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Mental Health Social Care Research Centre

A GUIDE TO SETTING UP AN INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMME

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

This Guide provides guidance to organisations about setting up and managing a scheme to provide support to people who would like to volunteer, but cannot do so independently.

For some volunteers, inclusive volunteering is on the pathway to employment; for others it is an end in itself, and leads to other benefits for them. Either way, organisations benefit from the skills and expertise of diverse volunteers.

It is hoped that this Guide will inspire organisations to further their understanding of what needs to be put in place to support volunteers with additional needs and the benefits this can bring.

This Guide is informed by a research project that aimed to evaluate inclusive volunteering at the _Ripon Museums_ in North Yorkshire, funded by the _National Institute for Health and Care Research Three Schools Mental Health Research Programme._

The project was a collaboration between the _Mental Health Social Care Research Centre_ (MHSCRC) at the University of York and the _Ripon Museum Trust_ (RMT), supported by funding from the _Leo Lion Foundation_. Although the project was conducted at the museums, this Guide is designed to be used across different types of voluntary organisations.

Volunteers play an important role in communities as they use their skills and expertise for the benefit of others. Their unpaid contributions make a real difference, and many community or voluntary sector organisations cannot operate without them. For example, RMT uses volunteers to help run the museums by working on the front desk; showing visitors around; conducting research for exhibitions and maintaining the buildings and gardens.

People volunteer for a variety of different reasons:

• To increase confidence.
• To meet and socialise with others.
• To develop and gain skills and knowledge.
• To build experience for future paid employment.
• To provide a sense of purpose and identity (for example, in retirement).
• To help others.

There is growing evidence of the importance of volunteering for our mental wellbeing[1]. However, people with low mental wellbeing or a diagnosed mental health problem often find it difficult to engage with more formal volunteering opportunities and may need extra support to help them to volunteer successfully.

Other reasons for requiring additional support may include:

• Experiencing low confidence.
• Social isolation.
• Difficulties socialising with others.
• Physical health issues or disabilities.
• Neurodiversity.
• Adverse life circumstances (for example, experiences of unemployment, financial or housing issues).

Inclusive volunteering is where volunteers receive additional support to enable them to carry out their volunteering role[2]. Ripon Museums employ a volunteer development officer to provide additional support to those that may need it, to enable them to volunteer successfully.

Engaging in volunteering can have many benefits[3]. It can help volunteers to:

- Increase social connections.
- Improve confidence and self-esteem.
- Improve wellbeing.
- Gain a sense of purpose.
- Develop new skills and knowledge.

It can also provide a sense of routine and structure, and act as a stepping stone to volunteering elsewhere, _paid employment and formal training_[4].

Inclusive volunteering also has benefits for the organisation, including:

- Contributing to a more inclusive and diverse workforce.
- Helping to attract new volunteers.
- Contributing to a wide range of skills, knowledge and experiences.

It is important to note that _volunteers can be essential to the success of the organisation_.

The project aimed to explore how and why inclusive volunteering works at Ripon museums and highlight the outcomes for people receiving support and the organisation providing it. Interviews and conversations were completed with volunteers and staff about their experience of the support that is provided. Volunteers also had the opportunity to keep a diary about their experiences and observations were carried out to help understand how support works in practice.

An advisory group consisting of volunteers, staff and external experts helped to advise at each stage of the project, including the content of this Guide. This group attended a Theory of Change workshop to help us to understand why support is important, how inclusive volunteering works and the keys benefits for both the organisation and volunteer receiving support. Following the workshop, a Theory of Change diagram was produced which created the structure for this Guide. This was also informed by the conversations and interviews with staff and volunteers and observations of practice.

Whilst drawing on findings from the project, the Guide aims to provide general guidance to voluntary organisations who are interested in setting up or developing inclusive volunteering.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This Guide is intended to be beneficial for voluntary organisations who would like to find out about inclusive volunteering and how it might be set up and implemented.

The Guide is organised around the _Theory of Change diagram_ and explores the following areas:

- Key elements of inclusive volunteering: organisational structure and procedure, and person-centred approach.
- How it fosters change.
- Individual outcomes: positive relationships; identity and purpose and self-growth.
- Organisational outcomes.
- Enabling factors and barriers (these are included at the end of each section as 'points to consider').

You can click on any of the headings within _the diagram_ which will take you to the relevant section of the manual where further information is provided.

In this Guide we have included some useful examples from our conversations with staff and volunteers and observations of support at the museum. However, it is recognised that inclusive volunteering might work differently with different people and organisations. Outcomes and benefits for volunteers may vary; for example, not all volunteer roles involve working with people and improve social connections.

The Guide is intended to provide general advice that might be applicable across different voluntary sector organisations. It is important to note that the Guide is intended to be used interactively, according to need and interest.

THEORY OF CHANGE FOR INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING

Key elements of inclusive volunteering

Organisational structure and procedure

- Agreed referral process and recruitment plan.
- Inclusive volunteering central to organisational culture and values.
- Leadership, vision and shared purpose for inclusive volunteering.
- Inclusive volunteering framework in place.
- Clear training, support plan and reviewing procedures.

Person-centred

- Emphatic, approachable staff.
- Trusting working relationship.
- Regular communication/feeling listened to.
- Advice and guidance; reassurance and emotional support.
- 1:1 support; buddying and support in-situ.
- Manageable tasks and realistic goals.

How it fosters change

- Providing structure and routine
- Developing new skills and knowledge.
- Carrying out meaningful role.
- Enjoyment and commitment.
- Connecting with diverse range of people.
- Responding to changing needs.

