



Volunteering for Everyone

A guide for organisations who want to include and recruit volunteers
who have a learning disability

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Introduction

Volunteering England is the organisation charged with delivering the Volunteering Hub, a government-funded initiative which will develop the volunteering infrastructure across England.

Part of the Volunteering Hub's work aims to encourage volunteer-involving organisations to engage a wider diversity of volunteers. Volunteering England passionately believes that volunteering is a key route to enabling people from socially excluded groups to participate in their community. We are very pleased to have been able to work with Mencap to produce this booklet, which aims to help volunteer managers to support and value volunteers with a learning disability, without affecting the volunteering activity itself.

We know from our experience of working with volunteers that involving volunteers from a variety of social groups and background benefits the volunteer-involving organisation as well as the individual volunteer. We hope organisations will find this booklet a valuable tool when looking for – and retaining – volunteers.

Christopher Spence CBE
Chief Executive
Volunteering England

Mencap as an organisation includes people with a learning disability and their families and carers, professionals working in the field, and volunteers. Volunteers are an invaluable asset to our organisation.

Mencap knows that people with learning disabilities have limited volunteering opportunities. This can be due to barriers such as understanding and awareness in the wider community, access to volunteer opportunities and also seeing themselves as recipients of volunteering rather than volunteers themselves.

We know that volunteering offers us all a chance to be valued in the local community, to learn new skills and widen social circles, and can lead to paid employment.

Mencap wants to raise awareness of how other organisations and communities can recruit, support and value volunteers with a learning disability. This not only benefits the wider community, it also allows a person with a learning disability to gain more independence, choice and the opportunity to share their own skills and qualities with others.

We are delighted to have produced this booklet, which aims to help and support organisations to do this, with the help of SPOT (Speaking Out in Torbay) and of course Volunteering England as part of its Volunteering Hub activity.

We hope that this booklet enables more opportunities to become available for volunteers with a learning disability.

Jo Williams CBE
Chief Executive, Mencap

Why involve people with a learning disability as volunteers?

Many people with a learning disability are socially excluded and viewed as having no valuable contribution to make to the society in which we live. They are often seen as the recipients of voluntary help rather than having a positive contribution to make to their communities.

Only 6 per cent of people with a learning disability currently volunteer. This is mainly due to imposed barriers of access and lack of opportunities. For this marginalised group volunteering leads to friendships, skills, enjoyment and confidence. It enhances their communities and it challenges the views of disability of those around them.

Volunteer-involving organisations will benefit from the broad range of skills, experience and diversity this group can contribute. With the right support and understanding, people with a learning disability are an untapped resource of dedicated and committed volunteers so desperately needed by the voluntary sector.

Robert Zdanowski volunteers for the National Trust at The Workhouse. He started as a handy man but has gone on to assist with school visits, ensuring the children's safety as they move around the building on their tour.

Robert decided to volunteer because he thought it would be 'fun and enjoyable'. Volunteering has lived up to his expectations.

Nikki Williams, property manager, says, 'As a part of the team, we have seen Robert blossom in confidence. He has gone from someone very reserved to a confident, assertive member of the team who interacts fabulously with other volunteers and most importantly, has mastered our radio communication system. Robert has grown into a valuable member of the volunteer team.'

How do we involve volunteers with a learning disability?

The following guide will give you pointers on good practice. However, involving volunteers with a learning disability is mainly about attitudes being challenged. There is no one-size-fits-all answer. Rather, it is about working in a person-centred way, considering the personal barriers faced by each individual you wish to involve and working through these with that person.

By adopting the good practice in this document, benefits will be felt not just by people with a learning disability but by all volunteers. For example, providing written forms and guidelines in an easy-to-read format also helps people for whom English is not their first language.

Recruitment

Where to look

There are a number of places where people with learning disabilities might go to find out about the volunteering opportunities that are available to them. These are some of the key places you should consider in your local area.

Job Centres

Some people will visit their local Job Centre to see if there are volunteering opportunities available to them in the area. There may be a disability officer within the Job Centre who could be an ideal first point of call for you to discuss the volunteering work you have available.

It is important to recognise that not everyone will be able to use the touch-screen facility at the Centre, so paper and/or audio adverts should be available.

Day Centres

Local authorities, private and voluntary organisations manage day centres where some people with learning disabilities may go during the day. Some of the centres will offer work experience schemes. Others will be looking for new opportunities for those who attend.

