



Volunteering with ACoRNS

Section	Article
Title	Volunteering with ACoRNS
Introduction	<p>The Autism Community Research Network @ Southampton [ACoRNS] is a unique partnership between researchers in Education and Psychology at the University of Southampton, and education partners in the local community. Our education partners include nurseries, FE colleges, and special and mainstream schools. Together, we plan and carry out research projects that are relevant and meaningful for informing and improving educational practice.</p> <p>Depending on your skills or preferences, a volunteering role with ACoRNS can provide you with experience of some or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying out research in schools and the wider community; • project and web administration skills; • systematic literature search skills; • data management and analysis skills; • project writing and dissemination skills. <p>We welcome autistic and non-autistic students to volunteer with ACoRNS.</p>
Background	<p>We are a small friendly team and we value participatory and co-constructed approaches to research. We apply the same principles to planning and supporting volunteer positions within ACoRNS.</p> <p>Sometimes it can be difficult to get involved in activities outside of your usual academic programme or work. We know that fitting new things in can be difficult because this can mean developing a new routine, meeting new people, and managing time effectively. These can be common concerns for autistic and non-autistic people alike. However, we know that these things may be particularly concerning for autistic people, especially if communication and expectations are not clear, or time is not spent at the outset to find out how people like to work best.</p> <p>One of the best ways of helping to deal with these concerns can be to start small. This can mean getting in touch to have a conversation about volunteering; volunteering for a short period of time to get a specific task done; or volunteering to work on a specific project with some well-defined tasks. Typically, volunteers contribute up to 4 hours of time per week, but this can vary depending on the person, the type of task and whether it is during vacation weeks. We will always discuss and plan with you what feels practical and appropriate.</p>

	<p>ACoRNS is a very inclusive team. We, and all our students and collaborators, have a very good understanding and awareness about autism.</p>
<p>How could this affect me?</p>	<p>You may feel additional pressure in taking on new responsibilities within the ACoRNS team. You may want to think about whether this is the best time to volunteer or something that could be done at a different time. You may want to think about your reasons for volunteering and whether other activities could help you to meet your objectives.</p> <p>If you do want to consider volunteering further, the benefits can be considerable and may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthening your CV in specific ways; • gaining skills, experience and confidence; • making a difference to children and young people on the autism spectrum, and the schools that support them; • developing good working relationships with new people.
<p>What to do next</p>	<p>Find out more about the kinds of projects that we do from the ACoRNS website: http://acornsnetwork.org.uk/projects/</p>
<p>Practical tips</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Email us with any questions or to arrange a time for an initial discussion. This does not commit you to anything. You can email Hanna Kovshoff in Psychology (H.Kovshoff@soton.ac.uk) or Sarah Parsons in Education (s.j.parsons@soton.ac.uk). 2. Make some notes for yourself about the kinds of things you might be interested in doing with ACoRNS e.g. helping out with data collection in schools; doing some project administration work (such as organising meetings); updating the website; using social media to capture and share information about what ACoRNS is doing; undertaking data analysis; developing writing or presentation skills. 3. Speak to someone who knows you well (this could be a partner, friend, personal tutor, family member) to discuss whether this could be the right thing for you.
<p>Questions to think about</p>	<p>Here are some questions to think about when considering your next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the unique perspectives and skills that you bring to ACoRNS? • What kinds of things do you enjoy doing and how might those things be relevant for ACoRNS? • What kinds of skills or experiences are you looking to develop? • Are you ready to take on an additional role and prepared to work in professional settings? • Does your CV need tidying or updating? • How much time do you think you could reasonably commit to ACoRNS? Weekly? Over what period of time? • What information do you need from us to help you to decide? • What kind of training / induction would be helpful for you?

Additional
information and
links

The ACoRNS website is here: <http://acornsnetwork.org.uk/>

You can also follow ACoRNS on ResearchGate:

<https://www.researchgate.net/project/Autism-Community-Research-Network-Southampton-ACoRNS>

And on Twitter: [@ACoRNSoton](https://twitter.com/ACoRNSoton)

Note: We have developed this article to provide you with information about volunteering with ACoRNS using the ‘autism&uni’ toolkit, which is available here: <http://www.autism-uni.org/toolkits/>