Individual outcomes

Positive relationships

- Increased social connections.
- Sense of community.
- Reduced social isolation.

Self-growth

- Increased confidence and self-esteem.
- Improved wellbeing.

Identity and purpose

- Sense of purpose and identity.
- New skills, learning and knowledge.
- Structure and routine.
- Employment or training.

Organisational outcomes

- Increases diversity.
- Raises profile.
- Leverage for funding.
- Bring skills and knowledge.
- Volunteers can be essential to running the organisation.

Enabling factors and barriers

- Leadership and management style reflective of inclusive volunteering.
- Volunteers in management roles and involvement in decision-making.
- Volunteer roles that match need and skills.
- Limited organisational resources.
- Individual factors e.g. wellbeing.
- Socio-economic and community factors.

2. KEY ELEMENTS OF INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING

2.1 Organisational structure and procedures

SUMMARY

- **Agreed referral processes and a recruitment plan** should be in place.
- Establishing and building relationships with potential referring agencies is important to gain appropriate referrals and contribute to a successful volunteering experience.
- **Inclusive volunteering opportunities should be promoted:** on a website; through social media; within posters and leaflets at the organisation; during recruitment open days and organised events.
- **First meetings** with the volunteer should be welcoming, inclusive and non-pressured.
- Inclusive volunteering works best within an **organisation whose culture and values are aligned to it.**
- **Strong leadership** is required to embed inclusive volunteering within an organisation.
- A **framework of policies and procedures** is required which includes provisions for volunteers with additional support needs.
- **Clear training, support plans and reviewing procedures** should be in place. *The reviewing process should not make the volunteer feel judged or formally assessed.*
- **Individual ability, skills and goals should be considered** when matching a volunteer with additional support needs to a particular role. *A variety of different opportunities and experiences should be offered to meet individual needs.*

2.1.1 Agreed referral process and recruitment plan

It is useful to have an agreed referral process and a clear recruitment plan.

Volunteers with additional needs might be referred to the volunteer setting by a variety of referral organisations. This could include, for example:

- Mental health support services and organisations.
- Community groups.
- Charities.
- Health and social care and 'support to work' services.

Establishing and building relationships with potential referral agencies is important. This might involve identifying potential referring organisations in the area; building connections through direct contact promoting inclusive volunteering; attending relevant meetings and forums.

It can also encompass re-establishing working relationships, for example, through key contacts within referring organisations. A strong working relationship with these organisations can help to strengthen an understanding of the volunteer setting, support offered and appropriateness of referrals. In addition, providing feedback on positive outcomes to referring organisations can make it more likely that they will refer potential volunteers with additional needs in the future.

The referral process might start with the referrer making an informal enquiry about a potential volunteer with additional needs and completion of a referral form. The form might include information about the support undertaken with the individual; perspectives on the person's mental health and wellbeing and what they might need in terms of support.

It might be helpful for the organisation to promote inclusive volunteering on a website, through social media (including blog posts) or local press, to enable potential volunteers to self-refer. Websites could include links to contact details and the application process and form. Volunteering roles might also be posted on more general websites advertising volunteer positions. Promotional posters and leaflets at the organisation are another important way to promote inclusive volunteering, particularly if the organisation is visited by members of the public.

Members of staff and existing volunteers can also help to answer any questions or provide further information about the role. A recruitment drive, incorporating recruitment open days and social media advertising, can be beneficial. Others might find out about inclusive volunteering and be introduced to the organisation through other volunteers, friends, or family members or by attending organisation events or community projects.

Once the volunteer organisation has considered the application form, the individual would then be invited to visit the organisation for a 'guided chat'.

Some volunteers might be experiencing low confidence or feel apprehensive about visiting a new place or meeting new people. For these reasons it might be beneficial and supportive for the referrer to be present.

This is an opportunity for the individual to discuss what they hope to gain from volunteering, roles they are interested in; relevant experience; skills they would like to develop, goals and any support needs.

It is important that the conversation is a supportive, welcoming, and non-pressured experience. During the chat, the staff member can also informally assess whether the individual might need some additional support. For example, one volunteer with additional needs shared during the initial conversation with museum staff, that they experienced mental health issues. The staff member responded sensitively and inclusively, and emphasis was placed on how the organisation could support them, enabling a positive volunteering experience.

It is important for the staff member to have conversations with both the volunteer and referring organisation, to ensure the volunteer role offered is sensitive and appropriate to goals and support needs.

> " I guess I was worried about, obviously cos I have mental health issues, I know there's been a lot of improvements to attitudes but there is still stigma around mental health that was absolutely no problem, "can we support you in any extra way?". It wasn't like a barrier in any way. **(Volunteer)**

The referrer might also assist the volunteer with the completion of any registration forms. The registration form might include contact details and background information; availability; any health issues or disabilities; volunteering interests and goals and information on how to make volunteering more accessible. This information can be shared with the staff member who will be supporting the volunteer, who can then informally introduce the individual to the team in which they will be working.

It is also important to recognise that additional support needs might become apparent once a staff member meets the volunteer, from information shared on the application form or when someone has started volunteering. An individual may require minimal support when they start volunteering, but their need for support may increase over time.

2.1.2 Inclusive volunteering is central to organisational culture and values

Inclusive volunteering works best when it is central to organisational culture and values.

If one does not already exist, it might be useful to develop a statement of values. This might be a general statement relating to volunteers, with the incorporation of more specific detail relevant to volunteers who might need extra support. This might involve a commitment to working with a variety of different volunteers, reflecting diversity within the community.

