

# **INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING**

Recommendations for Volunteer  
Coordinators on How to Develop a  
More Inclusive Volunteer Programme



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This publication was prepared as part of a two-year project, *Volunteering as a Tool for Inclusion (2013–2015)*, carried out by eight partner organisations from the following European countries: Croatia, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia.

During the project, the project partners had an opportunity to visit each country and a chance to see examples of inclusive volunteering. They also had an opportunity to discuss the levels of inclusiveness in volunteering in the respective countries and share good examples of individual case studies, projects and programmes based on the principle of social inclusion.

One prominent commonality of all countries involved in this project was the disparity between the declaration of inclusiveness within most of the volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) and the actual situation on the ground. It became clear that when it comes to day-to-day volunteer management, there are few organisations that are actively involving volunteers from vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, in all of the participating countries, there were examples of projects and programmes focused on specific target groups (such as homeless people, prisoners or ex-prisoners, and unemployed people), or situations in which individuals become volunteers for organisations which they had previously been involved with as clients.

The visits provided a basis for achieving our main goal of this project: providing recommendations on how to create more inclusive volunteer programmes. We have sought to provide VIOs with some useful practical advice on how to work with specific groups of volunteers and how to help organisations to welcome vulnerable volunteers.

This booklet consists of two parts. Part I covers general aspects of inclusive volunteering and Part II includes recommendations for volunteer coordinators on how to work with various groups – people with hearing impairments, people with visual impairments, people with physical disabilities, people with mental health difficulties, older people, migrants, long-term unemployed people, ex-prisoners and people affected by homelessness.

All of these recommendations were prepared in cooperation with expert organisations who work with the specific groups, and we would like to thank them all for their comments and suggestions.

We believe that volunteering is for all, and that there is a role for anyone who would like to get involved and to support organisations or the community they live in. We hope this publication will help volunteer coordinators to become more open and confident in embracing diversity in their organisations.

More information about the partner organisations is at the end of the publication.

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# PART 1

## General aspects of Inclusive Volunteering

### 1. VIOs and inclusion

'Volunteering is for all' and 'anybody can be a volunteer' – those are the mottos used by Volunteer Centres and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) when they are trying to attract more interest in volunteering and encourage more people to give volunteering a go. When you ask volunteer coordinators whether they consider the organisation they work for to be inclusive, the immediate answer usually is 'Yes, of course!'. The reality, however, does not seem to reflect this, as it is not easy to find examples to demonstrate it.

As part of the project Volunteering as a Tool for Inclusion, it became clear that the two most common types of inclusive volunteering are:

- Projects and programmes targeting a specific marginalised group (e.g. homeless people, migrants, unemployed people and people with mental health issues)
- Volunteering done by former clients (e.g. a blind person who was a client of an organisation providing help to people with visual impairments and who has become a volunteer there; or a client at a day-care centre for people with mental health issues with specific skills who has become a volunteer there to help others)

Examples of individuals from vulnerable groups entering organisations without any previous connection to them or without a client-service provider relationship were the least common. However, we came across a small number of these, and they serve as proof that such situations are possible and could occur more often. We do not want to imply that the first two examples are less valid, but rather to present our findings and identify opportunities for potential improvement.



## What is inclusive volunteering?

One of the easiest ways to explain inclusive volunteering is by illustrating it through the picture below:<sup>1</sup>



If we were going to refer to inclusion as it is commonly used in an educational environment and apply it to volunteering, then inclusion is the participation of a person who has a disability or any other difficulty that is limiting their opportunities to get involved within mainstream volunteering. We can define inclusive volunteering as volunteering opportunities that are available to all people regardless of age, culture, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, social status or disability.

## Barriers to inclusive volunteering

There are many barriers that prevent inclusive volunteering from occurring more often.

Barriers on the side of volunteer coordinators/organisations:

- Lack of experience of working with a specific target group and consequently being fearful of involving them in volunteering
- Concern that the management of these volunteers would be more difficult and time consuming
- Limited knowledge of which volunteer positions would be suitable for volunteers
- Fear of taking up the challenge and not knowing what to do if issues arise
- Stereotypes and preconceptions that exist within the organisation or society



Barriers on the side of potential volunteers:

- Lack of awareness of what volunteering is
- Lack of awareness about available volunteer positions (they often do not know they can volunteer and if they do, they do not know where to start)
- Feeling they would not be welcomed in an organisation as volunteers because of lack of self-esteem and confidence
- Previous negative experience of trying to become a volunteer
- Image of volunteering as an activity for certain groups of people only, or based on a traditional 'helper and helped' model, whereby 'able' people are helping people with disabilities
- Fear of being asked to do too much
- Fear of prejudice
- Fear of losing welfare benefits
- Very formal recruitment process, perceived almost as a job application process
- Slow or no follow-up from the organisation
- Physical barriers and no access to volunteer places
- No reimbursement of expenses

## Ways of addressing barriers

Here are some ideas on how to address barriers to volunteering:

- Aim to create a network of organisations in your community, where you can exchange knowledge and ideas, and address your fears of working with under-represented groups.
- Try to think of inclusive ways of advertising volunteering opportunities available within your organisation by using various channels that will help you reach people under-represented in

<sup>1</sup> [www.advocacyforinclusion.org/publications/Publications/Information\\_Sheets/Education/inclusion\\_and\\_integration.pdf](http://www.advocacyforinclusion.org/publications/Publications/Information_Sheets/Education/inclusion_and_integration.pdf)

volunteering (e.g. distributing posters and leaflets in your local community, covering places such as community centres, places of worship, health centres, libraries, post offices, railway stations and job centres).

- Try to use inclusive images and language in your promotional and recruitment materials – make sure they illustrate the diversity of your volunteers and use simple and clear language.
- Try to include your advertising in the existing communication materials of other organisations, such as schools and community centres, which are already working with under-represented groups (e.g. a newsletter that goes out to members of disability groups).
- Spend some time building relationships with community organisations and informal networks that already work with groups under-represented in volunteering and who can help your staff in case they are needed.
- Think about the ways you can help volunteers to prepare better to volunteer (e.g. host open days, organise pre-volunteering trainings, assign a mentor to new volunteers who may need more time to build up their confidence). Some volunteers may need a bit more attention and time, and it is therefore very important to give a thorough introduction and set clear expectations for both sides.
- Try to develop a recruitment process that is friendly and not overly formal. Minimise form-filling and be mindful of the language you use (e.g. ask new volunteers for a chat rather than an interview). At the same time, make sure that you have clear policies and guidelines around recruitment, as it helps the transparency of the process and ensures that everyone will feel they are treated equally.
- Take time to create an inclusive environment within your organisation by offering diversity training to your staff and volunteers and developing equal opportunity policies.
- Improve the physical accessibility of the volunteer sites (e.g. provide transport or out-of-pocket expenses, consider creating online volunteering opportunities).
- Focus on the skills and experiences of each volunteer and consider how you can fit and adapt the roles to fit their abilities.



- Provide meaningful support to your volunteers (e.g. appropriate training, peer support and ongoing supervision), offer a variety of opportunities to choose from, and provide out-of-pocket expenses.
- Provide meaningful support to your volunteer coordinator if they work with under-represented groups, including supervision or consultation with specialists working with particular target groups.
- If possible, share your experience of inclusiveness in volunteering with other organisations in order to help them to become more open to diversity.



## Benefits of inclusive volunteering

Despite the barriers, working with traditionally excluded volunteers can be very enriching and can bring many benefits to the volunteers and organisations, as well as to the wider society. The following lists include the benefits that are common for different groups but once you start embracing inclusive volunteering in your organisation, you will discover other benefits.

Benefits for volunteer involving organisations (VIOs):

- Opportunity to broaden and diversify the pool of volunteers
- Opportunity to provide other volunteers and employees with a possibility to learn new skills and broaden their perspectives
- Opportunity for the volunteer coordinator to gain new skills and experience
- Way to become more open to volunteers from vulnerable groups
- Opportunity to become a leader when it comes to inclusiveness
- Staff and volunteers are more inclined to get involved and stay with an organisation that is inclusive and manages diversity well
- Involving volunteers from socially excluded groups helps in better service delivery; service users who become volunteers serve the clients better, as they understand their reality better

In addition, involving volunteers who have experienced social exclusion provides the opportunity to live up to your organisational values and practise what you preach. Involving these volunteers contributes to their personal development and therefore helps to reduce social exclusion, which ultimately enables organisations that aim to reduce social exclusion to meet their objectives.

Benefits for volunteers:

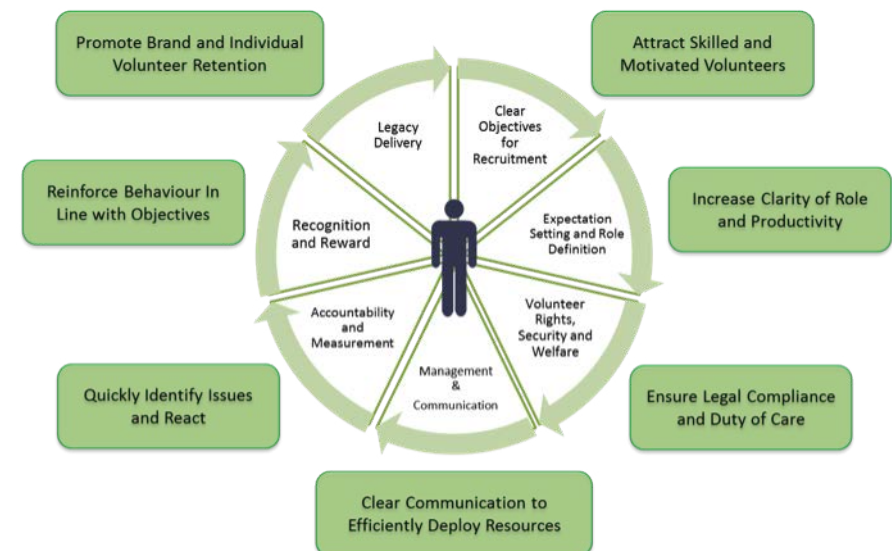
- Experience communication and life outside their usual circles
- Access new social networks and new opportunities
- Increase self-confidence and self-esteem
- Opportunity to gain new skills, knowledge and experience
- Opportunity to combat discrimination and demonstrate that they can be respected members of a team
- Become a positive example and inspiration for others
- Loneliness and exclusion are reduced
- Better employment perspectives are created

Benefits for the society or community:

- Opportunity to build a network between social services, state institution and VIOs in order to better serve people from vulnerable groups by broadening activities available to them
- Provide people from vulnerable groups with an opportunity to become fully-pledged members of society, particularly relevant in situations where they are not able to find a job
- Opportunity to get 'extra hands' for activities carried out at a local level and to improve the quality of life within that community

## 2. Importance of good quality volunteer management in VIOs

All volunteer programmes should be based on best practice in order to be successful. It is essential that VIOs who decide to become more inclusive have a good volunteer management system in place. They should have a designated volunteer coordinator, an efficient recruitment system, transparent selection procedures, appropriate orientation/training, and provide motivation and support for their volunteers as described in the following diagram:



Source: [www.getscheduled.co.uk/volunteer-management-software](http://www.getscheduled.co.uk/volunteer-management-software)

## How can you achieve effective volunteer management practices?

In some cases, retention and motivation procedures may require more time and effort (e.g. for the recruitment process, for providing volunteers with extra support needs, and for introducing volunteers to the organisation).

