

Volunteering at Braziers Park:

Things to know before applying, and to keep in mind if you come

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We love and are grateful to volunteers, who help us keep the place running, and the ideas, interests, culture and skills they contribute!

Here are some things to consider and know about before applying, and to refer to again once you are accepted.

Volunteers must be at least 18 years old.

Your mental and physical health

As a community, we try to be inclusive, including in terms of mental health diversity. At the same time, there are limits to how much we can support people if they become very unwell. So we ask you to ask yourself – and perhaps talk it over with your friends or family too: Do I have the necessary support in place for my health conditions - whether that is physical or mental? Can I meet my needs while living as a volunteer? Think about whether it is right for you, and also for the community.

Living in community can be rewarding, and at the same time really challenging with so many new conditions and experiences. You would be living, eating and working among many other people with different temperaments and personalities. Braziers is not the place for you if you don't enjoy being around lots of people, sometimes with a fair amount of noise! There are of course opportunities for quiet and solitude each day, but daily and weekly meetings, meals and your work will be full of people. You would also likely be sharing a room with one or two people. Most all of us go through emotional turbulence in the initial stages of moving into community, and even after being here a while. Sometimes the ideals and high hopes we project onto communities don't always come true.

So please consider if you can support yourself while you are here, and also if you can commit to working alongside other community members five days a week. If, after you think about this, and read all this information, your answer to yourself is an honest "Yes," go ahead and complete the application form.

FAQs

Is there a cost? No. You exchange 30 hours a week for your bed and all meals and snacks. You may want to have a bit of pocket money to pay for travel and extras, such as social activities outside Braziers.

Are there rules of behaviour? We have a [Code of Conduct](#). When you submit the application you are agreeing to abide by it. When this code is breached, there are processes for addressing and talking about what has happened. As a last resort, people may be asked to leave. The Code of Conduct will also be sent to you after you are accepted as a volunteer and you can find a physical copy on the notice board outside the pantry.

Generally, the atmosphere at Braziers is friendly. Our Code of Conduct exists to let those who choose to live here know that we have a duty of care to all residents. We don't tolerate insulting, discriminatory or aggressive behaviour or language, drug taking or excessive alcohol consumption. We encourage everyone to speak out if they are uncomfortable or worried about any behaviour.

How can I get there? Travel information is [here](#). Let us know what time you plan on arriving. We suggest you aim to arrive between 10am and 4pm. But that's okay if that's not possible. Just let us know.

What's the daily schedule? Volunteers contribute their time between 9am – 4pm over five days each week. Sometimes you'll need to contribute both Saturday and Sunday and have two days off in the week instead. All volunteers help in housekeeping on Mondays and Fridays. Some tasks require evening contribution, in which case you'll work less earlier in the day. There is a meeting each morning at 9.00 after breakfast, to connect with each other and decide how to share the day's tasks. There is a separate volunteers' meeting each week. Please ask in advance if you need to vary the hours or days that you've agreed at the weekly volunteers' meeting. **Be ready to carry out tasks from 9 am.** There is a 30-minute tea break at 11 am and a one-hour lunch break at 1pm.

You must be available to contribute during core hours. The volunteers and the coordinator for the day work together as a team. Stay in good communication throughout the day and if you are not sure what to do next, ask the person who is coordinating the day. Several tasks have explanatory briefing sheets on the bulletin board outside the pantry. Always ask if you need guidance.

What will I do? Tasks include; cleaning the house (bathrooms, toilets, guest rooms, changing beds) supervised by the Hospitality Team Coordinator or another resident, cleaning the kitchen once a week; and working in the garden and across the estate, including the festival campsite. After you receive a kitchen induction, you can help with cooking and cook by yourself if you wish. There are sometimes maintenance projects, and often the need to host visitors. We try to ensure our volunteers get at least one day a week helping outside but be aware it is different to many situations you might encounter through Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF): there are more indoor tasks here. You'll be given training and supervision as needed. If you have concerns with any task, speak to the person coordinating the day's work. Safety equipment must be worn or used as appropriate. If you notice a health and safety risk, please report it.

Do I need good English? Yes, you need a good grasp of spoken English. You will also need to be able to read things like recipes and notes, provide assistance to our guests and understand work and safety instructions as well as contribute to community life. If English is not your first language you will find plenty of opportunities to develop and improve.

What kind of people will I meet? Living here is an opportunity to experience community life and to exchange skills and cultural experiences with people from different countries, backgrounds, experiences, perspectives and skills. It is an opportunity to experience change and growth as an individual, and as part of a group. We encourage you to share your knowledge, experience and interests e.g. a film, music, a talk or workshop.

Where will I stay? You may be in the main house, Garden Cottage or outbuildings, usually sharing with one or two others: we don't take special requests or make guarantees that you have your own room. If you are non-binary we can talk with you in advance about what sharing arrangements you'd like. If you identify as male or female, we'll place you with one or two others of the same gender. At the end of your stay, please clean the room and change the bed for the next person. Often it is necessary to move to a different room during your stay as volunteers come and go.

Quiet time is from 11 pm onwards. Please be respectful of those who may be in adjacent rooms, including those above or below you.

What clothes will I need? It is often cold in England from mid-September to late May. Bring something warm and suitable for outdoor working in wet weather. There are some spare outdoor jackets, sweaters and boots for volunteer use. There are work boots, work gloves, hard hats and overalls if needed. Please return them clean. Slippers or indoor shoes and raincoat are useful to bring.