Volunteering should be both inclusive and accessible. The organisation should aim to provide support (where possible) and appropriate roles to meet the different needs and abilities of volunteers, including those who may need additional support to enable them to volunteer successfully.

The organisation should aim to be as inclusive as possible, promoting a supportive sense of place where *everyone, regardless of support needs feels welcomed, valued, and listened to*.

It is also important that volunteers feel engaged with the organisation and are making a valued contribution. This can be supported by social events, or by sending volunteers regular updates about the organisation including news, opportunities, and events.

Volunteer involvement in future planning and processes (for example, attending meetings or developing ideas for funding applications) can also contribute to this.

Inclusive volunteering can also be central to partnership working and creating links with local organisations and the community.

It can be beneficial for the volunteer organisation to work in partnership with other agencies, charities, community, and volunteer groups. This might be to deliver training to support development and progression. This may include motivational or vocational skills programmes, for example, or it could focus on mental health and wellbeing.

In addition, the volunteer organisation might carry out community engagement and outreach work within the local area. This approach can help people who might not be able to volunteer to be engaged with the organisation in an alternative way. There are also clear _organisational_ and _individual_ benefits of inclusive volunteering which could be referred to within statements of culture and values.

2.1.3 Leadership, vision and shared purpose for inclusive volunteering

Strong leadership helps to ensure that organisations can support volunteers with diverse needs. For charitable organisations, this starts with the Board of Trustees and flows through the management structure of the organisation.

Senior managers need to embrace the vision and strategy set by the Board and support their colleagues to deliver it. Although it may be demanding for the organisation to find resources to support volunteers with additional needs, a strong commitment from senior staff to do so will send positive signals to all staff about the need to make it happen.

The organisation's commitment to volunteers needs to be clearly articulated in its vision, mission or strategy statement, highlighting their added value to the organisation. A clear statement of the importance of diverse volunteers to an organisation can help to remind all staff and volunteers that a little additional support can make a big difference in helping the organisation to achieve its aims.

This statement can act as a reference point for the induction of new staff to help ensure that the commitment to supporting volunteers does not diminish as staff leave. It is important for the organisation as a whole to take ownership of this strategy rather than just the individuals providing the support to volunteers. Having a shared purpose within the organisation to support volunteers helps to achieve this.

2.1.4 Inclusive volunteering framework in place

To help ensure that organisational support for volunteers continues when staff leave their positions, a framework to support volunteers needs to be in place. This includes policies and procedures for _their recruitment_; assessing and _planning their support_; and _delivering the support to volunteers to meet their individual needs_. It is possible that such a framework already exists for staff, but a parallel set of policies and procedures needs to be developed for volunteers.

Other staff policies need to be updated to apply to volunteers in general, and volunteers with additional support needs in particular. This may include policies regarding, for example:

- Data protection.
- Safeguarding.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Training and development.
- Parental or other leave.
- Grievance and disciplinary procedures.
- Health and safety.

2.1.5 Clear training, support plan and reviewing procedures

Volunteers with additional needs may benefit from some general formal training sessions as part of their induction. Some of the generic training for paid staff may be relevant for volunteers, such as health and safety or organisational inductions.
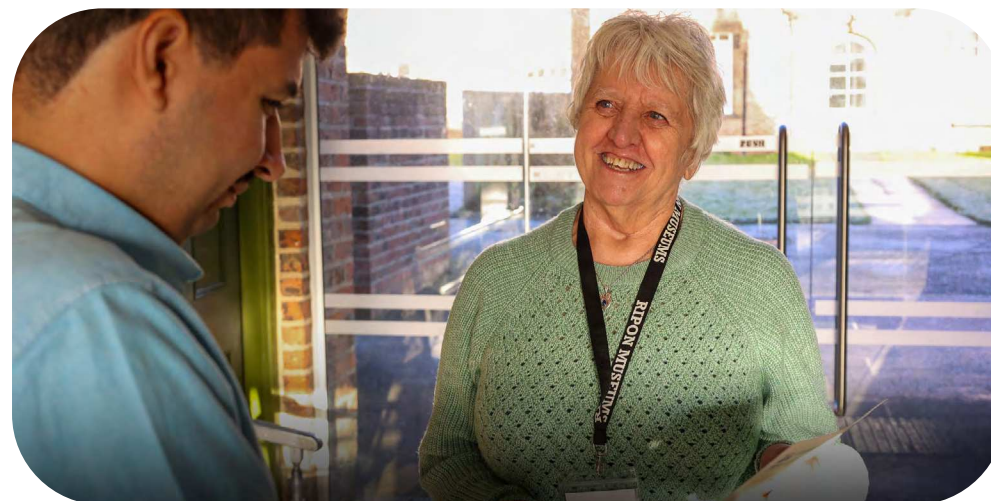
Other training sessions may be required in response to individual need or specific to the volunteer role. This could take the form of observing or shadowing a volunteer or staff member demonstrating a task and providing reassurance, advice, and guidance, _for example_.

Reviewing volunteers' experiences can happen informally through open and regular communication on a 1:1 level or within a group context. To assist this, staff members might observe volunteers' work and note their strengths and training needs. This may help volunteers to progress in their role or create new opportunities such as working within a different team or undertaking different tasks, for example. This will also allow any difficulties to be addressed.

It is important for similar processes to be used for volunteers who can work independently and those who require some support, so that the latter are not denoted as being 'different' in any way. When this happens, it can stigmatise volunteers with additional needs. However, it might be useful to keep some records of these conversations or meetings to ensure actions are taken and staff are aware of the support that volunteers may require.

Although reviewing is an ongoing process, it can be useful to have a more formal review at regular timepoints (e.g. after three weeks, three months or six months). This could focus on key aims and goals, views on progress and next steps. Some organisations might choose to incorporate a questionnaire or measure on wellbeing or other outcomes to be completed when the volunteer first starts volunteering, and repeated at the reviewing timepoints to see if there have been any changes in wellbeing. It can be important to complete the forms whilst having an informal conversation with the volunteer or retrospectively, to avoid feelings of judgement or being formally assessed.

Some support staff members might choose to complete written forms following each volunteer session.

> " I write a form at the end of each session just to monitor like the progress and ... been asking him certain things ... when we've been doing the tasks, saying like "Oh do you prefer this to what we were doing last week?" or "What sorta thing do you want to do?" And since, I've like sort of been here he's been able to do a lot more roles than before. **(Staff member)**

Some organisations might choose to keep a more detailed record, to capture the volunteer journey, detailing reasons for volunteering, hours worked, and support received, the role and tasks completed, wellbeing outcomes and benefits of volunteering, for example, meeting new people.

It may be helpful to establish a volunteer support group, including existing volunteers who are open to offering support to those with additional support needs through a buddying system. It is also important that volunteers are able to attend regular team meetings, with the involvement of staff members. A supportive atmosphere can lead to volunteers feeling comfortable contributing, sharing experiences, difficulties, and new ideas.

It is important to consider individual ability, interests, skills, and goals when matching a volunteer with additional needs to a particular role. It can be useful to offer a variety of different opportunities and experiences across different teams and roles to meet individual need. Some volunteers might be less sure about abilities and interests, particularly if they have low confidence or have had negative work experiences. It might be important for these volunteers to try out different roles and tasks to find a role that they feel comfortable with. It is important to consider that some tasks might be more popular or appear more daunting than others. Further, some volunteers might prefer working in a team, whilst others will be more comfortable working on their own.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- In some organisations time pressures and high caseloads might mean that some referrers do not have time to complete the referral form or attend initial meetings.

- Staff members need to have enough protected time to spend on establishing working relationships with referral organisations to help facilitate volunteer recruitment.

- Some referrals might not be suitable. For example, the level of support needs might be too high. Further, an absence of background information on the referral form can make it difficult to decide on suitability.

- It is important to consider how appropriate existing recruitment procedures are for those who may require additional support to volunteer (e.g. application forms and interview process). It is important to review existing procedures which can be adapted if needed.

- Completing the application form can be challenging or daunting for some individuals. This might be associated with a lack of access to the internet or concern about sharing information. If the document is not easily understood, people might decide not to complete it.

- Some volunteers might experience difficulties providing references (particularly providing two references).

- There needs to be enough jobs and roles that volunteers with additional support needs want to do.

- The often-changing dynamics of relationships between paid members of staff and volunteers needs to be managed sensitively.

- Tensions can occur when there are changes and developments to staff and volunteer roles and responsibilities. For example, volunteers might start to carry out roles that were previously undertaken by paid staff, or volunteers might have been working within the organisation for longer than staff members. Sometimes, changes can feel threatening to people and need to be handled sensitively.

2.2 Person-centred

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SUMMARY

- Developing positive relationships with volunteers with additional needs is key to engagement and a successful volunteering experience. Staff members working with volunteers should be **understanding, empathic and non-judgemental**.
- A person-centred approach helps to facilitate a **trusting relationship**, and can encourage volunteers to share experiences, views, and any problems they encounter.
- Importantly, getting to know volunteers can help staff to understand any support needs, as well as gain insight into individual abilities, strengths, and goals.
- **Regularly meeting and connecting with volunteers with additional needs** helps to build positive working relationships.
- **Providing reassurance and guidance**, particularly when the volunteer first starts volunteering can be helpful.
- Direct support can involve **shadowing a member or staff or volunteer and buddying with a more experienced volunteer**. Support in-situ can be a non-stigmatised form of support, where it isn't obvious which volunteers require additional support.
- **Volunteer tasks and roles should be manageable**, match abilities and meet support needs.

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2.2.1 Empathic, approachable staff

Developing positive relationships with volunteers with additional needs is key to engagement and a successful volunteering experience. It is important that staff members find time to regularly meet, spend time with and get to know volunteers. It is crucial that staff members have good communication and 'people skills' and can engage with a wide range of volunteers (e.g. individuals of varying ages and backgrounds). Employing staff who are approachable and supportive, who know and care about the volunteers they work with, contributes to a positive volunteering experience. It is helpful if volunteers with additional needs feel able to approach staff members if they are unsure about anything, particularly when they are new to their role.

Staff members working with volunteers with additional needs should be understanding and empathic towards individuals. A non-judgemental approach, understanding experiences and issues from the point of view of the volunteer, is key. This might include physical or mental health problems, or family or socio-economic issues, which can impact on the ability to volunteer successfully. For example, an understanding approach might include recognising changes in circumstances; _regularly 'checking in' with volunteers_ and responding with additional support if needed, such as building in flexibility if the volunteer needs to attend health or other appointments.