Colleges

Most further education colleges have a learning support department. This department would be able to inform students of the opportunities. The college may also have a newsletter or college paper where adverts could be placed.

Local advocacy groups

There are many local self-advocacy groups throughout the country, where people with a learning disability meet and work together. As well as local groups there may also be advocacy organisations that would be able to inform people of any opportunities you have.

Learning Disability Partnership Boards

In all local authority areas there are Learning Disability Partnership Boards, a network of statutory, voluntary and private organisations, parent/carers and people with learning disabilities. All these Partnership Boards will have an employment or work sub-group, which could help in the recruitment of volunteers.

Others

- > Local media
- > Your own website
- > Libraries
- > Charity shops
- > Mencap (see Resources section)

Application pack

This section suggests some of the things you may want to include in an application pack for potential volunteers.

General introduction

Many people find it really useful to have a little bit of background information about the organisation they may volunteer for. This may include:

- > History
- > What the organisation does
- > How many people are employed
- > How people can get involved
- > Contact details and numbers
- > Website address

Potential role description

When including the role description it is very important to be clear about:

- > What the volunteer work will be
- > What skills the person will need
- > How many hours they will be needed/available
- > What, if any, equipment will be used

This is particularly important so that people can think very carefully about the work and what it may mean for them, but also to be as sure about it as they can be before they make the application.

Application forms

A detailed and complicated form could prove a barrier to people with a learning disability, preventing them from applying. Application forms can also be off-putting to people with low confidence, poor literacy, or indeed anyone who dislikes form-filling. You may be able to do without one altogether and choose to gather the information through an informal interview.

The form should be clear, easy-to-read, large-print (at least 14-point type) and not need too much written information. Pictures to support the questions would be helpful but not essential. For more information about making communications accessible please see the Total Communication section (page 11).

An example of an application form which demonstrates how they can be simplified can be found on pages 16, 17, 18 and 19.

Interviews

This section suggests some of the things you will need to think about when interviewing people with a learning disability.

Before the interview

Once you have decided the questions you are going to be asking the prospective volunteer, it would be a good idea to send these to the person before the interview. The reason for this is that some people with a learning disability will need time to think about and prepare their answers.

Some people will also need support at their interview. Going to a new environment and meeting new people can make people anxious. Most people would prefer someone they know already to support them and this can be arranged before the interview.

The interview room should be light and have reasonable space. Ideally it should be quiet so that people can concentrate.

The timing of the interview should be no more than 20 minutes. This is to allow the best concentration time to be used by the interviewer and the volunteer.

'I had support showing me what to do and then I began to know what to do on my own.'

‘When I volunteered I met new people. I was nervous at first but then I got used to it and really enjoyed it. I was talking to lots of people.’

The interviewer/s asking the questions should make sure they speak clearly and use easy-to-understand words. Abbreviations and buzzwords should be avoided to minimise possible confusion.

If the volunteer is supported at the interview it is very important that the questions are addressed to the volunteer and not the supporter. The supporter should only answer the questions if the volunteer has asked them to. The supporter may have to explain your question to the volunteer.

Time should be given for the volunteer to answer the questions, as some people might need more time to think about what has been asked.

During the interview you may want to ask the volunteer what support, if any, they feel they might need when volunteering. This is beneficial to both the organisation and the volunteer so that any support needed can be planned and arranged before the volunteer begins work.

An opportunity to visit the place the volunteer might be working and meet other people who work there would be beneficial for some people. This will allow the volunteer more time to think about whether they feel able and want to do the work.

After the interview

It is important that if a decision is not made while the volunteer is at the interview, they should be told how and when they will be notified.

If the volunteer has not been successful, then it would be really beneficial for them to know why. This will help them to think about whether they really want to do that type of work.

All comments should be constructive and sensitive to the individual.

Support and supervision

Everyone needs support, and for some people in particular, lack of support can be a significant barrier to volunteering.

Supporters

Some people may have their own supporter but others may require support from someone within your organisation.

If there is someone in your organisation who will be offering support, then it is very important that they meet with the volunteer before any volunteering begins. This will allow both people to decide if they are happy to work together and it is also a chance to get to know each other.

People being supported generally prefer the supporter to work alongside them, rather than standing over them. People with a learning disability want to feel that they are working as a team and also to feel independent as far as possible.

If your organisation is providing a supporter for the volunteer, then it is good practice to have an additional named supporter, to cover for leave or sickness of the main supporter. Many people with a learning disability have had to miss out on volunteering work because their only supporter was unable to attend.

