

Supporting disabled volunteers

Guidance for volunteers

1 – Introduction

Disabled people can make a great contribution to the work we do. However, we need to be aware that they do not share the same opportunities and choices as non-disabled people in many areas of their lives. Poverty, social exclusion and disadvantage experienced by many disabled people often stem from a lack of understanding of disability issues. Disabled people are 9% less likely to volunteer than the rest of the population due to the barriers that prevent them from volunteering.

At any stage of your volunteering journey, you may support, buddy, mentor or coach disabled volunteers. This piece of guidance has been created to help you in proactively supporting them, whether they are already volunteering with us or expressing an interest in becoming a volunteer.

2 - Useful definitions

Disability - 'A person has a disability if she/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day duties'.

Disabled people - covers a wide range of different people with different impairments which may or may not affect how they carry out their volunteering role.

Reasonable adjustment - is a fair, sensible and simple change we can make to support disabled volunteers. The majority of adjustments are relatively inexpensive if not free.

3 – Putting the guidance into practice

A new volunteer is joining our branch/group. They have a disability. What could we do to ensure the volunteer gets the support they need to carry out their role?

It is important to spend some time talking with them, and ask them if they feel they need any additional support to effectively carry out their role. Some disabled people may not

want or need additional support; however if they do need small adjustments to be made and these are reasonable, put them in place.

If you need some guidance on what is a reasonable adjustment and how to implement it, contact your Volunteering Development Coordinator (VDC).

How can my VDC help us support disabled volunteers?

Your VDC can:

- assess if adjustments required are reasonable,
- request information and resources from disability specific organisations,
- discuss your concerns and provide some advice and guidance,
- request funding and arrange for equipment/resource/service to be purchased (or produced in-house).

Remember

Some disabled people don't say 'I have a disability' or 'I'm disabled'. They may explain it differently e.g. 'I get easily stressed so I need a routine'.

Not all disabilities are visible and many disabled people have conditions that are not immediately apparent e.g. dyslexia, heart disease, depression etc... People who have an invisible disability will be more likely to tell us about it if we create an open and accommodating volunteering experience where they know they can come to us to discuss problems in confidence.

4 - Common barriers faced by disabled people, and what the Association does to overcome these

<p>People lack the knowledge about the support that disabled volunteers need. e.g. "We don't have the time or money to give them the support they need".</p>	<p>We ask the disabled person for their help in understanding what, if any, additional support they need to be effective in their role. We implement reasonable adjustment e.g. for people with concentration problems, we divide large pieces of work into smaller tasks and goals.</p>
<p>People think that reasonable adjustments have to be physical or costly.</p>	<p>The majority of adjustments are relatively simple and inexpensive. A change in working hours, more rest breaks, splitting the role up can be just as effective. e.g. we allow disabled volunteers to work their hours flexibly so they do not have to travel at times that are unsuitable for them.</p>
<p>Financial and transport difficulties.</p>	<p>We are up front about what out-of-pocket expenses we can cover and ensure volunteers are promptly reimbursed. We can offer to help</p>

	volunteers find details of accessible transport options (such as Dial a Ride, Taxilink). We could consider organising a “buddy” to help disabled people to learn new routes.
Some buildings are inaccessible to disabled people.	We run training and events in venues which are accessible to disabled people.
Volunteers don't feel welcome / no-one helps them when they arrive or start volunteering.	Disabled people may have a history of negative experiences that may put them off applying. We can appoint “buddies” to welcome volunteers on site, show them around, and tell them about the tasks required.
Disabled people often have to attend regular appointments or take medication at certain times of the day.	We offer flexible volunteering slots to help a disabled volunteer feel in control and remove anxieties about attending regular appointments.
Lack of alternative forms (e.g. large print, Braille, audio tape, disk) and complicated forms exclude people from the recruitment process.	We can provide information in a variety of ways and offer assistance in completing forms.

5 - Case studies

Hilary Walklett, North Lancs and South Cumbria Branch Vice Chair

“Over the years, I have undertaken a number of roles including Secretary, Chair and Vice Chair [...] I give talks on MND to local societies and groups and to Health and Social Care Professionals. I recruited volunteers to form two satellite fundraising groups and I fundraise - everything from rattling tins to organising street collections, market stalls etc.”

“I enjoy putting back into the Association some of what I get out of it and meeting people who understand my position and my needs [...] My colleagues in the branch are really good at making sure that venues have good access, so we don't have committee meetings in houses that I can't get into, or only have an upstairs toilet. At events, care is taken that I get tasks that can be done without much standing or walking.”

Alison Kelly, David Niven House Volunteer

“My motivation to volunteer with the MND Association stems from my desire to work for a charity that helps people with physical disabilities adjust and cope with a life changing condition [...] I have compiled packs for volunteers and helped complete various administrative tasks for the Fundraising Team.”

“On my first day working at MND Association, I was extremely nervous: I had been housebound for a year because of a significant deterioration in my physical condition. I explained this to the lady who was to supervise me that day and she was extremely

accommodating, supportive and friendly. She checked up on me during the course of the day at frequent intervals and introduced me to many other colleagues who were gregarious and friendly.”

“All staff members were happy to help me in any way they could physically, such as: lifting heavier objects, helping me decide which chair was most comfortable and making me frequent cups of most welcome coffee! All the tasks I have been asked to undertake have been tailored to my individual capabilities.”

For more information contact the Volunteering Team:

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