What else should I bring with me? What is provided? Bedlinen and towels are provided. On the top floor you will find a linen closet with sheets, bed linen and towels. Return all linen washed and folded. If travelling from outside of the UK, remember to bring an appropriate power plug adapter. Our sewerage system is a septic tank which works well if the bacteria balance is maintained by not using

the chemicals found in most detergents and toiletries, so please bring your own biodegradable and organic toiletries. We have a small shop with organic shampoos and soaps.

How much stuff can I bring? There is little in the way of storage space, so don't bring anything with you that you will not need while you are here. There is nowhere to store extra possessions that you may need in the next phase of your life. You must take all your things with you when you leave.

Are there rules about drinking & smoking? There is no smoking or vaping in the house, any other buildings and on the front porch. You may smoke outside. Don't inconvenience others with smoke. Illegal drugs aren't permitted. We ask that alcohol is consumed in moderation.

What's the food like? We grow some of our own food (fruit, vegetables, herbs and nuts). Our garden is run on organic and no-dig principles; we have a large greenhouse, polytunnel and walled garden. We often make our own bread, juice and preserves. Some residents are vegan and vegetarian and most days we have no meat. We cook our meals ourselves. The application form contains a place for you to indicate food allergies. If you won't be present for a meal, cross yourself off the meal list in the kitchen well in advance, so the cook doesn't prepare too much food.

Where does energy & water come from? Our water is from the mains and is metered – please don't waste it. Sewerage is into a Victorian septic tank which needs a delicate balance of bacteria for its anaerobic digestion to function and discharge naturally purified water into the surrounding land. This balance is disrupted by bleach and other chemicals in most toiletries and detergents. Please don't bring or put bleach into the toilets or sinks. We try to live in an ecologically sustainable way, so if you can bring eco soap, shampoo, toothpaste etc. organic/biodegradable that is much appreciated. We have some for sale. Our electricity is supplied by a renewable energy company. Help us reduce bills by turning off lights, heaters and appliances not in use. A wood pellet system provides hot water and heating. We also have some electric heaters. Cooking is on an oil-fired Aga and an electric oven.

What's there to do during time off? There may be bonfires and celebrations, opportunities to join courses, films, discussions, board games and outings. Volunteers often contribute their ideas and enthusiasm: feel free to suggest and organise activities, share your interests, games, cuisine and skills with us all. There's a grand piano which likes being played and plenty of guitars and drums.

There's a lounge with board games and a big screen for streaming films. There's WiFi in the main house, but not in all the outbuildings where you may be sleeping. There are spaces that can be used temporarily for yoga, therapy, crafts, reading and hanging out.

We are on the edge of the Chiltern Hills, an area of outstanding natural beauty and close to The Ridgeway, one of the oldest pathways in the country. The river Thames is close by and there is an outdoor swimming pool in Wallingford in summer and indoor pool in Reading.

There are two pubs within walking distance: The Black Horse and The King William. The Ipsden Village Store and Post Office is about 15 minutes' walk. There are bicycles available, to be looked after by users. It's your responsibility to check they are roadworthy. You're advised to wear a reflective jacket and a helmet. There may be spares you can borrow..

Can I have friends or family to visit during my stay? Volunteers may request that friends or family stay overnight occasionally, for a total of 14 people-nights over the course of 3 months (or 5 nights per month if you are staying less than 3 months), with a maximum of 7 consecutive nights. Your guests would stay either in your room or in a guest room, if one is available (guest rooms are less available at weekends when we tend to have more paying guests). Ask for our Friends & Family information sheet once you get here.

How does the community work? A link person will show you around, introduce you and orient you to the place and its rhythms and systems. You can ask them anything during your stay, and you can also ask any resident. We eat together and share cooking and

cleaning. You are welcome and encouraged to attend our Sensory Meetings (Tuesdays at 7.30 pm). The feelings aired in this meeting often inform the weekly Community Meeting on Thursday at 1.30 pm, where we use consensus to make decisions. (You are also welcome to attend this, but check first with the Thursday coordinator). Morning meetings are also a time for sharing thoughts and feelings. We often have a round at the start of each meeting, where everyone can share anything they wish, without interruption or comment.

There is always a lot to do and it's essential to do your share of communal jobs such as drying up dishes and cutlery, sweeping the floor and emptying bins. Please leave bathrooms clean and dry, wash up all your crockery, wipe up your crumbs etc. The more people who do a bit extra, the happier we all are. At the same time, you need to take time off when you've done your share and not feel you have to do everything there is to be done. Most people find that some time on their own each day is necessary, as there are so many interactions with others for much of the day.

Where is Braziers? Braziers is a 29 hectare / 55 acre estate in the heart of the countryside in South Oxfordshire which is in the South East region of UK. The nearest small town is Wallingford (8km). The nearest large town is Reading (15km) and Oxford is 30km away. There is a good bus service between Reading and Oxford (X40): the bus stop is less than ten minutes' walk along an unlit single track lane (you will need a torch at night for safety). London Paddington is 25 minutes from Reading by train.

Is my booking flexible? We have a fully booked volunteer programme all year round. . . Occasionally there are cancellations: Once you are here, check with the Community Coordinator if you want to extend your stay. If you need to leave early, give us as much time as you can, so we can find a replacement. After two weeks you'll have a check in with the Community Coordinator, including a chance to give feedback.

If you have to cancel coming to Braziers for any reason, please let us know as soon as possible: our weekly programme relies on a full complement of volunteers and it takes time to fill unexpected gaps.

How do I apply? The volunteer application form is on our website.