At least in the beginning, some volunteers will need to have one person they can refer to (ideally a volunteer coordinator) so they can build trust with this person and the whole organisation. Providing one point of contact is always beneficial, as volunteers are more inclined to share their worries and raise potential problems if they feel comfortable and accepted. It will also help to motivate them and to sustain their interest in volunteering.

It is necessary to plan in advance and have a sufficient timeframe for volunteer management. Very often the role of a volunteer coordinator is not limited to managing volunteers, but also involves many other organisational tasks. In order to be efficient in your volunteer management, you will need to have a designated time to manage volunteers and not compromise on this. It is always good to remind yourself and your organisation of the benefits of involving volunteers and of how they complement your vision and mission.

The role of a volunteer coordinator cannot be underestimated. If they are open-minded and willing to use the skills, experience and knowledge of any volunteer regardless of their background, there will be a true openness to inclusiveness in that organisation. In fact, many volunteer coordinators say that they do not see any difference between working with ordinary volunteers and volunteers from marginalised groups.

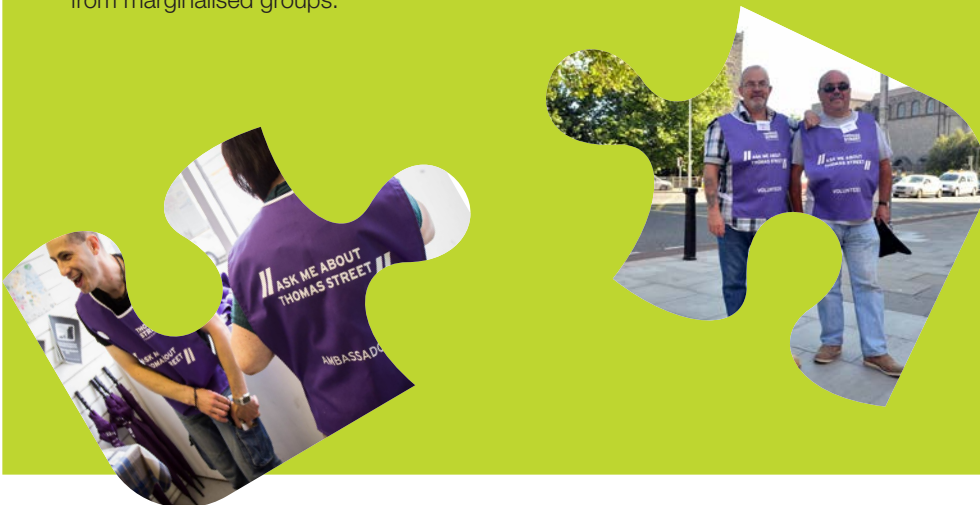
As Virginia Moyles of the Galway Volunteer Centre in Ireland, who works on a project involving people with mental health difficulties in volunteering, put it: 'I have actually no tips for you when we talk about supporting people with mental health difficulties to volunteer, except to treat them in the same way as we should treat every volunteer.'

This means that you should:

- Welcome them warmly
- Recognise that the volunteers can make a useful contribution to an organisation in the right role
- Reassure the volunteers that they are in the right place and that there will be a role for them
- Encourage them to tell you what really interests and motivates them
- Support them in finding a role that they will enjoy and benefit from
- Encourage them to tell you about any support needs that they may have
- Advise them on which organisations may be best able to provide any required supports if you are not able to take them onto your team of volunteers (e.g. refer them to a local volunteer centre)

People with a disability or facing other challenges are often thought about in terms of what they cannot do, instead of giving them equal time to think about what they can offer. Quite often they have amazing sets of skills and experiences and are truly inspiring individuals who have learned how to overcome their limitations. It is important to constantly remind ourselves that at the core of inclusion is recognising the capabilities, not the disabilities, of individuals.

There are also situations where a volunteer coordinator is not necessarily aware of the vulnerability of existing volunteers (for example, in the case of unemployed volunteers, volunteers coming from socially disadvantaged backgrounds or volunteers with mental health problems). The coordinator might not know of the volunteer's circumstances unless the volunteer decides to disclose this information. It may mean that they already involve people from excluded backgrounds and it could be a perfect opportunity to try to become more active about it and start a more conscious involvement of diverse volunteers.





### How to deal with difficulties

If you have a volunteer from a vulnerable group in your team of volunteers and you experience some issues or problems, first try to understand if the problem arose due to their disability or limitation. If that is the case, speak to other volunteer coordinators or contact experts working with that specific group. They will be able to provide you with advice on how to deal with such a situation and give the volunteer the help or support they need. It is usually easy to identify individuals with the relevant knowledge and experience through your networks of work colleagues, family, friends and volunteers.

It is important to stress that having to deal with problems without an agreed procedure can be a painful experience, not only for the volunteer and volunteer coordinator concerned, but also for the organisation as a whole. Having standard procedures in place can make the process easier. As with all your volunteer management policies and procedures, it is good practice to have guidelines for dealing with difficult situations in place before you begin to involve volunteers. In that way, you avoid ambiguity, and by following the standard procedures, your organisation demonstrates that you are transparent and treat everyone equally.



### 3. Support systems for volunteer coordinators and volunteers

As we all know, it is important for volunteers and volunteer coordinators to take appropriate care of their wellbeing. VIOs that have a good quality volunteer management system usually provide their volunteers with regular supervision – individually or in a group session. They also provide volunteer coordinators with supervision internally, or send them for regular supervision provided by other organisations or local volunteer centres (if available).

Support and supervision is essential, regardless of the tasks that volunteers are performing. Even volunteers doing administrative or manual activities and not working directly with clients should have a chance to discuss any issues they encounter while volunteering.

However, support and supervision are not only about dealing with problems. They also provide an opportunity to give positive feedback and encourage volunteers to keep going. Support and supervision are two of the most powerful tools when it comes to retention. They allow for better communication within the organisation, as everyone is encouraged to voice their challenges, opinions and suggestions. Volunteers who are checked in with regularly feel that they are an equal and important part of the organisation.

### 4. Creating a network of partner organisations or stakeholders

If you are considering setting up a volunteer programme and becoming more inclusive, it is a good idea to think about the network of individuals and organisations or institutions that are already involved in working with various marginalised groups.

Answering the following questions will help you to identify the web of potential supports that will help you to engage with the target groups:

- Does the target group have some advocacy organisation at a national level (e.g. an association for visually impaired people, an association of people with mental health difficulties, an umbrella organisation fighting for equal rights for marginalised people)?

- Is there a state organisation that is in regular contact with this target group (e.g. a special secondary school, a social welfare office or a job centre)?
- Are there any service providers working directly with this target group?
- Does this target group have its own self-help group or association? (Self-help groups are also known as mutual help, mutual aid or support groups. These are groups of people who provide mutual support to each other. In a self-help group, the members share a common problem or a challenge, e.g. illness or addiction. Their mutual goal is to help each other to deal with the challenge, to heal or to recover.)
- Do you know any experts working in this field?

Answering these questions should give you a list of organisations, institutions or individuals that can help you to create a more inclusive volunteer programme or to provide you with ad hoc recommendations or advice when needed. This will make your cooperation with volunteers from marginalised groups more effective and potentially more successful.

This publication is based on the advice of experts working with their respective groups. If you have any questions related to a specific target group, you can contact the partner organisations involved in the project. They will be able to provide you with some advice, contact information for the experts and, in some cases, with additional materials that have been published on the issue.

# PART 2

## Managing Volunteers

In this part of the publication, you will find recommendations on working with specific target groups:

- People with hearing impairments
- People with visual impairments
- People with physical disabilities
- People with mental health difficulties
- Older people
- Migrants
- Long-term unemployed people
- Ex-prisoners
- Homeless and recently homeless people

The choice of these particular target groups was determined by the fact that project partners already had some experience of working with those groups and wanted to share their experiences.

### How to read this publication

This publication was put together to serve as a manual for volunteer coordinators who may need advice on when a volunteer with extra support-needs approaches an organisation.

You can either go directly to a chosen chapter or read the whole section. If you decide to read the entire publication, you might find some information repeated under the various target groups because some information is common to the different groups. We hope you find the layout useful and convenient.

## Involving volunteers with hearing impairments

### Description of the target group

The World Health Organisation factsheet states: Over 5% of the world's population – 360 million people – has disabling hearing loss (328 million adults and 32 million children). Disabling hearing loss refers to hearing loss greater than 40dB in the better hearing ear in adults and a hearing loss greater than 30dB in the better hearing ear in children. The majority of these people live in low- and middle-income countries. Approximately one-third of people over 65 years of age are affected by disabling hearing loss.<sup>2</sup> (WHO, February 2014)

The above data suggest that volunteer managers may come across volunteers with hearing impairment in their volunteer programme, as well as older people who may also suffer from hearing difficulties.

There is a wide spectrum of people with hearing problems. Some people are able to hear almost nothing while others experience only mild or moderate problems with hearing. They all are described as having a hearing loss, which may be mild, moderate, severe or profound. The level of hearing loss and other factors affect spoken language and the quality of communication. People with profound hearing loss often use sign language for communication.

