

Interlink

Your local county voluntary council



4. Volunteers

4.15 Supporting harder to place volunteers

Volunteering is attractive to many people with differing needs. The voluntary sector is committed to combating discrimination, offering innovative ways for people to develop skills and supports volunteering as an important marker of citizenship.

Support for volunteer co-ordinators

It is not always easy to place people into volunteering, for many reasons. However, recruiting and maintaining a diverse volunteer base that reflects the community served is an aim organisations strive towards. Volunteer co-ordinators will rightly see the development of a diverse volunteer base as a major success. Volunteer co-ordinators should be provided with support and supervision which recognises the challenges they will face and gives them opportunity to discuss any issues. You can check with the Volunteering team in your CVC about joining a local volunteering forum which will meet regularly looking at best practice in the management of volunteers. You will be able to draw on the expertise and experience of volunteer managers in your area.

The Investing in Volunteers standard recognises the importance of work undertaken to improve support for volunteers, including those with additional needs or those who could be defined as 'harder to place'.

There are many organisations nationally and locally that will be able to offer best practice information and training regarding supporting those with specific needs. Contact your local CVC to see what support is available. There may be a local directory of organisations that can provide specialist support.

All CVC s have volunteering development officers who will be able to help you look at ways you can develop volunteer roles, volunteer support and supervision systems and consider innovative ways for providing training to meet different needs.

Learning from experience

In 2010-2012 WCVA co-ordinated a Wales wide action research project, funded by BIG lottery, which aimed to co-ordinate learning from each CVC in working with 'harder to place' volunteers.

The project looked at different types of support which could raise the likelihood of successful volunteering for those with additional support needs and / or who are unemployed. What follows is a summary from this learning but the full resources can be found at on the [WCVA website](#)

Improving your ability to support volunteers

- Provide adequate training to volunteer co-ordinators to enable them to feel confident about best supporting their volunteers including diversity training.
- Can you put into place preparatory events for volunteering such as open days with time available to take a tour of the volunteering location and to meet the volunteer co-ordinator. Or put on taster sessions for people to try out volunteering.
- Provide opportunities for people to talk to volunteers and perhaps to meet with trained buddy volunteers who can help people through the application and induction process. In some instances, buddy support can be useful for longer periods too. If mentors, buddies, or support workers can be involved this will encourage less confident volunteers to apply, and enable them to enjoy their induction training and volunteering.
- You could fill out the volunteer application form whilst talking it through with a potential volunteer. This helps, especially, those for whom neither English nor Welsh is their first language, who have basic skills needs, visual impairment or a general lack of confidence with forms. After the form filling meeting, a phone call to the potential volunteer is recommended, to check all is well and to reinforce important information.
- Can you signpost a potential volunteer to support services in your area which may enable them to get additional support which will make it possible them to volunteer?
- Be aware of how accessible your facilities, building and location is, including access by public transport. Is your information accessible in different formats?
- Be realistic about your capacity. How many volunteers can you support? Do you wish to have a waiting list for potential volunteers ...if so be sure to keep people informed as to the status of their application and why they are being asked to wait.
- Be flexible about roles. Maybe you can design a role specifically for someone according to their needs, level of commitment and availability.
- Provide information to potential volunteers who are claiming benefits about volunteering whilst on benefits (see Information sheet 4.12).

- Volunteer support sessions, training, on-going supervision, and opportunities to be involved in decision making and / or to have your opinions heard, are important for all volunteers including those with additional needs. You may consider innovative ways that suit the needs of your specific volunteers such as paired, group or one to one sessions.
- Induction training can be adapted, for example to take place in shorter sessions. All documents should be in a format that suits the needs of the volunteer.
- Case studies, leaflets and your website should feature images and examples of a variety of volunteers. Give good publicity to examples of volunteers in your organisation who have additional support needs. This is a way to demonstrate your commitment to recruiting a diverse volunteer base. This in turn encourages people to regard your organisation as welcoming and inclusive.

Further Information:

The [Investing in Volunteers Standard](#) requires that organisations are open to involving volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities and commit the necessary resources (Indicator 3.1) and that if possible tasks are adapted to suit the needs, abilities and interests of individual volunteers (Indicator 4.4). It also requires that organisations aim to increase diversity and representation from the local community (Indicator 3.3)

[Swansea Community Farm](#) volunteer and volunteer co-ordinator discuss in a short video, their approach to supporting volunteers.

See the following Information sheets:

4.6 [Equality and Diversity](#)

4.7 [How to ensure volunteer satisfaction](#)

4.12 [Volunteers and welfare benefits](#)

4.17 [Understanding mental health and volunteering](#)

4.22 [Managing volunteer exits](#)

WCVA resources

[Promoting Equality and Diversity in Volunteering](#), a Guide for Volunteer Involving Organisations in Wales

[Recruiting volunteers, a manual of good practice](#)

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

For further information contact

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