You may need to think about the skills of your supporter and ensure that they are matched with the individual volunteer and their support needs. It may be that training is required, such as awareness or communication. This should be looked at as a positive career development opportunity.

You should also think about the workplace and ensure that the area and facilities are accessible for any volunteer with a disability.

People with a learning disability have said some of the important qualities of a supporter are:

- > Patience
- > Understanding of individual needs
- > Reliable
- > Friendly
- > Respectful

'I made lots of friends when I volunteered.'

The role of a supporter is not to take over or do the work for the volunteer, but to encourage and enable the volunteer to do the work him/herself.

Supervision

Supervision is an important part of any work-related role and is just as important to a volunteer with a learning disability.

A meeting once a month for half an hour, at least to begin with, is generally recommended. It would also be good practice to give the volunteer a few questions before the meeting, so they have time to prepare.

People have said they would prefer a trial period of 2 months. After the first month, at their supervision meeting, you should ask the volunteer if they are happy to go on to the next month.

If the volunteer has a supporter, they should also attend the supervision meeting. However, it is a good idea for the supporter to leave the meeting 5 or 10 minutes before it finishes. This will allow the volunteer to feel comfortable about bringing up any part of the support that might not be working.

As an organisation you should treat a volunteer with a learning disability the same as any other volunteer. You should feel comfortable in being able to say honestly what is working well and what, if anything, could be better.

A copy of the supervision should be made available to the volunteer. This should be in easy words and large type (14-18 point). A copy on audiotape may also be needed.

'It makes me feel really proud and happy that I can help other people.'

Total Communication

This is only a brief introduction to Total Communication. Courses are available across the country – see www.totalcommunication.org.uk for more details.

What is Total Communication?

Total Communication is not a particular way of communicating; it is a way of thinking about how you communicate and always trying to use the best method.

What is involved in Total Communication?

The Total Communication approach involves using lots of different ways of communicating. It can be difficult to make someone understand us if our speech is not clear or we cannot read or write. But this doesn't mean we cannot communicate effectively.

Total Communication uses other ways apart from verbal and written communication, such as:

- > Gesture – pointing, facial expressions
- > Signing – there are two main signing languages that people with learning disabilities may use which are Makaton and British Sign Language (BSL)
- > Symbols – there are systems of pictures which represent words and these can be used to communicate
- > Objects – you can use actual objects to support communication
- > Photographs – these can be used to communicate what you want, what you have been doing or what you want to talk about
- > Drawing – don't be afraid to draw what you are trying to say, or ask the person if they can draw

Some people may use writing to communicate and not speech. It is always necessary to speak to the person as well as using any of these other communication methods.

'It makes me feel really proud and lucky that I am able to help other people.'

Case studies

This section showcases some great success stories, not only from the volunteer's perspective but also from that of an organisation that recruits volunteers with a learning disability.

Robin

I worked whilst training at Manor House, Torquay, for the visually impaired. It was the best place I ever worked at because I was paid £40 plus my benefits.

I stayed 3 different times between 3 to 6 months. I was unwell so I had to keep returning. The disabled resettlement officer said I was only good for sheltered employment. This annoyed me because it was negative.

So I started as a volunteer making cane baskets to use for chicken and chips in my local pub. I thought when I knew people were eating from them – I made those baskets – I felt at last people needed my services. I then grew tomatoes and cucumbers on my balcony and they used them in the pub. They just paid me my expenses.

Then I went to college to prove myself and to prove to Manor House I could do it. I would like to think I could get a job with computers.

I am doing sheltered employment although they call it training for work. I have been training for 10 years and they throw in a few certificates.

I now do voluntary work for the SPOT group. I am the regional representative for the Valuing People Regional Forum and I go to the learning disability partnership board subgroup for employment. It makes me feel really proud and lucky that I am able to help other people.

Julie

I like all the jobs I have. I have had some that I got paid for and some I did not.

The voluntary café job I had, which was run by the church, involved standing for 3 hours. My leg hurts if I stand around but I can walk a long way. I cleaned tables and washed up. I had a meal but no payment. I stopped working there because of the standing.

I now work one morning at a church children's nursery where the mums stay and join in with the play. I talk to people and play with the children. I don't get paid but the lady who works there takes me home to her house and I have tea.

I never miss going to my jobs and I am never late. I want to go even if I feel ill. I felt horrible and lonely when I was home all day. All the people where I work are very nice. They like me and I get on well with everyone.

'I felt horrible and lonely when I was home all day.'