### Generally used terminology

- **Hard of hearing (the hearing loss varies from 26 to 80 dB)**

People in this group suffer milder problems with hearing up to severe hearing problems. It is possible to compensate for this kind of loss of hearing with a hearing aid so that people understand spoken language or at least distinguish some kinds of noises, and it helps them to integrate well into the social environment.

- **Deaf (the hearing loss is higher than 81 dB)**

People in this group may have the ability to hear some sounds even if a hearing loss exists. This type of hearing loss affects the ability to perceive external hearing stimuli and to communicate with the outside world. Typically, people in this group are not able to understand the spoken language – even after a lot of

training in hearing – and they use visual channels instead (sign language and lip reading).

The following are some characteristics of the speech of people with hearing difficulties:

- The voice intensity is not steady.
- The voice often sounds artificial and unnatural.
- The rhythm of voice is not what we are used to; the speech is not fluent.
- There can be problems with breathing while speaking.
- The vocabulary is usually limited.
- They usually have their own grammar as the sign language has its own logic, which is different from the spoken language.
- They can have a problem differentiating between words that sound similar (for example, sink and think).
- They have often difficulties with the phraseology (their understanding of phrases is literal).
- Their verb forms can be limited to infinitives.
- They can have problems understanding written text because of their limited vocabulary and due to the fact that it is a 'second language' for them.



<sup>2</sup> Source: [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs300/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs300/en/)

## Managing volunteers with hearing impairments

The key issue when working with people with hearing loss is communication. Not only the volunteer coordinator, but also other staff members and volunteers need to be informed about the most effective and sensible ways of communicating with people with hearing loss.

Here are some tips that can help you to manage volunteers with hearing loss efficiently:

- Learn what type of hearing loss the volunteer is suffering from.
- Learn what type of communication the volunteer is using (verbal or sign language, lip reading). Respect it and make it as easier for the volunteer as possible (e.g. articulate clearly when you have a volunteer who is lip reading).
- Prepare your colleagues and other volunteers for the introduction of a volunteer with hearing problems.
- Make sure that the volunteer understands what they are supposed to do – ask them to repeat to you what they understood or to summarise their role/task.
- Make sure that the volunteer feels welcome in your organisation.
- Make sure that they are not socially isolated from the rest of the group and that they communicate with other volunteers and staff.

## Communicating effectively

Communication is the key to success when working with volunteers who have hearing impairments.

Rules for communication with volunteers with hearing loss:

- Talk to them slowly and fluently.
- The lips of the speaking person should be near the eye level of the person who is lip reading.
- The distance between the speaking person and the person lip reading should not be more than 1.5 metres.
- Articulate clearly – open your mouth so that the person can easily read your lips.
- Don't raise your voice, don't shout – the person won't hear you and it will make the lip reading more difficult.
- Take care of the lighting in the room or office. The light should not be behind you when you are communicating with the volunteer; when you are in shadow, the volunteer won't be able

to see you clearly. The best lighting is from above or from the side.

- Keep constant eye contact with the volunteer.
- Make sure that nothing limits reading your lips. Don't put your hands over your mouth, don't smoke, don't eat and don't chew gum.
- While communicating, do not move your head too much.
- If you need the attention of a person with hearing loss, try waving, a soft touch on the hand or shoulder (avoid the back and head), or use vibration (stamping on the floor, knocking on a table) or lights (switch the lights on/off for a short time).
- If the volunteer is using sign language, it is unnecessary for you to know it. You can use written communication – but make sure to use clear and short sentences only.

## Important tip

Everybody in your organisation should respect the rules of communication and use them in practice so that volunteers with hearing loss feel they are integrated in your organisation. There are no additional changes you need to make to the working conditions.

## Recruitment

The best way to recruit volunteers from this group is to connect with schools, organisations (advocacy or self-help) or institutions working with people with hearing problems and – even better – try to approach them directly. As they probably have not volunteered before, try to involve them in a group activity first so that they do not fear the new environment.





### Suitable volunteering positions

Even though there are many people with hearing problems who are able to lip read and communicate quite well, here are some suggestions on suitable volunteer activities:

- Avoid activities where the volunteers need to use verbal communication, including communication over the phone and communication with people who do not know about the hearing problem of the volunteer or with clients of the organisation who might not be ready for it.
- Appropriate roles include administrative roles, manual activities and working on a PC.

**Acknowledgment:** The above section is based on advice provided by Dr Anna Šmehilová of Effeta – Centre of St. Francis of Sales, Slovakia ([www.effeta.sk](http://www.effeta.sk))



## Involving volunteers with visual impairments

### Description of the target group

According to the latest World Health Organisation global estimates, 285 million people around the world are visually impaired.<sup>3</sup> Of these, 39 million are blind and 246 million have moderate to severe visual impairment. A total of 28% of those living with moderate and severe visual impairment are in their working years, and 82% of people who are blind are aged over 50.

Most reports on people with visual impairment point out that the vast majority are unemployed and have few opportunities to change their condition due to lack of access to education, assistive technologies or accessible environments. Most people who are blind living in industrialised countries report that their lives are affected more by lack of opportunities than lack of ability.

### Generally used terminology

According to the International Classification of Diseases, there are four levels of visual function: normal vision, moderate visual impairment, severe visual impairment and blindness.

There are some different terms used to describe levels of vision disability. These terms include partially sighted, low vision, legally blind and totally blind.

- **Partially sighted**

To be partially sighted means the person has some form of visual disability that may require special devices. These include readers, audio taped texts and raised-line drawings. The partially sighted person may be able to use large print books and a screen magnifier or other magnifying devices.

- **Low vision**

People with low vision experience a loss of visual acuity while retaining some vision. It applies to individuals with sight who are unable to read a newspaper at a normal distance of viewing, even with the aid of glasses or contact lenses. People with low vision often need adaptations in lighting or enlarged print to read something. Some of them may need to use Braille.

- **Legally blind**

Being legally blind means a person has less than 20/200 vision in the better eye or a limited field of vision that is 20 degrees or

less at its widest point. People who are legally blind are unable to see clearly and often use Braille or other non-visual forms of media.

- **Totally blind**

Being totally blind means that a person needs to use Braille, raised-line drawings, audio recordings or other non-visual media to help them to access the content of visually presented materials. People who are totally blind are unable to see anything and often use Braille or other non-visual forms of media.

Visual impairment is a term used to describe all of the types outlined above. It is an umbrella term used to refer to loss of sight that can be a consequence of a number of different medical conditions.

### **Managing volunteers with visual impairments**

Effective communication with volunteers with visual impairments is one of the key issues for a good volunteer experience. It is important for you to understand how you can support a volunteer with a visual impairment.

Make sure to pay attention to the following:

- Learn what type of visual impairment of the volunteer has – understanding how someone's vision is affected can help you think through how to communicate and cooperate with them effectively.
- Ask people what their needs are and what supports they need. Do this before they start volunteering with you, so that you learn how you can support them.
- Before giving a volunteer with a visual impairment written information, check what format they would like it in. Some people may want the information electronically in advance so they can use special computer software to read it.
- Consider filling in an application form with someone during an informal discussion rather than asking them to complete it.
- During an induction, introduce a volunteer to other team members and give them time to talk to one another so the volunteer has a chance to recognise other voices. Make sure the volunteer knows who to ask if they have a question and where to go if they need support.

- As a volunteer manager, think about how you can help someone familiarise themselves with the volunteering environment. Try not to move things or leave unnecessary items lying around.
- When preparing events such as training, think about your methodology and how to best accommodate the needs of the visually impaired person (e.g. increasing the font size of a case study you are using, or asking another group member to read out the case study instead of asking individuals to read it by themselves).

### **Communicating effectively**

It is important to establish good grounds for effective communication and having a positive volunteering experience.

The following are useful tips to consider when communicating with visually impaired volunteers:

- Speak first and introduce yourself.
- In a group situation, introduce the other people present.
- Look at the volunteer during the conversation and adopt the same level of position as the volunteer, i.e. sitting or standing.
- Do not be afraid of using normal language and include words like 'look', 'see', 'read', remembering that blind and visually impaired people have exactly the same vocabulary as sighted people.
- Explain noises and silences and do not shout.
- Do not expect or invite others to speak for blind people. Talk directly to them and not through a third party.
- Always check first if help is needed.
- Be precise if giving instructions – giving directions by pointing and saying, 'it is down there', is not of much help and is thoughtless.
- If a volunteer is accompanied by a guide dog, the animal must never be distracted. Do not pet a dog guide while it is 'on duty'.
- Do not walk away without saying you are leaving.
- If you are going to guide a volunteer, let them take your arm. Don't grab theirs.
- Mention any potential hazards that lie ahead and say where they are; watch out for things at head height.



- When approaching kerbs or steps, say if they rise or descend as you approach them.
- Explain changes in ground surfaces, pointing out uneven ground.
- If you are guiding someone into a seat, place their hand on the back of the seat before they sit down, so they can orientate themselves.

### Recruitment

You may wish to consider outreach into the disability community to let potential volunteers know about the opportunities in your organisation and that you would welcome their participation. The best way to recruit visually impaired volunteers is to go to educational institutions, organisations or institutions working with people with visual impairments. You can also approach them directly, reaching out to potential volunteers and organisations working with visually impaired people.

### Suitable volunteering positions

Matching volunteering positions to volunteers is very subjective, as people with visual impairments are found in a wide variety of jobs. They are capable of fulfilling various tasks and roles, including working in direct contact with people (e.g. volunteering as befrienders or helpline volunteers).

There are many devices for people with visual impairments, which enable them to carry out computer-based tasks (e.g. special magnifiers, dictaphones, Braille typewriters and computer software that magnifies or reads out text). However, this equipment can be expensive and many VIOs might not be able to provide it. Always ask your volunteer what they want to do and what they need in order to complete the tasks assigned to them. If you are unable to meet the request for a special aid or device, try to find another role or task for the volunteer.

While the use of special aids and devices can help with many tasks, it may not be ideal to have visually impaired volunteers carry out jobs such as cleaning or painting, or tasks that involve a lot of moving around.

