by which you want to have achieved goal	Progress
Increase my confidence and familiarity with IT packages, including excel.	Offer to update the volunteer database with current volunteers' details	3 months time	Goal achieved? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
Improve my team-working skills	Organise a social event for volunteers in a team of others	Next Christmas	Goal achieved? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
Improve my writing style	Offer to take minutes in volunteer meetings Write an article for the Newsletter Help Volunteer Manager draft reports	6 months time	Goal achieved? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
Get a job as a paid classroom assistant	Volunteer in a local school Take a child protection training course Highlight volunteering on my CV	9 months time	Goal achieved? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
Gain a Millennium Volunteer's Award	Enrol on an MV scheme Complete 200 hours of volunteering	12 months time	Goal achieved? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:

Exercise 3a: Action Plan

Goal (skills to develop, awards, qualifications you want to gain)	Action to take (volunteer activities / tasks to do, courses to take, training to attend etc.)	Time by which you want to have achieved goal	Progress
			Goal achieved? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
			Goal achieved? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
			Goal achieved? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
			Goal achieved? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
			Goal achieved? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comments: