

# First World War volunteers



During World War One, some 90,000 people became volunteers in Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) in both the UK and overseas in areas where people needed help and support from the British Red Cross. The Red Cross holds a unique [online archive](#) of all of these volunteers that is free to access.

This module looks at the realities of life as a VAD during World War I and will increase learners' understanding of the people involved and the places where they volunteered, using the VAD archive as source material. Individual volunteers became known as VADs during the war and so sometimes VAD is used to describe the person as well as the detachment (group) they volunteered for.

Young people (aged 11–16) will also apply this to their own lives and consider what skills and qualities they themselves could bring to a volunteer role.

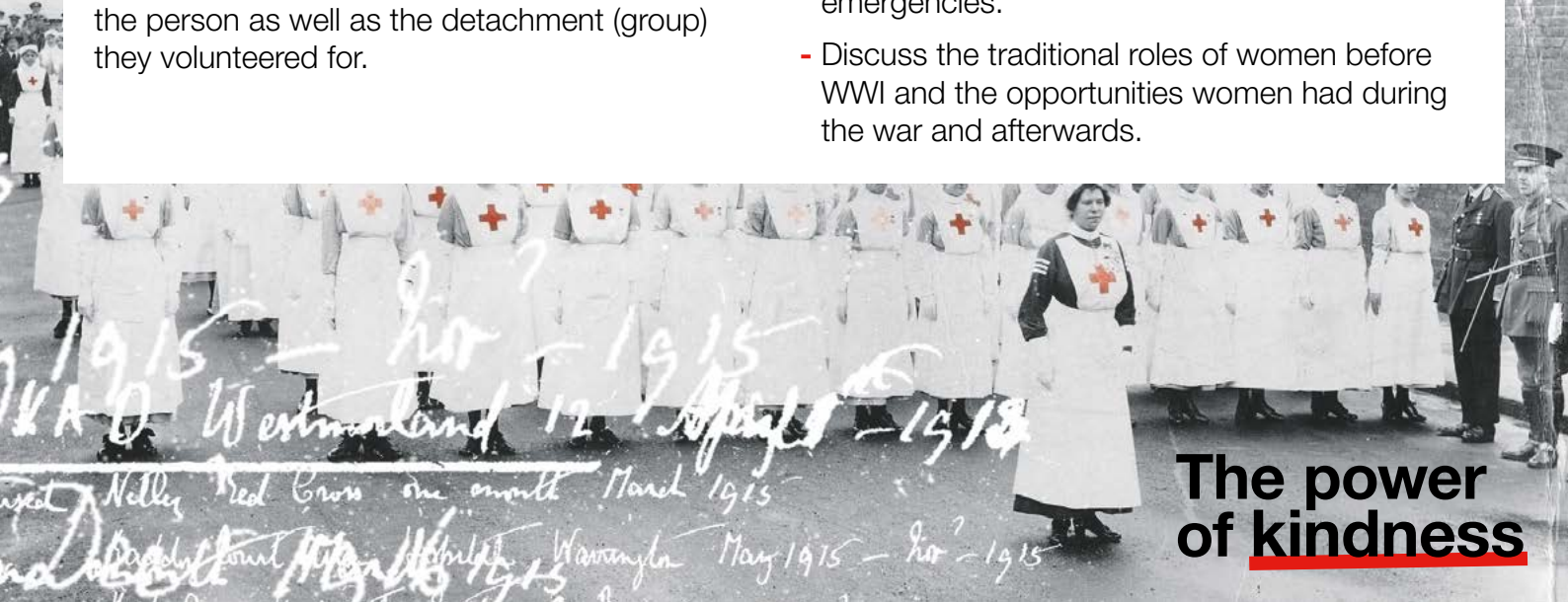
This module includes three parts:

- **Part one** uses the [online archive](#) and helps learners to find out more about individual volunteers and the qualities of a volunteer.
- In **part two**, learners consider the places that were used as auxiliary hospitals where the VADs worked and what is important for a centre used during an emergency.
- In **part three**, learners will explore the new roles for women during WWI and how this led to them having greater freedom and empowerment.

## Learning objectives

In this module, learners will:

- Increase their awareness of what life would have been like as a VAD.
- Explore what moves people to help others and the qualities they have.
- Consider what they have learned and how this can help them cope with challenges in their own lives.
- Increase their understanding of what was needed in an auxiliary hospital, and compare this to centres used in modern-day emergencies.
- Discuss the traditional roles of women before WWI and the opportunities women had during the war and afterwards.



# Activities summary

Part	Activity number	Activity title	Summary
<b>1</b> The volunteers	<u>1.1</u>	<u>Volunteering in a Voluntary Aid Detachment</u>	Research some VADs online and learn about their experience.
	<u>1.2</u>	<u>Being a volunteer</u>	Think about the qualities of a volunteer.
	<u>1.3</u>	<u>If I were a volunteer</u>	Consider the reasons why people volunteer.
<b>2</b> Auxiliary hospitals	<u>2.1</u>	<u>What are auxiliary hospitals?</u>	Research auxiliary hospitals during WWI.
	<u>2.2</u>	<u>Volunteering in auxiliary hospitals near you</u>	Find out about auxiliary hospitals where you live.
	<u>2.3</u>	<u>Designing an auxiliary hospital</u>	Think about what an auxiliary hospital needs.
	<u>2.4</u>	<u>Auxiliary hospitals today</u>	Explore how you might be able to help during an emergency.
<b>3</b> Women volunteers	<u>3.1</u>	<u>Women in the VADs</u>	Research women volunteers
	<u>3.2</u>	<u>In her shoes</u>	Explore the daily life of a VAD.
	<u>3.3</u>	<u>Equality and fairness</u>	Think about how women's roles changed during WWI.
	<u>3.4</u>	<u>Changing roles</u>	Look at the roles carried out by women before and after WWI.
	<u>3.5</u>	<u>Peace quotes</u>	Consider the meaning of peace and coping with difficult situations.

\*Please note that core activities are in red and extension activities in grey.

# Part 1:

# The volunteers

## 1.1 Volunteering in a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD)

### Core

Invite learners to search the **online personnel records** to find out about some of the people who volunteered in VADs during World War I. They could try searching using “Location” and enter their own county, town or village, or could search by name.



Surname *Stewart* REC'D 5 JUN 1919  
Christian Names *Lauren*  
Permanent Address: *Burrough Court, W...*

Ask learners to choose two volunteers from their results and capture the following information – they could copy the simple grid below to help them investigate and record their findings (this could be displayed in the PowerPoint). (Some records are more detailed than others, so they should select two that are more detailed).

	Volunteer 1	Volunteer 2
Name		
Gender		
Age		
Location/s		
Duties		
Other information (How many hours did they work? When were they a volunteer? etc.)		

Learners compare the volunteers they investigated with a partner and tell each other the story of their volunteers using the information they gathered. What was their name? How old were they? Where did they volunteer? What role/s did they do and for how long?

When they have shared their stories, learners work together on the following:

- a. What questions do you have about the volunteers you investigated? Learners can make a note of things they would want to ask if they could speak to them now.
- b. What do you imagine it was like to be them and to work in a VAD? How might they have felt? What kinds of feelings might they have had? Learners share their ideas and make a list of the key words that might describe being a volunteer in a VAD.

Whether whole or part time, and if latter No. of hours served *1609*  
Previous engagements under Joint War Committee, if any, and where *No*

*Elizabeth*  
*Red Cottage, London R. Chatterin* (February 1919)

## 1.2 Being a volunteer

### Core

As a class, mind-map the qualities that learners think might be important for volunteers i.e. compassion, listening skills, being practical.

Then, in smaller groups, ask learners to draw an outline of a person on a large piece of paper. Think about the qualities that were needed to be a good volunteer in WWI:

- a. Learners write the personal qualities they think would have made a good volunteer inside the outline of the person (for example, empathy).
- b. On the outside of the person, learners write why they think that quality was needed. They join up the quality (on the inside) with the reason (on the outside) with a connecting line (for example, they would have needed empathy so that they could put themselves in another person's shoes in order to help them).
- c. When they are finished, they swap their qualities outline with another group and compare their ideas. How were they similar? Did they have any additional qualities? Do they agree with the qualities the other group identified? Is there anything they would add?
- d. Now working individually, ask learners to consider these qualities. They can draw a smaller personal outline for themselves, and add the qualities that they feel they have. Then, in another colour, they can add the qualities they would like to develop and consider how they could do this. Invite learners to share with a partner or in the group.

### Extension

Display or hand out the **Code of Practice** from 1914, issued to women who enrolled to be volunteers in a VAD. Invite learners to read the code carefully and compare it with the list of qualities they made in their groups. Would they want to add anything to their person outlines now that they have read the code? Were there any surprises in the code? Why were they surprising?

You are being sent to work for the Red Cross. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience, your humility, your determination to overcome all difficulties.

## 1.3 If I were a volunteer

### Core

Invite learners to imagine themselves as a volunteer in a situation of war or conflict like the volunteers who enrolled in the VADs.

- a. Display in the PowerPoint or hand out the **Motivations for Volunteering** cards for learners to think individually about what might motivate them to volunteer. There are 14 cards in total, with one blank so learners can choose to add a motivation.
- b. Either individually or in small groups learners select the top nine that they think might motivate them to volunteer and discard the rest.
- c. Using those nine cards, learners organise them in a diamond shape with the most motivating reason at the top of the diamond and the least motivating of their reasons at the bottom of the diamond.
- d. Ask learners to compare their answers with a partner or in small groups. Why did they choose to organise the cards in this way? What was most important to them about their motivations? What prompted their decisions? What did they think about to make their decisions?

Ask them to think about the important role volunteers play in helping others. If they had to pick one motivation to display on a poster to attract volunteers, what would they choose and why?

### Extension

- e. Encourage learners to consider what kind of voluntary work they could do (see [here](#) for some ideas).
- f. Learners can create a poster to encourage others to volunteer for the British Red Cross, they could research more about the services of the British Red Cross [here](#).

Give generously and whole-heartedly, graciously, remembering that you are giving because your help.

If you see others in better circumstances than you and think of the men who are fighting amid difficulties and are often in great pain.

Those of you who are paid can give to the Mother Society which is your Mother and which needs more help to carry on its great work.

Those of you who are not paid are giving to the Mother Society and thus to the Sick and Wounded.

Let our mottoes be—"Willing to do anything"



# Part 2: Auxiliary hospitals

Particulars of Duties *Black at military hospital, Redwells*

Whether whole or part time

Previous Engagements under

PERIOD OF SERVICE

From 1-9-1915 To Present Time  
Commission Department County



## 2.1 What are auxiliary hospitals?

### Core

Direct learners to the First World War Volunteers website's section on auxiliary hospitals.

(Note: an auxiliary hospital means a temporary hospital that provides extra support during wartime.)

Invite learners to use the information on the website to answer the following questions (display in the PowerPoint):

- How many auxiliary hospitals were set up by the British Red Cross during the First World War?
- How did the services and care provided by auxiliary hospitals differ to the military hospitals?
- Who provided the care in auxiliary hospitals?
- What did the patients like about auxiliary hospitals?
- How was an auxiliary hospital organised and managed?
- How were auxiliary hospitals funded?

### Extension

Learners can use the answers to their research to design a poster to share this key information with others. You can display some posters from WWI in the PowerPoint, looking at the style of the posters, to inspire the learners.

## 2.2 Volunteering in auxiliary hospitals near you

### Core

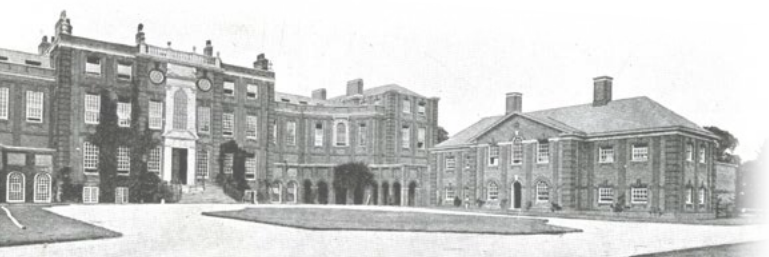
The British Red Cross has listed all of the auxiliary hospitals in the UK that cared for people during the First World War. Learners can explore the list here and identify the hospitals closest to where they are, considering the following questions to discuss in a group:

Do you know any of these buildings? Are they still there? What are they used for today? Is the building still used to help people? Are there any interesting connections you can find?

Learners enter the name of the hospital they found into the "location/hospital" box to find out about any of the volunteers that were stationed there during the war. They can look at their cards to see what they can learn about them and consider:

- What do they think life would have been like for the volunteer at that time?
- Why do they think they volunteered?
- As a group, think about what daily life might have been like for a volunteer:
  - What might they have done?
  - What might they have experienced?
  - What could have been challenging?
  - What might they have enjoyed?

Learners can share the story of the volunteer/s at this auxiliary hospital with others or write a short diary entry for a volunteer, outlining a day in their life.



Permanent Address:

*St. Dunstons Hospital, Gillingham*

Date of Engagement

*June 1918 Rank*

## 2.3 Designing an auxiliary hospital

### Core

Run a carousel activity to explore some of the elements that might need to be considered when designing an auxiliary hospital. As well as providing practical care, auxiliary hospitals played an important humane or emotional role in helping patients to recover from illness or injury. This included providing space for recreation and companionship, and a pleasant environment.

**Carousel activity:** Divide learners into small groups, give each a large sheet of paper and ask them to think about one of the aspects below, writing the heading in the centre of the paper and adding their thoughts. Two groups could do the same heading if needed. Once they have completed this task, groups then pass their paper to the next group, for them to add their ideas (this could be in a new colour pen). The papers are passed around the room until they get back to the original group, so that they can see what has been added to their ideas.

If needed, groups can learn more about auxiliary hospitals [here](#).

Aspects to consider:

- Space, transport and services – how much space might patients, staff and volunteers need? What would be needed in terms of access for patients, deliveries, visitors etc.? What kinds of services might be needed like toilets, kitchens etc.?
- Accommodation, location and environment – would it have room for key staff/volunteers to stay on site? What might patients need? Where might be good locations for the auxiliary hospital? What else might you need to consider? Outdoor space for fresh air etc.?
- Needs and dignity – how might people need to be looked after and what types of care might the hospital need to provide? What would help to give patients dignity in their care e.g. privacy?
- Recreation and activities – where could people enjoy themselves, meet and talk? What kinds of activities might there be for patients?

*Howdale Auxiliary Hospital - June 1916 - Sept 30, 1916  
Thelka Hospital, April 1917 - Jan 1919.*

Around the room, pin up the sheets groups have created of important features to include in the design of an auxiliary hospital. Hand out more large paper to the group and ask them to use the ideas around the room to design a floor plan of their own auxiliary hospital. Groups can consider the layout, where different services and rooms might be, how the design could help patients to recover, and can use drawings and text. Once they have completed their floorplans, groups can present their idea back to the whole class explaining their decisions.

### Extension

Ask learners to consider how they might adapt their auxiliary hospital to the following scenarios:

- There has been a major battle and you are expecting the arrival of many new casualties.
- It is summertime and the weather is hot.
- It is winter and the weather is cold and icy.



Date of Termination *July 1916* Rank *"* Pay *"*  
Particulars of Duties *Sister in charge of Infants' patients.*



## 2.4 Auxiliary hospitals today

### Extension

The equivalent of auxiliary hospitals are still needed today (often called rest centres in the UK). They may be needed because of a conflict, but they may also be needed as part of a response to a natural disaster, for example floods, earthquakes, hurricanes etc. or other emergency such as disease outbreak or famine.