> " It's not a case of asking them what they need it's a case of knowing them and being able to chat to them... **(Staff member)**

> " She [staff member] was very accommodating ... and open to ideas and easy to talk to. **(Volunteer)**

2.2.2 Trusting working relationship

A person-centred approach helps to facilitate a trusting relationship between the staff member and volunteer. It can encourage volunteers with additional needs to share experiences, views and importantly, any problems they encounter. Volunteers may feel that they can speak more honestly and openly with staff and are more at ease talking about any problems they are experiencing. Contrasting with more top-down approaches, emphasis should be placed on a more equal, partnership approach between the staff member and volunteer. Feeling listened to is an important aspect of this approach. Importantly, getting to know volunteers can help staff to understand any support needs, as well as gain insight into individual abilities, skills, strengths, and goals. This can help staff to adopt a more personalised approach and better match the volunteer to appropriate tasks and roles. Volunteers should also feel that staff members are responsive to any issues that they have

shared. This might mean meeting with the volunteer to have a constructive conversation about what the problems are and changes that might help.

> **Case example:** a volunteer shared that their goal of meeting more people through volunteering was not being met. The staff member discussed this with them and agreed changes to the structure of her day, so that she worked in the garden as well as in the office. Changes were also made to the office, resulting in changes to the volunteer environment enabling her to meet more people.

2.2.3   Regular communication/feeling listened to

Regularly meeting, listening to, and getting to know volunteers with additional needs helps to build positive working relationships. Staff might ensure that they see volunteers face-to-face when they are working and check in with them at the start and end of their shift. It might also be beneficial for staff to meet up with volunteers with additional needs following absence from work. Some staff members could be managing a team of volunteers, where the emphasis is on caring about and getting to know team members. Conversations with volunteers might focus on reasons for volunteering and specific goals they wish to achieve. Further, staff members might find out about wider interests and hobbies outside of their volunteering role, as well as useful background information. By gaining this information, staff members are in a better position to provide individualised support to volunteers. This approach also contributes to the _development of a trusting working relationship_. However, it is important to realise that some volunteers will be more comfortable engaging in conversation and sharing information than others.

It is important to check in with volunteers who might be experiencing difficulties. For example, a volunteer may miss a meeting or volunteering session due to mental health issues. If a staff member can contact the volunteer, this can provide an opportunity to check on wellbeing, offer assistance with their role and increases the likelihood that volunteers will reengage and feel reassured when returning. Through relationship building,

staff members might identify volunteers with additional needs who they feel they need to check in with more regularly (for example, if there are concerns about wellbeing). It is important to note that some volunteers may wish to talk about issues they are experiencing, whilst others may not wish to share this information.

Support should be individualised and person-centred. Communication preferences will be diverse, for example, some volunteers might prefer phone calls rather than email. It is important to make information accessible to all volunteers with additional needs, considering neurodiversity or visual impairments, for example. This might involve providing 'easy read' written information or using an audio or audio description. It is best to follow a person-centred approach and ask the volunteer for their preferences. Through building positive relationships with volunteers, interactions become more responsive to individual need and characteristics.

> "
> **One of our volunteers who has some learning difficulties ... each month I email a pdf of her schedule so she has it a more accessible form for her** (Staff Member)

In some circumstances a risk assessment might be required to make sure the organisation setting is accessible and safe. For example, if the volunteer has a visual impairment, this might include thinking about lighting, the visibility of exit signs, guide dogs and whether the volunteer requires a 'buddy'. It might be appropriate and helpful to gain external advice.

2.2.4   Advice and guidance; reassurance and emotional support

It is important to provide reassurance, advice, and guidance to volunteers with additional needs, particularly when they first start volunteering. _This can occur when providing direct support_ and during regular check ins with volunteers. Some volunteers with additional needs might need emotional support, particularly if they are experiencing individual, family, or wider issues that might impact on their volunteering role. _Staff members should adopt an understanding and empathic approach in response to these issues_.

2.2.5 One-to-one support; buddying and support in-situ

Direct one-to-one support can involve a staff member or volunteer talking through or demonstrating a specific task, such as working on a till, with the opportunity for the volunteer to ask questions. Shadowing can be particularly helpful for volunteers with additional needs who might be feeling particularly nervous or worried about making mistakes. When volunteers feel more confident, *support might involve setting a task and then working alongside the volunteer to provide advice, encouragement and respond to any issues*. Staff members might engage in general conversation with the volunteer with additional needs so that the support provided is not made obvious. This approach might also mean that the volunteer will be less likely to feel observed or judged. Some volunteers with additional needs might need continued 1:1 support, each time they volunteer, whilst support might be gradually withdrawn for others.

> " The desk she sits at is right next to my desk so I can less formally just be there to just talk about what she is doing **(Staff member)**

This direct support can also be carried out by a 'buddy'. Buddying involves more experienced volunteers pairing up with new volunteers with additional needs. Depending on the individual, this can happen when the volunteer first starts volunteering or following a period of more direct support with a staff member. This additional support, together with 'learning by doing' can help to increase confidence prior to the volunteer working independently. It can also be a permanent form of support, if volunteers with additional needs are unable to volunteer on their own. Mentoring can provide a similar type of support, where more experienced volunteers can help to develop skills and increase knowledge. More generally, any volunteer or team member could provide support and advice.

Support for volunteers can also be provided in-situ. A duty officer or a staff member 'on call' can provide this type of support. This can be a non-stigmatised form of support, as although a staff member is available if needed, it is not obvious to others which volunteers might require additional support. It is helpful for volunteers with additional needs, particularly if working on their own, to be able to phone a duty officer if they have any questions or difficulties.

This is helpful in providing reassurance, particularly when volunteers are new to the role or are feeling apprehensive.