Caroline

I work 5 mornings a week at Baytree House, a respite centre for people with learning disabilities. I am paid wages each week. I am paid a good wage.

I started at a day centre then moved onto the Adult Training Unit and they found me a job, which was voluntary. I worked as a cleaner at Hatfield House, a residential home for the elderly run by social services. I did this for 3 years and I had a lot of experience in the job.

Doing the voluntary job helped me to get out into the community. I had support showing me what to do and then I began to know what to do. I got praise, which made me feel very good.

Hatfield closed down and I was offered a paid job at another residential home, then Fernham closed and I was offered work at Baytree House where I now work.

At Baytree I am a domestic cleaner. I enjoy the friendship of the staff and residents. I am going to Italy soon and I paid for a computer course.

'Doing the voluntary job helped me get out into the community.'

'I was over the moon when I had my interview. I was a bit nervous at first. I am very proud of my job.'

"I was bored sitting at home watching television, looking at four walls"

Dot

I have never had a paid job so volunteering gives me a choice about going out or staying in. It gives people a chance to prove what they can do.

I first worked at Paignton Zoo on the computers. It did not work out because I was on my own doing shredding and collecting post, which was boring. Then I was offered a job in the Zoo restaurant. I was over the moon when I had my interview. I was a bit nervous at first. I am very proud of my job. I wash up, clean tables and sweep up.

I like using the dishwasher best and that's what I do now. I am my own boss. I get on with the chef and we have fun. All the staff help me. I have a uniform.

I meet lots of people and I feel useful and no longer lonely at home on my own.

John

I was bored sitting at home watching television, looking at four walls. Then an organisation called Community Day Opportunities offered me voluntary work making a special garden. It was called a therapy garden and people who use wheelchairs could work there. I went twice a week and loved it. I was glad to get out and meet people.

Everyone was throwing cans away and I thought about what I had seen on television about recycling. With my experience I then got a voluntary job at Paignton Zoo. I am in the education garden and I also work a day recycling so I use my knowledge to raise money. I have been at Paignton Zoo a long time.

I am much more independent and equal to everyone else. Not left on the shelf.

I work in a team and I laugh and joke with all the other staff. I meet lots of different people. I feel more important and that people listen to me more.

Andrew

Andrew, from Carmarthen, has a learning disability, and before he started volunteering at Dinefwr Park he felt he never had a real chance to learn.

However, with the right support and encouragement, Andrew's progress has been a real inspiration. He has achieved an NVQ Level 1 in Land-based Operations and is experiencing a level of independence he has never achieved before.

He said, 'I was doing nothing with my life. I wanted to get out and do something different. I went to a talk at the community centre and they were talking about volunteering with the National Trust and I thought that I would like to try it out.'

Mencap and The National Trust work in partnership to provide learners, who are often excluded, with supported opportunities to work towards their personal goals.

Selina Carpenter, the National Trust's Community and Volunteering Officer Wales said, 'In terms of formal learning, Andrew has achieved his NVQ Level 1 developing a range of new skills including health and safety, also transporting, operating and maintaining equipment, plus assisting with the construction and maintenance of footpaths, steps and fencing.

'He now regularly undertakes a number of tasks including painting, tree planting and strimming. All pretty amazing for someone who has never done anything practical in his life until 4 years ago.

'On an informal level, Andrew has learnt to socialise and work as a member of a team. When I first met Andrew on his first day at Dinefwr Park, he was quiet and appeared apprehensive. What a difference 4 years makes. It's the same Andrew today but with a different outlook, an unfazed, more confident man.'

With the continued help and support available to him, it is hoped that Andrew will be able to move into paid employment in the future.

'I was doing nothing with my life. I wanted to get out and do something different. I went to a talk at the community centre... about volunteering with the National Trust and I thought that I would like to try it out.'



Volunteer Application Form

Please complete this form clearly. All your information will be kept confidential.



Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other

Name



Date of birth



Address



Telephone number (day)

Telephone number (eve)



Do you have a paid job? Yes No

If yes, what do you do?



How did you find out about volunteering for Mencap?



Have you done any voluntary work before? Yes No

If yes, please tell us what you have done.



Why would you like to volunteer with Mencap?

Do you have any experience of learning disability? Yes/No _____

If yes, please give details. _____



Why would you be a good volunteer? Tell us about your skills and work experiences. _____



Please tell us what kind of activities you enjoy. _____



What do you not enjoy doing? _____

Which days and times are you available to volunteer? _____



Do you have a car you can use while volunteering? Yes No





Do you have a medical condition or disability that may affect your volunteering? Yes No

If yes, please give details.