**Acknowledgment:** This section is based on the advice and work of the Liepaja Society of the Blind, Latvia ([www.ngolatvia.lv/en](http://www.ngolatvia.lv/en))

## Involving volunteers with physical disabilities

### Description of the target group

The term 'physical disability' refers to a disability caused by developmental delay, diseases of the central and peripheral neurological systems, traumas or other congenital diseases of the musculoskeletal system. Most of the physical disabilities can be a result of problems caused by diseases or failure of development growth stages.

It is difficult to say how many people with physical disabilities are in the world, as the statistics are related to people with disabilities in general. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) defines disability as an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. Disability is the interaction between individuals with a health condition (e.g. cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome and depression) and personal and environmental factors (e.g. negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social supports).

The Factsheet on Wheelchairs published by the World Health Organisation in October 2010 states: About 10% of the global population, i.e. about 650 million people have disabilities. Studies indicate that, of these, around one in ten requires a wheelchair.

Mobility impairments range from lower-body impairments, which may require the use of canes, crutches, walkers or wheelchairs, to upper-body impairments, which may result in limited or no use of the hands. It may take longer for individuals with mobility impairments to get from one place to another and, in addition to the special equipment mentioned above, the adaptation of housing (e.g. a wheelchair ramp or adapting physical objects like toilets, bathtubs or shower so that people in a wheelchair can use them) is often also necessary.



Some people with mobility impairments find it difficult or impossible to manipulate objects, turn pages, write with a pen or pencil, type on a keyboard or retrieve work-related documents without supports, such as page-turners, book holders, an adapted pencil grip, an adapted keyboard or voice recognition software.

The impairment may range from mild to severe; it may have minimal impact on the person or it may interfere substantially with their functional ability. The effects of the disability may be minimised through appropriate environmental adaptations or the use of assistive devices.

In some cases, physical disability might be combined with another disability – so do not forget to ask the volunteer at the outset and regularly during the volunteering what type of support they need.

### **The organisation's readiness for inclusive volunteering**

There are limited opportunities for people with a disability to volunteer. This can be due to barriers such as a lack of awareness and understanding in the wider community, physical impediments and access to transport or the perception that people with disabilities are seen only as recipients of volunteering rather than as volunteers.

Common myths and issues around people with disabilities in volunteering include:

- A lack of understanding of what a person with a disability can contribute
- Traditional views that people with disabilities are only able to do 'light work'
- Concerns that a person with a disability will not be as reliable as a non-disabled person because of poor health
- Organisations being unable to provide flexible work arrangements, physical access and equipment

To overcome these challenges, it is crucial not to underestimate the skills of such people and to use an individual approach to the volunteer's needs, abilities, skills, experience and motivation. Always ask the volunteer about their expectations, but also map their needs. If your offices are not barrier-free, think about other options, such as tasks that can be done from home or in other

premises of the organisation, or elsewhere. If a volunteer works from home, do not forget to check in on their progress, as the regular contact might be very beneficial for them. If you are not able to create a suitable role for the volunteer, think about other organisations that could use their help and refer them there or to the local volunteer centre.

### **Managing volunteers with physical disabilities**

When we think about involving volunteers with physical disabilities, we need to be mindful of the environmental barriers and to address them where possible. For a volunteer with physical disabilities, it is crucial to consider the following areas:

- **Transport** – Travel can sometimes be difficult for people with physical disabilities but those who are willing to volunteer are usually already experts in how to travel and know all of the options available to them. However, do not forget to ask them what kind of support or assistance they need to get to the place of volunteering. If your organisation has the capacity, you may consider providing transport for them or travel with them on public transport to assist them.
- **Accessibility** – Make sure that volunteers can access the place of volunteering. Consider how easy it is to enter the building, but give some thought also to the layout of the offices, worksites and toilets.
- **IT support** – Some volunteers might need special devices or equipment in order to fulfil some tasks, e.g. office volunteers may require access to a 'big key' keyboard. If these supports in the working environment are too expensive, try to find another volunteer opportunity that would be both rewarding and interesting for the volunteer and at the same time would not require any special investment by your organisation.
- **Mentoring and individual skill development** – One-on-one mentoring is a great way to support volunteers with disabilities. It is important to work alongside volunteers and guide them rather than stand over them. Mentors should be patient, reliable, friendly, respectful and understanding of individual needs.

Remember that volunteers with disabilities are not 'stupid'. This is obvious, but sometimes people around them make silly assumptions. It is demeaning to a volunteer to be spoken to in a slow monotone voice and, worse, to be talked about in the third person when they are present.



If it is needed, allow more time to induct and train volunteers with disabilities – not because they will take more time to understand your message, but because the logistics might be more complicated. This may involve ensuring the interview room is comfortable and that you can deliver the induction and training in a format most suited to individuals' needs.

As with any other target group, good communication is the key to successful integration.

Below are some suggestions on how to communicate effectively with a person who has mobility impairment:

- Offer your help (opening a door, carrying things) if it makes sense. Ask yourself, 'Would I want help in a similar situation?'
- Consider a person's wheelchair or walker as an extension of their body. Therefore, neither leaning on the wheelchair or walker nor placing your foot on a wheel is okay.
- Speak to a person who uses a wheelchair, walker, cane or crutches in a normal voice strength and tone.
- Talk to a person who uses a wheelchair at eye level whenever possible. Perhaps you can sit rather than stand.
- Feel free to use phrases such as 'walk this way' with a person who cannot walk. Expressions such as this are commonly used by wheelchair users themselves.

## Recruitment

When recruiting for volunteers from this target group, consider contacting special schools, advocacy groups, self-help organisations, day care centres or job centres as volunteering can be a good alternative for them, particularly if they are long-term unemployed.

## Suitable volunteering positions

Some examples of suitable positions include those where:

- A range of office-related tasks can be carried out, such as administrative roles or computer work or arranging papers, folders or other items while being seated.
- There are a range of opportunities working directly with people, such as reading and mentoring for children.
- Workshops on different topics can be facilitated (depending on the ability to speak and communicate in general) or where assistance with registering participants at a conference, etc., is required.

**Acknowledgment:** This section is based on advice received from the IHTIS organisation in Romania ([www.asociatia-ihitis.ro](http://www.asociatia-ihitis.ro))



## Involving volunteers with mental health difficulties

Note: This covers people recovering from mental ill-health, not people in an acute state of the illness.

### Description of the target group

The need to prioritise mental health in public health agendas has been increasingly recognised in Europe over the past number of decades. Mental health problems affect one in four people at some time in their lives; the most common forms are anxiety disorders, stress and depression. In many countries, mental health difficulties are the leading cause of disability and are responsible for 30% - 40% of all chronic sick leave. Moreover, they are the main reason for over 50,000 suicides every year – more than the annual number of deaths from road traffic accidents, murders or HIV/AIDS in Europe.

The World Health Organisation describes mental health as ‘a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community’. Mental health difficulties can mean the opposite is the case. They are characterised by a combination of challenging thoughts, emotions, behaviour and relationships with others.

Mental health problems are quite common and can range from temporary feelings of stress or to longer-term, chronic feelings of deep depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder. They also relate to experiences of psychosis, which can involve hallucinations, delusions or impaired insights.

It is therefore impossible to provide a comprehensive list of characteristics of that group.

However, it is generally defined by a combination of how a person feels, acts, thinks or perceives the surrounding environment. Their behavioural patterns cause suffering, and they have an impaired ability to master their own life situation or everyday life. They often feel lonely, stigmatised and excluded from the community and are often caught in a situation where they need to get social benefits. They are sometimes perceived as people who need special treatment instead of being regarded as active and resourceful citizens.

As a consequence, they often find themselves in a situation where they feel they do not have the same opportunities as others to contribute to the community on a voluntary basis – or do not feel invited to join in.

### Communicating effectively

There are no clear guidelines when it comes to communicating with people with mental health difficulties because their resources and communication skills can differ greatly.

As a volunteer coordinator, you should be aware that not everyone will be willing to disclose their mental health problems. It is important, however, to be aware that someone is facing a mental health challenge. Otherwise, they will be seen as different and their behaviour may possibly be labelled as strange and out of place, which can lead to people making bad comments and jokes. As a volunteer coordinator, you can ask everyone at the recruitment stage the following questions:

- Is there anything that you feel we should know as an organisation to make sure you have the best experience of volunteering?
- Do you have any extra support needs that we should be aware of?





Once you become aware of someone's mental health challenges, make sure to discuss with the potential volunteer how much information about their mental health should be shared with others (if at all relevant) and the best ways of communication with them. It is important to use clear and simple language when communicating, including when using written communications, such as emails and leaflets.

The following are some useful supportive conversation strategies that may be helpful when communicating with people with mental health difficulties:

- Be aware of the impact of distractions and background noise (e.g. a busy café, walking on the street).
- Try to stick to one topic at a time.
- Keep communication simple and direct – avoid complex language and roundabout introductions to a topic.
- Be prepared to repeat what you are discussing.
- Give the person time to respond before moving the conversation on.
- Remember it may take the person longer to process information than usual.
- Ask if the person has understood and reassure them that it is okay to say that they have not.
- Be a good listener and do not be afraid of silences.
- Check out what the person thinks or feels – do not guess.
- Listen carefully.
- Ask questions to check if you have understood.
- Paraphrase what you have heard.
- Write down dates and times of the next meeting if necessary.
- If the person wanders away from the topic regularly, gently re-direct them back to the topic by saying 'We were talking about... tell me more...'

### **Recruitment**

To recruit volunteers from this group, it may be useful to have a personal dialogue, where you can be direct in the communication about their individual opportunities and benefits of being a volunteer in your organisation. It is also important to prepare for an individual voluntary process where you take into account their support needs.

The most direct way to recruit people with mental health challenges is to connect with persons or organisations, clubs and institutions who are working directly with that target group.