> " My first, yeah, my first shift went slightly wrong ... obviously my first shift on my own ... I'd got a little bit confused cos I was nervous... But again, I just phoned my duty manager who was really nice and actually came down in person, showed me how to do it ... and also was very sort of nice and understanding, saying "It's OK ... you know, it's not a problem" and that kind of again just reassured me ... I definitely remembered it after that **(Volunteer)**

2.2.6 Manageable tasks and realistic goals

Volunteer tasks and roles should be carefully considered, match abilities and meet support needs. Realistic individual goals and aims decided during a conversation with a staff member should also be considered. *Achievable, manageable tasks are important as they help volunteers to gain a sense of achievement and progression*.

Observations and regular check ins with the volunteer can help to monitor whether tasks are still manageable and to respond to changing aims or goals. This might also involve the volunteer identifying a training need, for example, shadowing a more experienced volunteer or assisting in other teams.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Some volunteers may experience barriers accessing the organisation associated with access to transport and socio-economic issues. Travelling to the organisation can be difficult if the volunteer does not have transport, public transport is limited and/or expensive (a budget to help with transport costs can be beneficial).

- Working with volunteers with additional needs requires a caring, person-centred approach. However, it is crucial to maintain appropriate professional boundaries. Organisations have a 'duty of care' to their volunteers.

- There should be sufficient administrative support.

- The organisation needs to have capacity to provide support and adequate resources (including support staff) so the volunteer with additional needs has a successful experience.

- It needs to be recognised that it takes a lot of time and effort to build positive, trusting relationships. There needs to be enough staff members employed to offer that support and manage the needs of volunteers.

- It might be useful to consider 'matching' a mentor or buddy to a volunteer, in terms of ways of working, skills and personality. Knowing volunteers and the team well can help.

- Having a buddy system and/or supportive team can help to free up time for team managers too. A training and support system for buddies might be beneficial. It is important to ensure that the buddy doesn't feel burdened or overworked.

- Some volunteers might not be keen to be seen to have a 'support worker' (some prefer buddying or more informal support).

3. HOW IT FOSTERS CHANGE

SUMMARY

- **Structure and routines** can be built into the volunteer experience.
- A range of roles and opportunities should be provided, that will help the volunteer to develop or learn **new skills and knowledge.**
- It is important that **tasks and roles are meaningful and worthwhile** to the volunteer.
- Volunteers with additional needs should **enjoy the volunteering role and tasks.** This can lead to further commitment to the role.
- Organisations should create opportunities through which volunteers with additional needs can **build social connections and meet a variety of people from different backgrounds and cultures.**
- The organisation and support staff should be **responsive to changing behaviour and needs** of volunteers with additional needs.

The following section highlights how inclusive volunteering might lead to key changes for the volunteer. It is important to note that these are examples and that as an organisation, not all the factors might be in place. However, they can be important points to consider as a team. The outcomes section (hyperlink 4. And 5.) explains in more detail how these factors might lead to both individual and organisational benefits.

3.1 Providing structure and routine

Engaging in volunteering can provide structure and routine for volunteers with additional needs. For example, volunteers might volunteer at the same time each week. Structure can be built into the volunteer experience by providing a timetable for sessions, times for breaks and opportunities to socialise.

3.2 Developing new skills and knowledge

A range of roles and opportunities should be provided, that will help the volunteer to develop or learn new skills. For example, the organisation might provide opportunities to work on a computer (for example, using spreadsheets in excel). Opportunities can also be given for volunteers to increase their knowledge in an area or job they are unfamiliar with. Volunteers should also be given the option to take part in relevant training and shadowing sessions.

3.3 Carrying out a meaningful role

It is important that a variety of different manageable roles and tasks are on offer for volunteers with additional needs. They should match a range of different abilities, skills, and support needs. Further, it is important that these tasks and roles are meaningful and worthwhile to the volunteer and contribute positively to the organisation.

3.4 Enjoyment and commitment

The aim should be for volunteers with additional needs to enjoy the volunteering role and tasks. This can result from a feeling that the role is important or useful to the organisation, a supportive environment and meeting new people. A feeling of enjoyment can lead to volunteers returning each week and further commitment to the role.

3.5 Connecting with a diverse range of people

Organisations should create opportunities through which volunteers with additional needs can build social connections and meet a variety of people from different backgrounds and cultures. This might involve creating opportunities for volunteers to interact with members of the public, other volunteers, and paid members of staff. This might include working in a team, inviting volunteers to team meetings, organising social and community events and social opportunities within the role.

3.6 Responding to changing needs

The organisation and support staff should be responsive to changing behaviour and needs of volunteers with additional needs, such as changes in mental health.

4. INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES

SUMMARY

- Volunteering can help volunteers with additional needs to **increase and build important social connections.**
- Volunteering can help to **build a sense of community within the volunteer setting.**
- Volunteering can help to **reduce feelings of isolation and increase social networks.**
- As a consequence of being supported to volunteer, individuals can experience **improved feelings of confidence and self-esteem.**
- Volunteers with additional needs may experience **improved wellbeing as a result of volunteering.** This may be a direct result or come from other benefits such as improved social connections or increased confidence.
- Volunteers with additional needs can gain a **sense of achievement, purpose, and identity.**
- Through volunteering, **individuals can learn new skills and develop knowledge.**
- Volunteering can **provide structure and routine** for volunteers with additional needs.
- Volunteering can **act as a stepping stone to volunteering elsewhere, paid employment, formal training or qualifications.**

4.1 Positive relationships

4.1.1 Increased social connections

Volunteering can help volunteers with additional needs to increase and build important social connections. Social connections can come from interacting with members of public, other volunteers and paid members of staff, for example. Volunteering can create opportunities to meet new people and talk to others from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Depending on the nature of the role, volunteering can result in volunteers regularly communicating, interacting, and socialising with the same volunteers each week (a 'social pattern' develops). This might be on a 1:1 basis, part of a group or team. Volunteering can also create opportunities for 'talking sideways': engaging in conversations with others whilst completing an activity or task. This is important for volunteers who feel less confident or experienced in talking to others. Linked to this is the importance of volunteers with additional needs working within an environment in which they feel comfortable and relaxed enough to enjoy interacting with others.