Ask learners to read Victoria's [case study](#). Victoria is a British Red Cross volunteer and has helped in many rest centres during emergencies. In groups, ask learners to mind-map what might make a good modern-day rest centre. Remind them that they will need to consider different people's needs (i.e. people with children, it will need to be accessible etc.) Can they think of a suitable local building for this?

Now show them the rest centre [checklist](#) and compare with their ideas. Was there anything they hadn't thought of? Would this change the building they would use for their rest centre?

Now ask learners to imagine the building is being used during an emergency, such as a flood in the local area, and they have volunteered to help.

- What role or skills do they think they could best provide as a volunteer in a rest centre?
- How would they take into consideration people's emotional needs at a time of crisis as well as their practical needs?
- What are the things they could do to make sure they stay healthy and able to help others?

To help, learners can explore the ["emergency response" pages](#) of the British Red Cross website to find out about how volunteers and staff in the British Red Cross respond to situations today.



# Part 3: Women volunteers



## 3.1 Women in the VADs

### Core

In this activity, learners will use the [First World War Volunteers website](#) to research the role of women in VADs. A good place to start is in the section [Volunteers during the First World War](#).

Invite learners to work in pairs as investigators to find answers to the following (you can display these questions in the PowerPoint), pairs can use the search box at the top right of the [webpage](#) to search the records; click on the

[“Famous WWI volunteers: Agatha Christie”](#) box on the webpage; and use the [information sheet](#) about women’s involvement with the British Red Cross during WWI to help investigate the questions below:

- Can you find any famous women who became volunteers? What made them famous? What was their role?
- What were some of the roles that women did as volunteers?
- Can you find out about the uniform that women volunteers wore? Can you sketch a picture of this using a description or perhaps from a photograph? (You could show the image in the PowerPoint.)
- What were the caps that women had to wear called? Can you find out anything more about the person they were named after?
- If you wanted to be a woman volunteer in a VAD, what did you have to do e.g. training etc.?
- How were women organised as volunteers in VADs?
- What new opportunities did volunteering provide for women?
- How might it have felt for women to have a role in the VAD?

## 3.2 In her shoes

### Core

Display these pieces of information based on the diary of a woman volunteer:

- Ishobel Ross was a Scottish teacher who signed up with the British Red Cross to volunteer in a VAD.
- Later she travelled 1800 miles to Serbia to work in a hospital kitchen for the Scottish Women’s Hospital.
- The hospital was run and managed by women.
- Accommodation was basic, with people sleeping in canvas tents.
- The hospital looked after soldiers who were fighting on both sides in the war and was neutral in the care it offered, meaning that care was available to anyone who needed it.
- She saw soldiers wearing different uniforms passing through the town – Serbian, Russian, Italian and more.
- She heard bombardments (attacks with bombs) and saw flashes on the hill at night.

Ask learners to try and imagine what it might have been like for Ishobel at the hospital. They can either discuss this with a pair or write a diary entry as if they were Ishobel:

- How she might have felt before she left/during her journey/when she arrived.
- What she might have had to learn in her new role.
- What the challenges and the positives might have been.
- What kinds of things might have helped her to cope with these challenges.
- What the benefits of this work might have been.

Christie  
Agatha  
SEP 1919  
(Mr, Mrs, or Miss)

Surname  
Pearce  
Rec'd 5 JUN 1919



### 3.3 Equality and fairness

#### Core

Encourage learners to consider how women's roles changed during WWI, by considering the following questions (in the PowerPoint) as a class or in small groups.