There are many different needs to take into account, and it is therefore important to have an individual approach to each volunteer and their abilities and skills. It is crucial that the expectations of the organisation and the volunteer are clear from the start so that the match between the organisations' needs and the individual interests creates the best conditions for positive experiences and progression for both parties. Here are some of the questions that will help you to gain clarity during the interview or informal chat once the volunteer has disclosed a mental health difficulty:

- What is the individual's vulnerability and what is the challenge?
- How would the individual like to work around those challenges?
- How can the organisation accommodate those challenges?
- What kind of social relations are the volunteers comfortable with and uncomfortable with?
- What does the volunteer expect to learn or get better at?
- What communication methods or styles suit the volunteer?
- What type of issues might arise during the volunteering (e.g. tiredness, lack of interest, problems with concentration due to medication, etc.) and what are the ways of dealing with them?
- Who is the contact for the volunteer should problems arise?

### **Additional recommendations**

- It might be a good idea to involve several people with mental health difficulties who know each other in various group activities, as the mutual support can help overcome the fear of the unknown.
- A volunteer with a mental health difficulty being accompanied by another person with whom they have a close and trusting relationship can work well. This type of support can be provided at least at the beginning of the volunteering and it would help prevent feelings of insecurity.
- The explaining of the volunteering activities and the role of the volunteer should be done in advance and should be clear and easy to comprehend.

- As the need to adapt to new conditions and environment may be stressful for a person with mental health difficulties, be sure to give them enough time and space for answers and ensure that volunteers understand their tasks, rights and responsibilities.
- Avoid a paternalistic approach and do not behave overly protectively.
- Accept their needs. People with mental health difficulties usually know when their mental health conditions are deteriorating. Respect them if they do not turn up for an activity or they need a break. Make sure to talk about those situations at the beginning and make them aware when they will have to get in touch in advance to cancel their volunteering shift.

### Suitable volunteering positions

Matching volunteering positions to volunteers with mental health difficulties is subjective as people's resources and skills are different as those of other volunteers. In that sense, people with mental health difficulties can get involved in different types of voluntary activities, but of course this will depend on the individual's vulnerability.

However, there are some potential challenges that may determine their suitability for the role:

- They can have good and bad days, which may mean that their needs are changing and their dependability can be a challenge.
- It may be challenging for some people with mental health difficulties to perform long and monotonous activities. A solution might be to divide the work into shorter periods with breaks and to mix different types of activities.
- Start with more simple tasks and build up at a pace that suits the volunteer to ensure that they succeed at the role.
- Relationships with clients or other volunteers can sometimes be a challenge because there may be situations in which the volunteer is uncomfortable with the company of other people or is too tired or not in the mood to communicate with others.
- It can be challenging to create a safe environment where you can speak openly about the vulnerability of people with mental health difficulties.

- If you are considering linking people with mental health challenges with other vulnerable service users, think it through as such roles may require a lot of emotional resilience, and it may be necessary to check with each volunteer to see if it is something they are prepared to take on.

**Acknowledgments:** This section is based on:

- The advice of Frivilligcenter Vesterbro, Copenhagen, Denmark ([www.frivilligcentervsv.dk](http://www.frivilligcentervsv.dk))
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## Involving volunteers with autism spectrum disorder

### Description of the target group

The umbrella term Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) covers conditions such as autism, childhood disintegrative disorder and Asperger syndrome, as stated in the World Health Organisation's report, *Autism Spectrum Disorders and Other Developmental Disorders – From Raising Awareness to Building Capacity*.<sup>4</sup>

The core symptoms include a mix of impaired capacity for reciprocal socio-communicative interaction and a restricted, stereotyped repetitive series of interests and activities. Neurodevelopmental impairments in communication and social interaction, and unusual ways of perceiving and processing information, can hinder the daily functioning of people with ASDs and impede their educational and social attainments.<sup>5</sup>

Statistics vary, but, on average, 1 in 70 to 100 children is on the autism spectrum. Generally, the data shows an overall increase of these types of disorders, but this can be explained by improved diagnostics and better awareness. This disorder is four times more common in boys than girls, and it has no racial, ethnic or social boundaries. Family income, lifestyle or educational levels do not affect a child's chance of being autistic.

One important point is that autism is a wide spectrum disorder, which means that symptoms vary from person to person. No two autistic individuals experience the same symptoms. One person might have severe sensory issues with strong social skills and executive function, while another may have few sensory issues while struggling with basic social interaction. Due to this variation in symptoms, it is hard to make generalisations about this condition.<sup>5</sup> Not all autistic people act in the same way, so it is important to emphasise individuals' needs – this is something we need to keep in mind while working with autistic volunteers.

### Managing volunteers with autism spectrum disorder

As the key issue with volunteers with autism spectrum disorder is communication, we should be aware of some specifics that might help us to communicate and coordinate these volunteers effectively. When you have an autistic volunteer in your team, inform

other volunteers and staff in your organisation about this so that the volunteer feels welcome and appreciated.

Here are some details on autistic people summarised in an article called *How to Explain Autism to People*:<sup>6</sup>

**Be aware of communication differences.** Some autistic people find communicating with others to be very difficult. Some of their common symptoms include having an unusual or flat tone of voice, creating odd rhythms and pitches, repeating questions or phrases, having difficulty expressing needs and desires and literally interpreting language. It can also take them longer to process spoken words and they can become confused by too many words spoken too quickly.

**Autistic people interact differently with the world around them.** When speaking with autistic people, you may find yourself wondering if they are really paying attention to you or even care that you are there. Do not let their reaction bother you. Keep in mind that:

- It is not uncommon for autistic individuals to appear uninterested in their surroundings – they may simply not be aware of or interested in the people around them.
- An autistic person may appear not to hear someone speaking to them. This may be due to auditory processing slowness or too many distractions in the room. Offer to move to a quieter place and provide pauses in the conversation to allow the autistic person time to think.
- Autistic people may find it challenging to interact with others because it involves difficult social rules or overwhelming sensory experiences. They may find it easier to disengage.
- In general, autistic individuals handle situations better when they know what to expect, so ask first before doing something that might startle the autistic individual.
- In some cases, autistic people repeat questions 10 or more times (e.g. 'Do you really have a dog?'). You can answer them three times. After that, you should ask them a similar question ('Yes, I have a dog'. And then ask, 'And do you also have a dog?')

**The autistic person may avoid eye contact.** Eye contact can feel incredibly overwhelming and the autistic person may not be

<sup>4</sup> [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/103312/1/9789241506618\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/103312/1/9789241506618_eng.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://autism.ehoow.net/?p=105>

able to meet someone's eyes and listen to their words at the same time (not making eye contact does not mean they are not listening). For autistic people, looking away is different from not listening.

- Never force eye contact.
- Make it clear when you want to talk to the autistic person. You should be physically close, use the autistic person's name and preferably be in their line of sight. If the autistic person does not respond when addressed, try again because they may not have noticed.

**Some autistic people cannot handle physical contact.** This is due to sensory issues. Reactions to touch vary greatly between autistic individuals, so it is important to ask the autistic person if they do not mind to be touched.

**Autistic people may not understand sarcasm, humour, tone, postures or hints that people are giving.** They find it difficult to understand different tones of voice, particularly when the facial features of the person talking do not match the tone of voice. They may not realise some issues that are obvious to other people. For example, if you wish to change the subject or want to end the conversation, they may not realise that you are dropping hints. It is best to be direct.

**Many autistic individuals cannot handle certain sensory stimuli.** They may get a headache from bright lights, or jump and begin to cry if you drop a dish on the floor. Again, be direct and specific and ask them if they are okay with, for example, working in a noisy environment.

**Autistic individuals have feelings like everyone else.** Autistic people feel love, happiness and pain just like everybody else does. Just because they may seem detached at times does not mean that they are devoid of feelings – in fact, many autistic people feel things very deeply. They also care about others' feelings, but they may not necessarily understand how you feel or know the best way to react to your feelings.

**Autistic people may display some abnormal behaviour.** They engage in self-stimulatory behaviour, which can help them to calm down, focus and communicate, and prevent meltdown, so do not try to prevent it. Here are some examples:

- Rocking back and forth

- Repeating words or noises (echolalia)
- Hand flapping
- Snapping fingers
- Head banging (contact a relative if this becomes a problem)
- Jumping around and clapping in excitement

**Autistic people enjoy structure.** They can create highly structured routines for their every day. This is because autistic people can be easily startled by unknown stimuli, and the certainty of a schedule feels more comfortable. Autistic people find it easier to follow a strict routine (e.g. placing things in order, such as lining books up by colour and size) and find unexpected changes, such as change in the volunteering environment, very distressing.

**Be aware of intense passions that can accompany autism.** Many autistic people are deeply passionate about a few specific subjects, and can talk about them at length.

### **Suitable volunteering positions**

As for volunteers from other backgrounds, try to find activities that meet their expectations and correspond with their abilities and skills. If they have a passion for any particular activity or topic, think about making it a benefit for your organisation. As people with autistic disorders might not like changes, be clear and specific in your communication and ask them about their expectations and the activities they would like to be involved into.

Try out individual activities first as autistic people might have problems with interaction. Always explain to them what they can expect (the environment, the people they will be in contact with, the type of activity and the timeframe) and make sure it is okay with them. Always respect their wishes and try to be systematic and structured in your requirements. Be aware that they might prefer to carry out individual activities by themselves, without other people being involved.

**Acknowledgments:** This section has been prepared by Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organisations in Slovakia ([www.dobrovolnickecentra.sk](http://www.dobrovolnickecentra.sk))

## Involving older people as volunteers

### Description of the target group

Life expectancy in Europe is increasing while birth rates remain at a low level. As a result, the proportion of people of working age in Europe is falling while the number of retired people is growing. It is important that we plan for this ageing population and focus on enabling people to live active and healthier lives for longer. Volunteering can play an important role in helping people to remain active and involved at community level.

In the European Union, an older person is defined as being aged 65 and over, but this can vary from country to country and quite often the definition includes people over the age of 55 or those retired from work.

Older people are a diverse population group. They are characterised by a growing diversity in health, lifestyles, values and opportunities and challenges. Because people are now remaining healthier and living longer lives, this pool of potential volunteers could be a huge asset for VIOs.

