**Values, beliefs and experiences**

Values are generally defined as **deep-seated beliefs** about what is right or wrong and about what is important or unimportant. They are principles, standards or qualities that people care about and that contribute to driving people’s behaviour. Values held by individuals are also supported by a set of **unwritten rules or norms** about what is socially acceptable behaviour – both personally and within society. (*Source:* *The Open University, Introducing the Voluntary Sector Free Course, Open Learn).*

There is a degree of judgement involved in choosing which values to adopt, and this means people’s values are based on *what* is important to them as well as *how* important it is to them.

Once we have adopted an ‘internalised’ a set of values, it becomes our own standard for understanding the world around us, directing and justifying our actions, sustaining our attitudes and, inevitably, judging others’ actions.

Examples of personal values are ambition, compassion, family, financial stability, joy, justice etc.

Values are held at different levels and interact with each other. They are **not fixed and can change** over time.

The different value levels influence each other, both outwards and inwards.

For example, individuals will vary in the extent they support, adopt, and internalise societal values; individuals may be able to influence and change the way their organisation acts; and groups may bring about change at a societal level, influencing the set of shared values. For example, changing wider societal attitudes towards children with experience of the care system through individual mentors.

Personal values have an impact on the particular types of work, organisations and volunteering opportunity you will be interested in or choose to do. Individual values will also have an influence on how you interact with other people who may or may not share your values.

It is important to understand that values are **just one component in people’s behaviour and actions**: motivation, abilities, education and temperament also play a part (and are also wider components of an individual’s personality).

Our personal values stem from our social background, religion (if we have one), ethnic origin, culture, upbringing, education and our experiences of life and work.

Personal values are not static. They continue to develop and change during our lifetime as we experience new situations and people’s behaviours, particularly ones involving conflict or difference, or ones we find surprising or offensive. These encounters provide opportunities to question and rethink our own values. Of course, people may not be fully conscious of the values they hold or of the value judgements they are making when taking particular actions. People are also not necessarily consistent in their behaviour, and there may be a discrepancy between what we say our values are and how we act.

*(Adapted from Open University,* *Introducing the Voluntary Sector Free Course, Open Learn).*

If you would like to find out more about your own personal values, there are lots of lists and quizzes on the internet and social media (e.g. on Pinterest) which can help you understand which values you identify with most.