- What kinds of jobs did women do before WWI? *(Work around the home; certain paid jobs such as a maid or a cook. Some careers, such as women training at medical schools to become doctors or dentists, were not available to, or allowed for, women before the war)*
- What happened when men went to fight during the war? *(Women had to do the work previously done by men)*
- What were the benefits of this? *(Women had greater freedoms and movement and new job opportunities. It also allowed them to demonstrate their skills)*
- What were some of the challenges that women faced? *(Women were still expected to look after the home, and were often paid less than men were)*
- What happened after the war? *(Many women went on to have paid jobs that were previously only available to men, and had more freedoms)*
- What tensions did women face after the war? *(Some women had to leave their jobs when the men returned from war and were expected to return to their previous domestic roles)*

Around the room, pin up the sheets groups have created of important features to include in the design of an auxiliary hospital. Hand out more large paper to the group and ask them to use the ideas around the room to design a floor plan of their own auxiliary hospital. Groups can consider the layout, where different services and rooms might be, how the design could help patients to recover, and can use drawings and text. Once they have completed their floorplans, groups can present their idea back to the whole class explaining their decisions.

### 3.4 Changing roles

#### Extension

Display or print and cut out the **cards** showing some of the wartime roles that were performed by women. They may have done these roles as volunteers in the British Red Cross, or as paid work in place of the men who had gone to fight in the war.

Invite learners to think about what it was like for women living at the time of World War I and create a women's roles line with "before the war" at one end of the line and "during the war" at the other end. Learners place the role on the line based on whether they think that they offered traditional or new opportunities to women (perhaps as roles/jobs that were previously only done by men, for example).

#### Suggested answers:

##### Before the war/more traditional roles:

Cook, nurse, teacher, house maid

##### During the war/new roles:

Driver, farmer, clerk, bus conductor, dispenser, commandant



Particulars of Duties *Motor Driver*

Whether whole or part time, and if latter No. of hours served *Whole time*

Previous engagements under Joint War Committee, if any, and where

Honours awarded

Christian Names *Ratie*

(Mr., Mrs. or Miss)

Permanent Address: *Oak Lea, Prospect Rd. Brompton. Bakers*



### 3.5 Peace quotes

#### Core

A major role for women volunteers during World War I was providing care for sick and wounded soldiers. Women may have found new freedoms and opportunities in this role, but many would have also experienced the horrors of war first hand. They would have had to treat terrible injuries, hear horrible stories and maybe even experience the fighting close by.

Consider how people might have felt when the WWI was over. How might people have reflected on what they had experienced? What might it have taught them about human nature? Think about the positives (like people coming together to help one another) and some of the challenges (like people having to fight, often with little or no training).

Display these peace quotes and ask learners, in pairs, to choose and discuss one of them: what they think it means, how they think it might have applied at the end of WWI, to women VADs and to their own lives:

PEACE, PERFECT PEACE (2).  
→ Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties press'd

- "Responsibility does not only lie with the leaders of our countries (...). It lies with each of us individually." **The Dalai Lama**
- "Peace is a daily, weekly, a monthly process gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures."  
**J. F. Kennedy**
- "When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful." **Malala Yousafzai**
- "There is no great force for change, for peace, for justice and democracy, for inclusive economic growth than a world of empowered women". **Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**

Now pairs can consider:

- How much they agree with the quote
- What kinds of things can help people feel stronger and to cope with challenges
- What kinds of things they can do to help themselves and others cope with challenging situations.



# Module one: Supporting resources



## 1.2 Code of practice

No.....14516

*This paper is to be considered by each V.A.D. member as confidential and to be kept in her Pocket Book.*

You are being sent to work for the Red Cross. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience, your humility, your determination to overcome all difficulties.

Remember that the honour of the V.A.D. organisation depends on your individual conduct.

It will be your duty not only to set an example of discipline and perfect steadiness of character, but also to maintain the most courteous relations with those whom you are helping in this great struggle.

Be invariably courteous, considerate, unselfish and kind.

Remember that whatever duty you undertake, you must carry it out faithfully, loyally, and to the best of your ability.

Rules and regulations are necessary in whatever formation you join. Comply with them without grumble or criticism and try to believe that there is reason at the back of them though at the time you may not understand the necessity.

Sacrifices may be asked of you.

Give generously and whole-heartedly, grudging nothing, but remembering that you are giving because your Country needs your help.

If you see others in better circumstances than yourself, be patient and think of the men who are fighting amid discomfort and who are often in great pain.