Some of the reasons your organisation might like to consider involving older adults as volunteers are to:

- Widen and diversify their pool of volunteers
- Gain access to highly skilled individuals who have a wealth of life experiences, commitment and maturity
- Involve individuals who can offer flexibility, e.g. daytime availability
- Reflect and embrace the intergenerational aspects of their community and provide role models for youths
- Act as a model for other organisations in the community in terms of openness and inclusivity

### Motivation for engagement and reasons to volunteer

There are many reasons older people get involved in volunteering. One is the desire to help other people. When an older person sees a specific need in the community or is passionate about a particular cause, they are more likely to feel needed and get involved. Other reasons for volunteering might include satisfaction from seeing the results, a willingness to share professional experience and a wish

to continue professional development, meet new people and make new friends.

The following are suggestions on how you can keep older volunteers motivated:

- **Provide feedback.** Regular reviews can provide information to your volunteers on the importance of their role and who they helped and how.
- **Clearly state your goals.** When advertising for positions, it may be a good idea to emphasise the end goals and expected results. Older volunteers will particularly appreciate detailed accounts of why their help is needed and the value that they will add to the organisation.
- **Create a community of volunteers.** Regular group meetings allow volunteers to discuss and give feedback about their experience of volunteering and serve as a way for them to get to know other volunteers. It is particularly relevant for roles that require volunteers to work in isolation.
- **Focus on skills.** When interviewing your volunteers, make sure to find out about their skills and experience and let them know about opportunities for training.
- **Volunteer trials.** Encourage older volunteers to try out activities on a trial basis to allow them to establish whether they are suitable for the role without the pressure of having to commit.



## Communicating effectively

When communicating with older people, use age appropriate language and images so that you do not convey the wrong message. You may like to consider the following when communicating with older people:

- There are no 'bad' words, but there are words that will help you communicate in a more inclusive way. For example, consider using words like older persons, over 50s, independent, experienced, mentor, coach, etc. Make sure to ask your volunteers to find out how they prefer to be called.
- There are no 'bad' images, but there are images that may stereotype people.

It is also important to be mindful of the channels used when communicating. Many researchers suggest that people's ability to use technology begins to considerably decline after the age of 55. At the same time, the number of older people using the internet is growing overall, and websites should be designed in a user-friendly way. It is crucial that you consider a variety of promotional and recruitment methods.

## Recruitment

It is vital that organisations consider older people's specific and individual interests, abilities and lifestyles during the recruitment process – otherwise organisations can struggle to attract and retain older volunteers. Older people can bring time, knowledge and expertise to voluntary work, but they may find it difficult to find out about the opportunities available locally or to identify what they are best suited for. They may also find it difficult to let organisations know that they are interested in volunteering.

Because people are living longer and are healthier, they tend to remain active for longer. Older people may have a lot of commitments, such as looking after their grandchildren, travelling or developing their hobbies. Some volunteers may be happy to offer a regular commitment, while others may be only interested in one-off projects or short, infrequent tasks. Flexibility is important, as it will attract more people and increase retention rates.

The bureaucracy involved in becoming a volunteer is identified as a particular barrier, anxiety and annoyance for people. The following may be potential obstacles for getting involved in volunteering: online registration, completing lengthy application forms, formal

interviews that may be associated with an employment situation, or criminal record checks. It is always a good idea to take the time to explain the rationale behind each of the recruitment stages.

## Tips for your organisation

- **Ways to recruit.** Be aware that recruitment of older volunteers cannot be reliant on the internet. Instead, use local newspapers and the radio. Word of mouth and informal meetings are good methods of recruitment, preferably with tea and coffee served in an informal way. Moreover, do not underestimate your existing volunteers – encourage them to act as ambassadors in reaching out to other, older volunteers
- **Places to recruit.** Put notices in local shops, banks, offices, post offices, libraries, local health clinics, places of worship, homes for the elderly, day-care and resource centres, parish newsletters and contact active age/retirement groups
- **Appropriate language.** Use informal or softer language, such as one-to-one chats instead of interviews; a 'registration of interest form' instead of an application form may make the application seem less daunting. Application forms should not be over-complicated and should present information in a clear, concise, jargon-free way
- **A 'buddy system'.** Allow a volunteer to be matched with another volunteer or mentor. Pairing friends may work well, as it may encourage people to get involved initially
- **Providing expenses.** Providing out-of-pocket expenses and insurance may be important for retaining volunteers
- **Keep it local.** Local volunteering opportunities for older people will keep travel times and costs down, and reimbursement of expenses or the provision of community transport can be a strong lever for volunteer participation; alternatively, promote and facilitate car-pooling as a viable alternative
- **Volunteers' entitlements information.** Provide information with regard to the impact of volunteering on social welfare and pension payments

## Suitable volunteering positions

The volunteer coordinator should select activities for each volunteer in a way that will meet their expectations and correspond with their

abilities and skills. Asking volunteers what they would like to do as opposed to assigning tasks that they may find uncomfortable works well. However, first of all it is vital to clarify whether there are health issues the volunteers that could limit what they can comfortably do.

There are certain types of voluntary work that tend to be popular among older people, such as health and social services. They include face-to-face contact with other people or telephone support or information for those who are isolated. There are many other examples of voluntary activities, such as education, lifelong learning and culture. Each depends on the skillset, experience and the interests of the volunteer.

### **Working conditions needed**

Volunteers' potential limitations may need to be accommodated, such as health difficulties or mobility issues. By creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere, you will make it easier for volunteers to share their limitations, and it will allow you to work around them where possible. It is important that you explain the precise requirements of role (e.g. if there is a lot of standing or travelling involved, finishing hours). Ensure that places of volunteering are easy to get to, safe and well-lit if volunteers are finishing at a late hour.

**Acknowledgment:** This section is largely based on a report produced by the Dublin City Volunteer Centre, Experience Counts: Volunteering amongst people aged 55 and over in the Dublin city area, Dublin, 2015 ([www.volunteerdublincity.ie](http://www.volunteerdublincity.ie)).

## **Involving migrants as volunteers**

### **Description of the target group**

Europe is an ethnically diverse continent. EU member states have around 500 million inhabitants, and in 2013, there were around 33 million people born outside of the EU living within its borders, as well as 17 million people born in a different EU member state to the one they currently reside in.

The term 'migrant' is understood to mean a person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another. Migrants have different ties to the country they emigrate to: some are born and raised in the country, while others are exchange students, employees with accompanying family members, individuals with permanent residency or refugees and asylum seekers. It is not possible to characterise migrants uniformly because of the diversity of their backgrounds cultures, family patterns and religious affiliations.

Social and economic exclusion remain an everyday challenge for millions of migrants living in Europe. In addition to language, cultural and religious barriers, there are integration challenges which include, for example, unequal access to health care and social services, unemployment, weak attachment to the community and, generally, being awarded a less favourable position when it comes to accessing the same opportunities as the native population. There may also be major differences in the understanding of volunteering as, in many countries, volunteering is not recognised and valued in the same way as in Europe.

### **Organisation's readiness to involve migrant volunteers**

The involvement of migrants ensures there is diversity among volunteers and will allow the organisation to reflect the diversity within the larger society. There are many benefits to involving migrant volunteers, such as:

- An increased range of different skills and competences, new knowledge and ideas and new, unique perspectives on things.
- Cultural competence – migrant volunteers have a better understanding of different cultures and therefore they will be able to better serve clients with an immigrant background.
- Language skills – they can usually speak more than one language.



- Fresh ideas/new initiatives – they can help the organisation to develop new initiatives or ensure the quality of the existing ones.
- Challenging stereotypes – their involvement helps to build mutual respect within the organisation.

### Communicating effectively

When communicating with migrant volunteers, your organisation has to take into account their knowledge of local languages and potential challenges this may cause. It is crucial to be very clear in your communication.

#### • Meeting face-to-face

For many migrants, face-to-face, personal contact is often perceived as a more trustworthy way of communicating. It will also reduce the language barrier, as it is much easier to talk to someone directly rather than over a phone or by email. It may be a good idea to avoid or reduce the levels of written communication, such as letters, notices on bulletin boards, brochures and ads, because many migrants have a tradition of oral communication.

#### • Translating material

You may consider translating your promotional materials into the language(s) of local ethnic minority communities and ensure that all the relevant materials are written in plain and simple language.

#### • Use ethnic media

To make your organisation known among migrant communities, consider informing various local ethnic media about your activities and opportunities for volunteering.



### Tips on intercultural communication

#### DOs

- Speak slower, simplify your message and rephrase.
- Check regularly that you and the service user have understood each other.
- Ask questions if something is unclear or you need to understand why someone behaved in a certain way.
- Use visual aids and the written word – try to incorporate symbols and/or graphics into your training.
- Be open, tolerant and respectful of diverse modes of expression.
- Educate your volunteers about basic Irish cultural norms.
- Build up your bank of intercultural knowledge. Ask volunteers about their country of origin, and its customs and basic facts.

#### DON'Ts

- Avoid using acronyms, idioms, colloquial expressions, slang or technical jargon.
- Avoid using phone to explain complicated issues – send texts or email instead.
- Do not change a person's name into its English language version unless the volunteer asks you to do so.
- Do not assume that the person understands everything – some people are hesitant to ask too many questions in case they are seen as impolite. Try to confirm with the volunteer if they understood through seeking verbal acknowledgment.
- Do not assume the person is uneducated or inexperienced if they are unfamiliar with Irish acronyms or jargon or do not speak good English.

### Recruitment

The concept of volunteering may differ from country to country. It is important to keep in mind that not all countries have the same tradition of democracy and independent volunteer organisations, and some people are simply unused to the idea of expressing solidarity and giving mutual help. Ordinary helpfulness is, on the other hand, very common, and in many cultures, family and friends are expected to offer each other help.

When explaining volunteering to migrants, make sure to give yourself time and use plain language. Talk about the roots of



volunteering, how volunteering is organised, the values behind it and its unwritten rules. It may be a good idea to describe volunteering using other terms, such as helping others, getting involved and taking action. It may help those people to relate better to what volunteering is.

The best way to recruit ethnic volunteers is on a face-to-face basis and through personal dialogue. The most direct way to recruit them is to start examining whether you have volunteers or people in your network who are in contact with migrant groups. It is also a good idea to approach local ethnic minority communities, relevant community leaders, ethnic-led businesses, places of worship and other religious networks, job-seeker places, and schools with children of migrant backgrounds.