Regular socialising can help to strengthen connections and lead to friendships developing and socialising outside of work. Friendship groups developed whilst volunteering can help to encourage and motivate volunteers to 'come back' and continue volunteering. Some may also go on to mentor other new volunteers. However, it is important to recognise that some volunteers might be happy to keep friendships in work and not extend this to outside the workplace. Increased social interactions can help to improve communication, social skills, and lead to improved confidence socially. This can then lead to further socialising and forming positive relationships with others outside of the volunteer setting.

> **That was really enjoyable and, you know, you got to see people, meet other people who were also there, which you then later I've seen sort of around; that's a very important social aspect to it. (Volunteer)**

4.1.2 Sense of community

Volunteering can also help to build a sense of community within the volunteer setting. Inclusive volunteering can lead to working within a team, helping volunteers to develop team-building skills. This can result in volunteers experiencing the benefits of working within a team that is functioning well, including improved social skills, increased confidence and developing friendships.

> " I mean the X team we get on really well all the time but all the rest of the volunteers, we're, we're quite a big, a bit like a family, if you like, I suppose that's, that's the thing to say, we, we all get on really well... making good friends with, with other members of, particularly of our team, we're a really close knit team... **(Volunteer)**

Attending events organised through the volunteer organisation can also provide important opportunities for socialising and interacting with others, contributing to a sense of belonging and community. Attendance at team meetings can also generate opportunities to meet other volunteers. Furthermore, creating opportunities for more informal socialising is also important. For example, a team 'tea break' can be an important social opportunity for volunteers to catch up with others and share volunteering experiences. This can help to build motivation, develop friendships, and help forge an important sense of community. More informal meet ups can also be an opportunity to plan tasks and activities as a group and learn about specific skills and experiences. This can lead to volunteer tasks reflecting and enhancing existing skills. Through this approach there is more likely to be an emphasis on shared ownership, inclusivity, and community rather than more formal, top-down decisions.

> " Tea break for everyone ... felt very inclusive. It was also a chance for people to have a general chat and a catch up ... Really friendly and welcoming group ... Tea break is important in terms of socialising **(Observation Notes)**

Through becoming more involved in the community, volunteering can help to build and improve networks of social support. More informal meet-ups can be an important way for staff members to get to know and support their team. They can create an opportunity to provide emotional support and respond to changing circumstances. For example, if someone is experiencing mental health problems (e.g. depression), the staff member may be more likely to notice changing mental health and behaviour if someone stops attending volunteer sessions, for example.

4.1.3 Reduced social isolation

Improved social connections are particularly important for volunteers who may have experienced social isolation or loneliness prior to volunteering. *Volunteering can help to reduce feelings of loneliness and increase social networks*. Interacting with members of the public can also strengthen feelings of being connected with society.

> **" I used to have a period where I wasn't very well where I used to be very socially isolated ... volunteering is really important and all the advantage, you know, you get social skills, structure, sense of purpose, achievement, and you feel much more connected I think. (Volunteer)**

4.2 Self-growth

4.2.1 Increased confidence and self-esteem

Volunteers with additional needs may have experienced a loss of confidence because of a variety of different circumstances, including job loss and experiences of lockdowns during the COVID pandemic. As a consequence of being supported to volunteer, individuals can experience improved feelings of confidence and self-esteem. *This can result from increased social interactions and connections with a diverse range of different people, including volunteers, paid members of staff and members of the public*. Volunteers may also develop skills, learning and knowledge which can contribute to feelings of increased confidence and self-esteem. *Further, confidence can be gained from an improved sense of purpose and identity*.

Volunteers with additional needs may feel more confident in completing specific tasks and activities as part of their role. Increased self-esteem and confidence can also result in volunteers actively contributing during team meetings, sharing views and ideas and feeling able to approach a member of staff with any issues they might be experiencing. Some volunteers might begin to think about opportunities arising from their experiences, such as different volunteer roles, paid work, or training.

4.2.2 Improved wellbeing

Volunteers with additional needs may experience improved wellbeing as a result of volunteering. This may stem from some of the benefits outlined here, such as improved social connections, increased confidence or engaging in a worthwhile and enjoyable task. Improved wellbeing is also connected to the volunteer setting and environment. Volunteering outside in a garden, for example, can increase both physical and mental wellbeing. This can result from being in nature, nurturing and growing plants and being more physically active. Research has shown that spending time outside, in green spaces, can help to reduce existing mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. Working in a supportive, inclusive environment with a welcoming sense of community can also impact positively on volunteer wellbeing.

> **" Think that's why I got into the gardening in the first place because you can see all the benefits for wellbeing and even through Covid, now that's become really commonplace, hasn't it, the, the work, working in the green...and being outside, ... (Staff member)**

4.3 Identity and purpose

4.3.1 Sense of purpose and identity

Volunteers who are supported in their role can gain a sense of achievement, purpose, and identity. This can be through acquiring and developing new skills and completing tasks. More specifically, a sense of purpose and value can be gained from feeling that the volunteer role is important or useful and contributing to the volunteer organisation as a whole. It is important that volunteers recognise the value and outcomes of their contribution. Staff members can feedback to volunteers that their contributions are worthwhile and appreciated. Depending on the role, volunteers can also gain a sense of purpose by carrying out a rewarding role such as helping other people and a feeling of contributing or giving something back to society. Volunteers with additional needs can gain increased self-worth from discovering what they are good at, skills they can offer and enjoying the role. For people experiencing

mental health issues, a sense of identity and enhancement of self-worth, together with increased confidence, can have a positive impact on mental wellbeing.