Those of you who are paid can give to the Red Cross Society which is your Mother and which needs more and more money to carry on its great work.

Those of you who are not paid are giving their best to their Mother Society and thus to the Sick and Wounded.

Let our mottoes be—"Willing to do anything" and "The People gave gladly."

If we live up to these, the V.A.D. members will come out of this world-war triumphant.

*Do your duty loyally.*

*Fear God.*

*Honour the King.*

KATHARINE FURSE,

*Commandant-in-Chief, B.R.C.S. Women's V.A.D.'s*

### 1.3 Motivations for volunteering cards

<b>Support my country</b>	<b>Help those who are in need</b>	<b>Try something different</b>
<b>Use my skills to help others</b>	<b>Develop new skills</b>	<b>Feel that I'm doing something</b>
<b>Because I can</b>	<b>Because people will think I'm good</b>	<b>Protect my family</b>
<b>I'd want someone to help me</b>	<b>It sounds like an adventure</b>	<b>Provide friendship and support</b>
<b>I like to be in control</b>	<b>Support those affected by war</b>	



## 2.4 Auxiliary hospitals today

# What makes a good rest centre?

My name is Victoria and I'm a British Red Cross young responder. I've worked in many rest centres over the years, providing emotional support for people in crisis.

**Having a good rest centre ready to help people and meet their needs is really important. It helps so much in the initial response.**

A rest centre has to be planned. Good planning within the council makes a good rest centre. Some of the things worth thinking about include: knowing where it should be set up, what to have ready, making sure the site has disabled access, accessible toilets, easy parking and access for emergency vehicles. Ensuring the right teams of people are there is important too.



Photo © British Red Cross.

We've set up rest centres differently, but one we set up, during recent flooding, worked really well.

- As you come in, there is a reception area where everyone is signed-in and signed-out.
- After you've been signed-in, we have tea, coffee, food, and refreshments.
- The Red Cross is there with clothing and practical support including pharmacy and first aid support.
- Cubicles have been built with tables and chairs inside, where people can talk with someone in private, rather than in front of others.
- There is a pet's area and a children's area where we have set up a film - to keep the children occupied.
- We included a quiet space where people can go and relax, and not feel they have to be around big groups of others if they don't want to be.
- We also closed off the bottom end of the hall and set up beds behind a partition – the lights are off and it is a quiet area.

**What do you think would be a good rest centre design?**



Photo © Matt Crossick/British Red Cross.



## 2.4 Auxiliary hospitals today

# Rest centre checklist

The British Red Cross recommends that you consider the following when selecting a location for, and planning the layout of, your rest centre.

- Is your centre easily accessible?
- Is there a car parking area?
- Is there level access to the entrance or an entrance for disabled people?
- Is there one large room/hall for a holding area?
- Is there one room in which private interviewing can take place, if required?
- Do you have basic kitchen facilities?
- Have you considered what food will be provided (taking into account dietary/medical/allergy- based/ cultural factors)?
- Do you have washing/toilet facilities (including facilities accessible to disabled people)?
- Is there a telephone room?
- Are there shower facilities?
- Is there a general administration office?
- Do you have a pets area?
- Do you have a first aid/medical advice area?
- Do you have a staff rest room (away from all public areas)?
- Have you taken into consideration the needs of people who might not speak English, or have a different culture/faith e.g. prayer room, availability of translators, or local community/religious leaders?
- Is there a crèche/play area?
- Is there a communal recreation area?
- Do you have private places and people with the ability to provide emotional and practical support?
- Do you have information and advice tables with people able to provide practical assistance and answer questions?

### 3.4 Changing roles

<b>Driver</b>	<b>Cook</b>
<b>Farmer</b>	<b>Clerk</b> <b>(note taking,</b> <b>letter writing etc.)</b>
<b>Bus conductor</b>	<b>Nurse</b>
<b>Dispenser</b> <b>(giving out</b> <b>medicine)</b>	<b>Commandant</b> <b>(in charge of</b> <b>a hospital)</b>
<b>Teacher</b>	<b>House maid</b>