Please give us the name, address and telephone number of two people who can tell us whether they think you would be a good volunteer. Mencap will write to these people and may phone them as well. Choose people who are not related to you.

Person 1:



Name

Address

Telephone number



Person 2:



Name

Address

Telephone number

CONFIDENTIAL

Mencap makes sure that everyone working directly with people with a learning disability is properly checked.



Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offence by a Court of Law? Yes No

If yes, please give details.

If you continue with your application to volunteer, we will also need to apply for a criminal records disclosure for you.

Having a criminal record does not necessarily mean that you will not be able to volunteer.

Please sign here to indicate that all the information you have given us in this form is true, as far as you know.

Signature:

Date:

If you would like some support in filling in this form, please call ...

About Mencap

Mencap is the leading UK charity working with children and adults with a learning disability and their families and carers. Our vision is of a world where everyone with a learning disability has an equal right to choice, opportunity and respect, with the support they need.

Mencap has expertise in developing practices that include people with a learning disability in their community. Our volunteering strategy is focussed on disseminating good practice so people with a learning disability can access and enjoy mainstream volunteering opportunities.

Mencap is made up of a strong voluntary membership, which is reflected in our governance. Our National Assembly (56 members) are all volunteers and 50 per cent have a learning disability. Mencap's affiliated groups are made up predominately of volunteers.

We have many successful volunteer-involving projects, including Get Together (where volunteers are trained to support children to access out-of-school clubs), Transactive (involving young people with and without learning disabilities in promoting person-centred

planning tools in over 90 schools) and Mencap Sport (which supports its own volunteers at national events and works with other sports organisations to provide sporting pathways for learning-disabled athletes).

About Speaking Out in Torbay (SPOT)

Speaking Out in Torbay (SPOT) have acted as our consultants in producing the content of this booklet.

SPOT is a speaking-out group for people with a learning disability based in Torbay, Devon. The members of the group are all volunteers. The group has its own committee and meetings are chaired by an elected chair. Individuals take responsibility for attending meetings and representing people, and are involved in pieces of work such as interviewing.

Primarily SPOT is a forum for people to express their views and be heard. The group initially started in 2002, when a speaking-up group in a day centre was introduced by a member of Mencap staff to individuals who were looking for their voices to be heard. The

group is still supported by Mencap staff and funded by Torbay Council.

About Volunteering England

Volunteering England is the national volunteering development organisation for England. It works strategically across the voluntary, public and private sectors to raise the profile and promote the interests of volunteering, and it provides support systems to assist anyone involved with volunteers.

Volunteering England works to keep volunteering high on the policy agenda, working with government to promote opportunities for and remove institutional barriers to volunteering. It provides authoritative, up-to-date research on volunteering issues.

Volunteering England supports volunteering development through:

- > Building partnerships across the voluntary, private and public sectors
- > Promoting quality accreditation for volunteer managers and local

volunteer development agencies

- > Identifying, disseminating and promoting good practice in the involvement of volunteers
- > Mounting awareness campaigns
- > Developing the strength, quality and profile of the volunteering infrastructure
- > Providing grants and strategic support to the work of volunteers
- > Running national events and practitioner networks
- > Providing consultancy, education, training, publications, information and web-based services for everyone involved with volunteers

For more information visit our website at www.volunteering.org.uk

Resources

Mencap

National Volunteer Co-ordinator
Tel: 0121 707 7877
www.mencap.org.uk

Mencap is committed to recruiting more volunteers with a learning disability and to working with partners to help them make their volunteering accessible to people with a learning disability. We would welcome the opportunity to work with organisations to help them involve volunteers with a learning disability through training and support.

To see some innovative Mencap projects involving young volunteers please log on to www.trans-active.org.uk and www.y-a-p.org.uk.

Volunteering England

Tel: 0845 305 6979
www.volunteering.org.uk

Volunteering England publishes a number of good practice guides. It also operates a free helpline for all kinds of volunteering-related queries (freephone/textphone:

0800 028 3304, 9.30-5.30, M-F; information@volunteeringengland.org) and hosts the Good Practice Bank of information for volunteer managers on its website.

National Trust

Tel: 0870 609 5383
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/volunteering

Scope

Tel: 020 7619 7100
www.scope.org.uk

CSV

Tel: 020 7278 6601
www.csv.org.uk



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