

BORDERLANDS

from exclusion to

BELONGING

Boundaries at Borderlands

Borderlands (South West) Ltd Registered Charity No: 1143313

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Safe and Supported - Boundaries at Borderlands

Introduction

Borderlands is a friendly, warm and trusting environment. We want our members to **feel part of a real and supportive community**. We know that sometimes people also know each other from other important communities, such as a Mosque, Church or through a school.

Sometimes, people in the asylum system have difficult problems in their lives. Sometimes we need to find creative ways to support our members. **We want to support you to work at Borderlands in a way that really sees the individuals that we are working with.**

However, sometimes when we think we are helping someone, we can confuse that person, make them feel uncomfortable, or create a difficult situation in the future.

This document will:

- describe the **rights** of people who are members at Borderlands,
- explain **why** we ask volunteers to have boundaries while working for Borderlands,
- give **guidance** for making decisions about boundaries as well as provide **example scenarios**.

We strongly **encourage conversation and transparency; if you are unsure about something - a behaviour or an interaction - talk to us about it!** This addresses any uncertainties and safeguards the wellbeing of members, volunteers and staff.

It is all of our responsibility to make Borderlands a safe, supportive place.

Application of guidelines

These guidelines stand as the default document for all of Borderlands' projects. For some things, we simply ask you to talk to your line manager before doing something.

For other things, if you do not follow these guidelines, you will have to stop volunteering at Borderlands.

The Mentoring Project **has some additional requirements that are unique to the Mentoring Project. These are laid out in the Mentoring Project handbook.**

Rights of members

Our members have the right to:

- Fully **understand and agree to any support provided**. Explaining this may take patience and reassurance (and may be impossible in some emergency situations, including in adult safeguarding). We will always aim to work collaboratively and gain informed consent.
- Their **cultural attitudes and beliefs**. It is important that staff and volunteers understand the members' approach to daily life and respect this while they are working with them, even where this challenges their own attitudes and beliefs.
- **Never experience feeling undignified or humiliated**, for example in being treated as unequal. As such behaviour is often unintentional, be aware of how to communicate to avoid this and think through actions or statements carefully.
- Be supported at a **pace that is right for them**. Which may mean staff or volunteers take a step back in providing support at an earlier point than anticipated.
- Acknowledgement of **past achievements or future goals**. Staff and volunteers should try to see members as complete individuals, not as the current difficult experiences they face.

Establishing and maintaining supportive boundaries

In order to form relationships that are healthy, trusting and supportive, staff and volunteers must **acknowledge the imbalance of power** between themselves and the members. This may lead to members:

- Feeling indebted towards Borderlands or the person(s) directly providing support
- Feeling dependent on the person(s) directly providing support
- Forming inappropriate feelings towards the person(s) directly providing support
- Feeling a lack of control and agency in their lives and situations

By understanding and acknowledging this power imbalance, we can gain extra sensitivity and caution when providing services and making choices surrounding additional support for members.

Where a member has a particular need not being met by generic services, **it is the responsibility of Borderlands to take necessary measures to ensure their safety.** If you become aware of someone whose needs are not being met, please tell them how to speak to one of the Help Volunteers on a Tuesday or to their Mentor.

All support given and friendships formed should happen in a context where **both parties feel comfortable.**

All decisions made to support members must be **made freely and fairly, without coercion from either party or without any agreement or expectation of repayment of any kind.** Borderlands was created as an organisation to collectively support people who are asylum seekers and refugees. As a team (staff, members and volunteers), we take on challenging and difficult situations and deal with them together.

Procedures

All staff and volunteers at Borderlands have a responsibility to **provide safe, effective and caring services to our members, whilst looking after themselves and their own needs.**

All relationships, exchanges and support should be transparent and open.

Any **support of members outside of the staff or volunteers' assigned role should be discussed with your line manager beforehand.** It is important to note that Borderlands is not the only organisation providing services and we have an extensive network of support in Bristol.

Staff and volunteers are encouraged to **have a general awareness of exchanges** that take place in and outside of the Drop-In, and raise anything that makes them feel uneasy – transparency is the best way to address any uncertainties!

If there is reason to believe – however small – that an **unhealthy relationship might be developing, or unhealthy exchange might have taken place, volunteers have the duty to report this to their line manager as soon as possible.** Staff have the responsibility to report this to their line-manager or the Director, as appropriate as soon as possible.

Volunteers must adhere to guidelines laid out in the Volunteer Handbook – failure to do so may lead to disciplinary action.

If staff or volunteers **have any uncertainties, they must speak to their line manager.** It's always best to talk things through with us before doing something that may lead to complicated or compromising situations later on.

Scenarios

The below are scenarios that might present themselves through interactions and connections at Borderlands as a whole. The **Mentoring Project has a distinct separate set of scenario guidelines in the Mentoring Project Handbook.**

Green scenarios require thought and reflection.

Amber scenarios require thought and reflection and we ask that you speak to your line manager about them.