A good way to reach wider groups of volunteers from this target group at once is by organising activities or presentations in a residential area or local cultural centres where migrants tend to gather. That way you get the opportunity to establish a dialogue with them.

Below are some additional tips in relation to the recruitment, induction and retention of migrant volunteers:

- Strengthen the sense of community and belonging by organising or encouraging social events.
- Consider different attitudes towards food and alcohol (e.g. Muslims only eat halal meat and do not eat pork).
- Take into account cultural differences. For example, some male volunteers may feel uncomfortable doing what they see as female tasks, such as washing up or cleaning.
- When organising events, choose a neutral place so that everyone feels welcomed (e.g. some volunteers may not feel comfortable if a meeting is in a pub, where alcohol is being served).
- Talk about the positive contribution of volunteers and visualise how they make a difference, for example, by hanging photos of successful events and experiences.
- Create an atmosphere of dedication, praise and recognition. Volunteers must feel that someone benefits from their work and that they are making a difference.

### Suitable volunteering positions

It is important to have an individual approach to each volunteer and to consider their particular abilities, motivations, skills and expectations. Be open, ask questions and listen in order to understand their background and interests. Ask them what they want instead of assessing their needs based on different conceptions of culture and religion. Migrant volunteers can become involved in any type of voluntary activity unless there is a language barrier. In those cases, it may be a good idea to think about the roles that will not require language fluency (e.g. helping with practical tasks, such as gardening or conservation work, taking photos or serving refreshments at events).

**Acknowledgments:** This section is based on:

- The advice of the organisation Dobbeltminoriteter (Double Minorities) from Taastrup in Denmark ([www.handicap.dk](http://www.handicap.dk))
- The toolkit produced as part of the cross-European GIVE Project (Grassroots Integration Through Volunteering Experiences) ([www.giveproject.eu](http://www.giveproject.eu))



## Involving the long-term unemployed as volunteers

### Description of the target group

Eurostat estimates that 24 million men and women in the EU were unemployed in December 2014. Unemployment – especially long-term unemployment – can have detrimental effects on the individuals involved and affect mental and physical wellbeing. Volunteering is not only a leisure-time activity, but can also be an innovative way to achieve new skills and competencies that are recognised by employers. As a by-product of volunteering while being unemployed, new relationships and connections can be established and self-confidence increased. At the same time, the organisation benefits from the know-how of the volunteer.

There are different types of unemployed people and they have different characteristics. For example, there are long-term and short-term job seekers, young school leavers, and people aged over 50 who may be considered by employers as not flexible enough and too old for some positions.

Beyond the loss of income, losing a job also comes with other major losses, some of which may be even more difficult to face:

- Loss of professional identity
- Loss of self-esteem and self-confidence
- Loss of daily routine
- Loss of purposeful activity
- Loss of work-based social networks
- Loss of sense of security

Sometimes, unemployed people get to a point when they are unable to establish contacts with other people and the community and can become isolated. Paid employment is much more than just the way we make a living. It influences how we see ourselves, as well as how others see us. It gives us structure, purpose and meaning.

However, as an organisation involving volunteers, you need to take into consideration that in some cases, you might not know that a volunteer is unemployed until they disclose that information to you. Unemployment as such is not a state of exclusion, but there may be other issues connected it, such as mental health problems and depression.



### Communicating effectively

Sometimes unemployed volunteers, especially those who are long-term unemployed or graduates, do not have a long history of work experience and so they may need more guidance than other volunteers. Otherwise, the general principles of volunteer management should be enough – be open, respect the volunteers' expectations and try to match them with the needs of the organisation, and make the volunteering a positive experience.

Guidelines for communicating with unemployed volunteers:

- Communicate without preconceptions.
- Pay attention to individual differences that are unique for each volunteer; respect their personality and individuality.
- Highlight and articulate the benefits of volunteering; offer examples of other unemployed people who volunteered and what they got out of it.
- Offer certificates or awards that can validate what volunteers learn from their volunteering experiences.
- Give feedback frequently to boost self-confidence. Low self-confidence is often the main problem for long-term unemployed volunteers.
- Frequently ask if they are satisfied with the volunteer tasks and check if they need any extra support.
- Do not ask about the reason for unemployment unless it is relevant or unless a volunteer decides to share it with you.

## Recruitment

If you plan a volunteer project or programme aiming to involve unemployed volunteers, consider advertising in places such as job centres, labour offices, municipal offices, hospitals, GP clinics, libraries, universities and other public areas. You can also use the internet, social networks and other media, but be aware that these might not be as effective with all types of unemployed people (they may work well with graduates but not for long-term unemployed people).

## Suitable volunteering positions

When designing a suitable volunteer position, keep in mind that volunteers might leave the organisation as soon as they find a job. In fact, they are obliged to do so if they are receiving social welfare payments. You should keep that in mind when designing the roles and try not to offer long-term roles with high levels of responsibility. However, sometimes volunteers continue to help organisations even after they find employment. They may move to a different volunteer role that will fit their new work schedule.

The following questions may help when planning appropriate roles for unemployed volunteers:

- What motivates unemployed volunteers? Why do they want to get involved in volunteering?
- How much time do they realistically have, between looking for employment, attending courses and other responsibilities?

## Working conditions for effective volunteering

Unemployed volunteers may need some level of flexibility around time and location in order to attend job interviews. If possible, VIOs should offer to reimburse expenses for unemployed volunteers as jobless people are less likely than other volunteers to be able to afford expenses such as bus fares, lunch costs and special clothing.

**Acknowledgments:** This section has been prepared by Önkentes Központ Alapítvány Marczibányi in Hungary ([www.oka.hu](http://www.oka.hu))

## Involving ex-prisoners as volunteers

### Description of the target group

In 2013, there were 1.5 million inmates in prisons across Europe with an average age of 34. The most common types of criminal offences were drug offences (18%), theft (16%), robbery (14%) and homicide (12%). These figures are useful to help volunteer coordinators to understand the profile of the people living in prisons in Europe. They are mainly males, and often have addiction and health problems, as well as complex psychological issues.

Life for ex-prisoners can be extremely difficult. Many experience problems with housing, employment, finances, relationships, drugs and alcohol and mixing with other people. As ex-prisoners are a demanding group to work with, there may be some questions that will naturally arise for your organisation.

### Involving ex-prisoners in your organisation

- There are large numbers of highly-skilled and motivated former offenders. By focusing on previous criminal conduct, society deprives itself of the opportunity to use the talents, skills and energies of these individuals.
- People with criminal records often appreciate being given a second chance and are usually very committed, hardworking, and loyal volunteers.
- You can be an example for other VIOs, showing them the benefits of having ex-prisoner volunteers.
- Being open to involving people with a criminal record in volunteering is a valuable service to the community.

### Addressing the potential risks

A bias-free, common-sense approach is necessary when considering involving a person with a criminal conviction. Risk assessment involves comparing the volunteer's skills, experience and criminal circumstances against the risk criteria connected to the volunteer role.

An assessment should consider:

- **The nature of the offence.** Would the offence create unacceptable risks for other employees or clients?

- **When the offence occurred.** How long ago was the offence? How long is it since they were released from prison?
- **The circumstances involved.** Have the circumstances changed since?
- **Reactions of others.** You need to make an objective assessment of possible reactions of other volunteers, employees and service users. It is normal that they may raise some concerns and question the decision to involve ex-prisoners, and it is important to allow the time to explore and address the concerns. It may be a good idea to deliver a training programme exploring the reality of prison life, the benefits of involving prisoners and the potential challenges. A visit to a prison and talk from some of prison staff may also be an option.
- **The nature of the volunteer position.** Does it present any realistic opportunities for the volunteer to re-offend?
- **Reducing risk.** Assess factors that might decrease any perceived risk, including those already in existence, such as the level of supervision.



### Managing sensitive information about ex-offenders

- To encourage volunteers to disclose convictions, an environment of trust must be created in which they understand how and why such information would be used.
- It is best practice to ask applicants about criminal convictions. You can do it directly by asking potential volunteers to declare their criminal convictions on a self-declaration form, accompanied by a statement saying: 'Information about criminal convictions is requested to assist the selection process and will be taken into account only when the conviction is considered relevant to the role'. You can also do it indirectly, by asking: 'Is there anything that you feel we should know as an organisation to make sure you have the best experience of volunteering?' Ensure there is an adequate space for the applicant to give details of the offence(s).
- Remember that unless this question is raised as part of the recruitment process or at interview, there is no obligation on the candidate to disclose a conviction.
- Have an equal opportunities policy, incorporating a statement on the involvement of ex-offenders. Make sure to include a statement that unrelated convictions need not be disclosed or discussed.

### Should you disclose sensitive information to other people?

There is some debate about whether fellow staff members and volunteers should be informed at the outset that a new volunteer is an ex-offender. The answer to this question is not easily reached for the following reasons:

- While it supports organisation transparency, it can also lead to problems, such as more pressure being put on the ex-offender to perform and closer scrutiny of their work.
- It could also isolate the ex-offender and create a strained environment and relationships.

On the other hand, if colleagues are not informed at the outset and they find out by accident, there could be worse consequences. For example, ex-offenders may even leave the organisation, feeling that the relationship with others has broken down. Therefore, management and staff communications policies should be examined to guide the decision on which approach would be most suitable in the given circumstances of the case. It is also crucial



that the volunteer is informed what information will be passed on and to whom.

### **Managing and supporting ex-prisoners**

To encourage the successful transition of an ex-offender 'volunteering, the following measures need to be looked at

- Consideration needs to be given to developing senior management support. Their support is crucial; if an initiative is supported from the top, it will also be supported at the bottom.
- The volunteer should be treated like any other person, and certainly will not want to be singled out for any special attention. However, it is important to be sensitive to the history of the volunteer. For example, if they have not been active or participating in activities in a while, a little patience may be beneficial for everyone.
- Many ex-offenders suffer from low self-esteem, and feel everyone is thinking the worst of them. It is important to treat the new volunteer like everyone else, creating a friendly and positive environment and providing clear instructions and expectations.
- It might be a good idea to assign a 'buddy' to newly-recruited volunteers for the beginning of their volunteering experience to help them learn the ropes and to ensure that they are not overwhelmed or isolated.

