

# Dozens of voluntary sector organisations reject planned role in Help to Work programme

George Osborne's headline policy at the last Conservative Party conference, known as "Community Work Placements" or "Help to Work" has launched today. However, the scheme is already in jeopardy, having failed to generate the voluntary sector participation it requires.

Instead, organisations including NCIA, Oxfam and the umbrella body National Association for Voluntary and Community Action are marking the date with the launch of a major campaign to "Keep Volunteering Voluntary".

Community Work Placements are six month full-time unpaid work placements for unemployed people. The [Keep Volunteering Voluntary](#) campaign, which has garnered the support of tens of voluntary sector organisations, points out this is more than twice the maximum community service sentence. As organisations become more aware of the impact of benefit sanctions on food poverty and homelessness, they are eschewing involvement in schemes which threaten benefit stoppages for non-participation.

There are numerous other signs that "Community Work Placements" are already in jeopardy:

- Three of the largest supporters of other workfare schemes have said they [will not accept placements](#): The Conservation Volunteers, The Salvation Army and YMCA.
- A response to a Freedom of Information request dated April 10th said that the [tender for 'Help To Work' was still ongoing](#), suggesting that the government was struggling to recruit the private providers to run the scheme.
- The DWP have also said that the guidance for companies running the scheme [will not be published](#) until the launch date, 28th April, suggesting its production is running late.
- The government is [refusing to reveal details](#) of where placements will take place to journalists.
- The Community Action Programme pilot – a similar workfare scheme to Community Work Placements – found that [placements could only be found for 63%](#) of participants.

Dave Draper from Derby, who will soon be finishing two years on the Work Programme and could be faced with a Community Work Placement said:

*"On the Work Programme, you are made to feel like a criminal for being unemployed. These new schemes aren't about helping people get jobs; they're about getting people off benefits. Those of us who have to go through them get sick with worry that we can be sanctioned at any time for anything."*

Andy Benson of the National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA), which works to keep the voluntary sector free of government interference said:

*"With Community Work Placements, charities that have a genuine desire to help people could end up exploiting them instead. We must not be naïve. The CWP scheme is the latest attempt to co-opt voluntary groups into doing ministers' dirty work for them. We want real jobs and real volunteering not real exploitation."*

Daniel O'Driscoll, Head of Volunteering at Oxfam said:

*“These schemes involve forced volunteering, which is not only an oxymoron, but undermines people’s belief in the enormous value of genuine voluntary work. Oxfam does not offer placements for participants in the mandatory work activity, or compulsory elements of ‘work for your benefits’ schemes. These schemes impact unfairly on the support people receive, and so are incompatible with our goal of reducing poverty in the UK.”*

Adrian McQuade, Director of Anti-Slavery International commented:

*“It’s remarkable that, in spite of its stated ambition to become a world leader in the struggle against slavery including a new “modern slavery bill”, the British government continues with its “workfare” schemes to force labour from vulnerable workers for the benefit of wealthy businesses. It represents the British government failing in its responsibilities towards its own citizens and undermining its stated principles to boot.”*

Joe Irvin, chief executive of the umbrella body the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA), said:

*“NAVCA champions volunteering but volunteering must be voluntary. That is why we oppose any requirement for people who are unemployed to carry out compulsory unpaid ‘voluntary’ work in return for their benefits.”*

***If your charity, faith group, union branch or other voluntary organisation wishes to reject “compulsory volunteering”, you can [sign up to Keep Volunteering Voluntary](#).***