

Q. Why volunteer with TinyLife?

A. TinyLife is dedicated to supporting families with premature and sick babies. Our family support volunteers provide practical and emotional support to parents who have had a premature, sick or disabled baby. As an organisation, we rely on our volunteers to help us provide services to families across Northern Ireland.

When a premature baby is discharged from hospital, it can be very daunting for parents to care for a small, vulnerable baby whilst juggling with the demands of family life and perhaps, other young children. As well as premature and ill babies, TinyLife provides support to families who have experienced a multiple birth. Mums and dads at home with two or three babies really appreciate having a TinyLife volunteer to help with the never ending cycle of feeding, changing, bathing and rocking to sleep.

Q. What do our Family Support Volunteers do?

A. After successful completion of our recruitment process and Access NI checks, our volunteers are matched with a family. Usually, the volunteer will visit the family in their own home once per week for a morning or afternoon. Ideally, you should be able to commit to a family for at least a year.

Family Support Volunteers provide practical, social and emotional support to families. Each family is assessed by a Family Support Officer who will then match the family and volunteer.

Q. What will a typical support visit entail?

A. As you can imagine, no two visits will ever be exactly the same. Our volunteers help families with all sorts of problems from the everyday to the overwhelming. As well as helping with the practical tasks of feeding and changing babies, most parents are glad to have another listening ear in their home. Looking after small and vulnerable babies can mean that opportunities for social interaction with other adults are limited.

They may need help with everyday parenting situations such as coping with other young children in the household. Quite often our volunteers will help mum out by playing with the other children or helping with homework. Parents may also need help to attend appointments, particularly, if they have twins or triplets. They may also assist with basic household tasks from time to time if they feel that this will help the family.

Q. What will I *not* be expected to do?

A. Volunteers are not asked to babysit or look after the children for long periods while mum or dad are absent from the home. When a volunteer has had at least 8 visits with a family, she may feel comfortable with looking after them for a short period while mum attends an appointment e.g. mum may have to take one twin to a hospital appointment. However, if a volunteer wishes never to be left alone with the children, this is perfectly ok.

A. A volunteer will never be asked to mind a child with a medical condition or disability that requires special skills or experience.

Q. Who are TinyLife Family Support Volunteers?

A. All TinyLife volunteers are people with a love for babies and young children who are keen to help families coping with young families. They may have children of their own or not. Some volunteers will have experience of premature or sick babies in their own family or extended family circle. Some volunteers may have worked in a paid or voluntary capacity with children. Others may be about to embark on a professional career and feel that volunteering with TinyLife will give them valuable experience in their chosen field.

Q. How do I become a TinyLife Volunteer?

Step 1 Complete the Family Support Volunteer Application Form

Step 2 The Family Support Officer in your area will arrange to meet with you for an informal discussion on volunteering with us.

Step 3 Attend 3 day Induction Training Programme (15 hours) + complete Access NI checks process.

Q. How will I be supported in my role?

A. All volunteers have a designated TinyLife Support Officer who is responsible for supporting all volunteers in her geographical area. Following initial training, the Family Support Officer will accompany you to your first matching visit with a family. Thereafter, she will be in contact with you at least monthly to review progress, check concerns or queries and receive suggestions for training or services.

Once volunteers complete their initial training, follow up training and social events are organised so that our volunteers will continue to develop in their role and meet with other volunteers.

Volunteers are reimbursed fully for travel expenses.