Red scenarios are a clear no and you will be asked to leave Borderlands if you cross these boundaries.

Green scenarios

Greeting and personal contact, such as shaking hands or hugging. Consent on both sides is essential.

As long as the exchange is friendly, accepted on both sides and does not make either the member, volunteer or staff feel uncomfortable. Everyone has the right not to shake hands or hug someone if they wish, but we don't prohibit this.

Behaviours, reactions and feelings might be context specific, so be aware of this and act accordingly.

If you receive unwanted physical contact or you do not feel comfortable, please feel free to clearly state your own needs. Saying no might feel rude, but it is your right to be clear with your personal boundaries. If you still feel uncomfortable or want to discuss anything, please talk to a member of staff.

Amber scenarios

Exchange personal contact details – we encourage you not to, but it's up to you

You should not exchange contact details (telephone numbers, social media etc) with new members or members who you do not have a relationship with. We do not encourage volunteers to share contact details and Borderlands can act as the point of contact for activities (e.g. theatre trips, walking groups).

The exchange of personal contact details can blur the lines of professional relations and friendships. Unexpected expectations can subsequently emerge around social contact or support outside of Borderlands. In some cultures, not replying to messages and potential subsequent invites can be insulting.

Members can communicate with the Office team Monday - Thursday and we can signpost people to other services outside of these times.

In the event of supporting external Borderlands activities, the exchange of personal contact details may also be clearly helpful. However, we recommend setting clear

boundaries for this. For example, only answering the phone on a Borderlands day or before/after an activity.

Consider the potential consequences and act accordingly.

Inviting or accepting invitations from members for tea, coffee etc. – must ask staff

Consider if the individual could benefit from a Mentor. If they need external help or guidance, it may be the case that the offer of ongoing 1:1 support from a Mentor might be a better solution.

Reflect on what the meeting would achieve. Please speak to a Borderlands member of staff before committing to anything. We can then advise on potential support for the member and discuss how you can keep yourself and the member safe.

Inviting, or accepting invitations from members to visit house – must ask staff

The invitation to someone's house, for tea or dinner, is an extension of friendship and important in many cultures. However, we always encourage people to meet in public space due to risk. For example; whilst you may know the member who lives in NASS accommodation, you do not know their flatmates. Borderlands can suggest community cafes where you could go for free and still be 'hosted' and welcomed by the member.

It is important to acknowledge that in many cases a single man inviting a woman to his house is likely to be, or be taken to be, a display of interest. This applies to volunteers and staff inviting members as much as members inviting volunteers and staff.

Talk to us and we can consider the scenario together. In rare circumstances, it may be acceptable to go to someone's house, such as in the Mentoring Project where it was been agreed in advanced with the manager.

In order to ensure healthy and clear boundaries, we strongly do not encourage people to visit members or volunteer's homes, and it must always be discussed with staff in advance.

Organising external activities with groups of members – must ask staff

Some great ideas come up from our volunteers for external activities, and they often fill gaps that we do not have the capacity to fill ourselves.

Talk to a line manager about the idea and we can consider the needs and logistics together. It is important that we are able to take responsibility for the activity and will need to conduct a risk assessment, etc.

There is a chance that we advise against it, but we will discuss the reasons for this with you. It is also possible that the activity you are proposing already exists in another organisation which would benefit from partnership.

You must adhere to this boundaries text as a guideline for considerations and behaviours.

From experience, Borderlands recommends that you create a small team of 2-3 volunteers to organise the activity. This enables a more supportive, reflective, safe and sustainable structure.


Red scenarios

Lending or gifting money – absolutely not

Many of our members live in destitution with daily money insecurities. For this reason, destitution support is an inter-organisational service and part of a larger strategy in Bristol. If someone asks you for money, it may be a sign that they are not accessing support or services they are entitled to; the best thing for them is to be referred to a relevant service.

Giving or lending money to a member will result in disciplinary action.

Romantic or sexual relationships – absolutely not



The power imbalance inherent to the service provider/service user situation could leave Borderlands members vulnerable to exploitation or coercion. As Borderlands must be a welcoming space for all members, we also must consider impacts of relationship dynamics or the ending of a relationship on a member who uses our services. As such, we take the stance that it is inappropriate to become romantically involved with a member while holding a volunteer position at Borderlands. If you want to pursue the relationship, that is your decision to make but for the wellbeing of all we ask that you stop volunteering at Borderlands before doing so.

Advice giving

Borderlands is not an advice-giving agency; It is illegal and irresponsible for us to offer advice relating to someone's immigration situation, or to provide any service relating directly to someone's immigration application. If in doubt, **please talk with us**, and follow the guidance in the Volunteer Handbook.

On other matters such as housing or benefits, it is also in the member's interest that we **do not offer any advice** but rather signpost to agencies with expertise and knowledge specific to these fields. If ever a member comes to you with a problem that they want help with, please refer them to Help at the Drop-in on Tuesdays. Members can put their name on a list on the Welcome Desk.