### **Communicating effectively**

Communication is the first issue in dealing with people who have lived in prison for a long time. In many cases, they have been treated by prison wardens in a very impersonal way. Communicating without preconceptions is the first step towards creating a fruitful relationship. Here are useful tips:

- Treat ex-prisoners as a normal person with desires, concerns and emotions and not like a minor unable to understand and act as an adult.
- Look directly into their eyes. Do not avoid eye contact.
- Show them respect using formal language until they wish to be more informal.
- Be clear about the rules and policies.

- If the volunteer is not suitable, explain the reasons clearly. For example, because the criminal conviction conflicted with the volunteering opportunity, or for an unconnected reason.

### **Recruitment**

You can contact the service providers who are taking care of people released from prison (especially social or health-care services) or try to contact people working with people who will be released from the prison shortly (social workers, therapists, priests). They can pass the information about the volunteering opportunities to this target group and refer ex-prisoners to you. It may be a good idea to start small. Place one ex-prisoner and learn from the experience.

### **Suitable volunteering positions**

When considering suitable positions for ex-prisoners, make sure to carry out a risk assessment for each of the roles and pay attention if there is a risk of re-offending. Assessment of risk should be compared using information on the nature of the offence and the sentence received with the activities involved in the volunteering role. More than likely, individuals who committed sexual crimes will not be suitable to volunteer with children or vulnerable adults. You will have to think about other convictions that will prevent an ex-prisoner working directly with your service users. At the same time, they may be a great help with tasks that do not involve direct access to children or vulnerable people.

The experience shows that many ex-prisoners often like manual work. But again, treat them on an individual basis and always ask them what their expectations and interests related to volunteering are.

**Acknowledgments:** This section is based on:

- Irish Association for the Social Integration of Offenders (IASIO), Hiring Someone with a Criminal Conviction – Frequently Asked Questions for Employers ([www.iasio.ie](http://www.iasio.ie))
- Volunteer Now, Ex-Offenders and Volunteering Checklist, June 2009 ([www.volunteernow.co.uk/fs/doc/publications/ex-offenders-and-volunteering-checklist-nl.pdf](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/fs/doc/publications/ex-offenders-and-volunteering-checklist-nl.pdf))

## Involving the homeless or recently homeless as volunteers

### Description of the target group

It is difficult to determine how many homeless people there are in the world because countries have different legal definitions of homelessness. According to the UN, around 100 million people worldwide were homeless in 2005.

The fundamental problem of homelessness is the lack of shelter, warmth and safety. Homeless people often face many social disadvantages, such as reduced access to private and public services, among other vital necessities. They often experience physical abuse, and they can be ignored or ridiculed, spat upon and called names. As a consequence, they may lack self-esteem and self-confidence, feel useless to the community and be unable to establish contact with other people and the community and become isolated.

While many countries have developed social policies for working with homeless people, not many have recognised the power of volunteering as a tool for social inclusion.

Involving people who are currently homeless (or were recently homeless) as volunteers can help to break their social isolation. It can also help to challenge stereotypes around homelessness (e.g. homeless people have nothing to offer their community). It is important to remember that there are many different causes of homelessness, from lack of good quality, affordable housing to issues such as addiction problems, mental health difficulties, learning difficulties, poverty, unemployment, abusive relationships and family breakdown. People who have lived in foster care and young people leaving care are also at a high risk of becoming homeless.

### Tips for involving homeless people as volunteers

Homeless people often do not have the capacity to volunteer and usually do not look for volunteering opportunities as their primary goal is to survive – to find something to eat and to find a place to stay. That is why they are not a usual target group when we talk about volunteering. However, it is common for homeless people, and particularly those who have exited homelessness, to do some

volunteer work for organisations that take care of them as their clients. These organisations often introduce homeless people to volunteering and see this engagement as a good way of re-socialising them.

When involving homeless people and people who have exited homelessness in volunteering, it is important to plan your volunteer programme well. This means you need to prepare your service users, employees and other volunteers to accept homeless people as valuable and create an atmosphere of welcoming and equal treatment. This can only be achieved if the staff managing volunteers are properly trained and supported to carry out their work. It is also important to be prepared and aware of the prejudices in the community towards homelessness and to be mindful that some service users may also have prejudices towards homeless volunteers.





Here are some tips for developing an inclusive volunteer programme involving homeless people or people who have exited homelessness:

- Become aware of the problems that homeless people have within your community.
- Prepare your employees, beneficiaries and other volunteers for involving homeless people through discussions with experts or organisations that are working in the field of homelessness.
- Start by involving interested and motivated homeless people together with other volunteers in some of the services you provide. This will help set up a positive example and help others consider it as an option.
- If needed, ask for advice and contact experts (social workers, psychologists, lawyers, etc.).
- Try to foresee the potential challenges (potential lack of reliability of these volunteers, issues related to personal hygiene or hunger) and think of ways to deal with them in advance.
- Consider the boundaries when involving ex-homeless volunteers in a homeless service. Be mindful that ex-homeless people may know some of the service users and it may be a challenge for them to disassociate from the group they used to be part of. Keep in mind that while some service users will find ex-homeless volunteers inspirational, others may struggle with the relationship (e.g. they may feel like a failure in comparison to the volunteers).
- Involve their support workers. If the applicant volunteer tells you that they live in supported accommodation or have access to a community service, you should discuss the option to contact staff members to talk about any support needs that may be required. Working in partnership will be beneficial for all – to ensure quality support and development.
- Obtaining references can be difficult for people who have experienced homelessness. The organisation should consider if they can accommodate this and, if so, how they can help the applicant to identify a potential referee.
- Consider the relevance of police checks to the voluntary role. Communicate your threshold for convictions (type and period of time since the conviction) with the potential volunteer. You may need to risk-assess an applicant's disclosures and take these into account when considering which volunteer roles could be suitable.

- The issue of mental health should be addressed at both the application and interview stages. You may be able to discuss how it affects the applicant and how it could impact on their volunteering. You should risk-assess the volunteering role in relation to any mental health issues – considering areas such as lone-working, the role and tasks, potential stress, levels of supervision, what supports can be added, medication, the nature of the service and the type of service users.

### **Recruitment**

The best way to recruit volunteers from this group is to contact institutions or organisations that work directly with homeless people, such as homeless shelters, associations dealing with homelessness issues, public kitchens, centres for social care and employment services.

Not all people who experience homelessness fit the common stereotype of someone sleeping rough who has mental health problems and addiction issues.

Giving the applicant time to talk about their experiences in an informal meeting or interview will help you to take the best approach. You could also get some basic information via your application form. This could be through the use of an open question, such as, 'Do you feel you have any support needs?'. Or it could be a specific question, such as, 'Have you ever been homeless?' Specific questions must be explained and justified or they may offend potential volunteers.

### **Suitable volunteering positions**

When trying to find suitable volunteering positions for homeless people or people who have exited homelessness, it is important to discover their needs and motivations and then match them with suitable volunteering positions. Always take a personal approach and get to know each homeless person, their problems and backgrounds. People who have experienced homelessness may have had issues with addiction or the law, but remember that many people end up homeless due to economic reasons.

You are advised to conduct a risk assessment for each role. For example, some roles may require that the volunteer has been in

recovery for a minimum amount of time, or potential volunteers may need to be made aware of the police checks required.

When you think about potential roles for volunteers, it may be a good idea to consider mainly short-term and ad hoc activities rather than regular long-term volunteering. Some homeless people can have a problem with concentration, and often their day-to-day problems take priority over volunteering, which is only natural. They may also have difficulties with various addictions, and this may result in a lack of responsibility on their part.

It is a good idea to invite them to various activities and show them they are welcome, but not to be very strict with the timeframe (e.g. it is better to say they can come any time from morning until evening, rather than for a specific number of hours). Do not use any sanctions if they do not show up, even when they have promised to do so. It is also a good idea to involve them in activities that bring about some improvements for them, which is why it is easier to involve them in organisations where they were (or continue to be) service-users.

Try to encourage ex-homeless people to try out volunteering for a couple of weeks or months, and then check with them on how they are finding it. Adjusting to a routine of regular volunteering may be a challenge for some people who have been out of work for an extended period of time.

Depending on their capacities and health, homeless people and those who have exited homelessness may prefer to be engaged in activities such as:

- Manual work (fixing, painting, maintenance)
- Physical activities in the community (cleaning parks or other public spaces)
- Activities in emergency situations or humanitarian aid services
- Administrative tasks in the office
- Activities that involve taking care of animals (many homeless people own their own pets and feel strongly about animals and their rights)
- Creative activities, such as painting and designing (many people who have experienced homelessness have a passion for the arts)
- Tasks related to working with clients of the organisation, if appropriate

If you involve homeless people or people who have exited homelessness in administrative tasks, be ready – at least at the beginning – to check the results. Many of them are usually long-term unemployed and their capability for concentrating and being responsible for the outcome of their work might be weakened.

Involving homeless people or people who have exited homelessness in volunteering should be done on an individual basis, as it may be challenging to manage group dynamics, particularly if potential volunteers know each other. It is definitely easier to work on an individual basis.

### **Communicating effectively**

During the whole process, it is important to establish good quality relations with volunteers.



Here are some tips for communicating with homeless people or people who have exited homelessness:

- Find time to communicate with each volunteer individually.
- Do not force them to talk about their personal situation if they do not want to.
- If it is relevant for the role, ask them openly about their lifestyle and potential addictions or recovery from an addiction or any recent history of breaking the law.
- Create relations based on trust – give them your attention but, at the same time, make sure to clearly explain your role as a volunteer coordinator.
- Listen and try to understand them, their problems and their needs.
- Be kind and support them in dealing with their volunteer tasks.
- Be ready to say no. Homeless people may expect reciprocity and require help from you if they have helped you by volunteering. If they require support and help that is beyond your role, tell them you cannot help them and refer them to other agencies that can provide them with the necessary support.

### **Support for volunteers and volunteer coordinators**

Some volunteer coordinators and people working directly with the homeless may find it hard not to involve themselves in the difficult life stories they hear about. Therefore, additional support, including regular supervision, is recommended for volunteer coordinators.

**Acknowledgments:** This section is based on advice provided by:

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- Depaul ([www.depaulireland.org](http://www.depaulireland.org))

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