> **" Well I think it gives me a sort of ... some self-respect, I think; I think that's part of it. You like to feel you're doing something important or useful, you're contributing; I think I like, I like that feeling, that's the sense in enjoy. (Volunteer)**

4.3.2 New skills, learning and knowledge

Through volunteering, individuals can gain experience working within a specific sector. Volunteers with additional needs may learn new skills and knowledge specific to their role, such as computer skills. More generally, _volunteers may develop social and communication skills, particularly if their role involves interactions with members of the public and working closely with colleagues_. Knowledge and interest related to a particular area or subject can grow, e.g. local history if volunteering at a museum. Importantly, this can also lead to increased desire to learn outside of the volunteer setting. Skills and knowledge can be developed through training and shadowing days, as well as from ongoing dialogue and communication with other volunteers.

4.3.3 Structure and routine

Volunteering can provide structure and routine for volunteers with additional needs, which might be absent due to a change in life circumstances or transition. This might include retirement, redundancy, or changes in mental or physical health, for example. Structures can be particularly important for volunteers who may have a diagnosed mental health problem or experience low mood. Engaging in meaningful occupations (including volunteering), can be an important part of the recovery process, through establishing structured routines in addition to fostering social connections, identity and meaning.

> **" It really does get you, it gets you up on a morning, gets you out and it, it keeps your, your, your brain going and everything. (Volunteer)**

Volunteering can lead to a routine 'social pattern' - meeting and socialising with other people. Importantly, for some people volunteering can provide a manageable 'level' of structure. Further, the positive impact of routine is closely linked to enjoying the role and the importance of it being voluntary rather than mandatory.

For some, navigating the commute to the volunteering setting can add to this sense of routine. Some volunteers might initially require additional support when traveling to the volunteer setting and then progress to navigating public transport and commuting on their own. This may lead to a feeling of increased self-organisation and confidence.

Inclusive volunteering can also provide routine in retirement, helping with the transition from established structure experienced during years in paid employment.

> **" I like being in the routine, you know, I like the established routine, because I, I'm used to the world of work; I mean I started school at the age of fifteen and, and thereafter I've always seemed to be I like the routine and organisation while I was, some structure. (Volunteer)**

Importantly, staff members and/or team leaders can provide and build structure into the volunteer experience, by providing plans and a timetable for sessions, for example, including allocating time for breaks and opportunities to socialise with others.

4.3.4 Employment or training

Volunteering can act as a stepping stone to future volunteer roles, paid employment, formal training, or qualifications. Some volunteers go on to volunteer elsewhere, alongside their current volunteer role. Links between the volunteer organisation and other settings in the community are an important facilitating factor. In addition, work-related skills and knowledge developed through the volunteering role can help to increase employability, especially if the volunteer is also receiving support to access paid employment from

other organisations. Further, volunteering can provide occupational-specific experiences which can help to increase employability elsewhere in that sector. Importantly, volunteering can help individuals evidence skills to potential employers, particularly through the provision of references. Other volunteers may go on to gain more formal qualifications and training.

> " I think the people that I worked with for the inclusive volunteering by and large kept going ...into, were employed...or went to college, two people went off to college, so yeah ... like the people I've referred into now; so one of the guys who was with the, the maintenance team, he stopped because he, he was then offered a job ... and he did do them both together but then his hours at his job increased so I'm, I'm pretty sure he's stopped volunteering now. **(Staff member)**

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- It is important to create roles and jobs where there are opportunities to meet others; considering the environment and layout might be important.
- The organisation should create opportunities for meeting, working, and socialising with other volunteers within the organisation, such as through organised social events and meetings where volunteers can share experiences.
- Volunteers have different preference and goals – some prefer to work on own; some in a team; and some in less public facing roles. Taking a person-centred approach, volunteers own individual goals and outcomes should be valued and respected.

5. ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES

SUMMARY

- Inclusive volunteering can **lead to a more diverse volunteer workforce** that is more representative of the wider community.
- A more inclusive workforce can help to promote **inclusive volunteering and attract potential volunteers to the organisation.**
- **Inclusive volunteers can be used as a leverage for funding,** providing evidence and commitment to inclusivity.
- **Inclusive volunteering can contribute a range of skills, knowledge, and experiences to the organisation.**
- Volunteers can be **essential to the success of the organisation.**

5.1 Increases diversity

Inclusive volunteering opportunities can lead to a more diverse volunteer workforce that is more representative of the wider community in terms of age, social and cultural background and level of support needs, for example. A more inclusive volunteer workforce can also bring together people with a variety of different experiences, interests, and skills. Importantly, people from different backgrounds can also contribute new ideas and perspectives. A more diverse volunteer team can also make other volunteers and paid staff members more aware and inclusive of others who may have additional support needs and may improve the skills of staff members who provide direct support to volunteers.

5.2 Raises profile

A more inclusive workforce can help to promote inclusive volunteering and attract potential volunteers (who may have similar support needs), to the organisation. It may be easier for new volunteers to engage with the organisation if they are aware that people with similar backgrounds and abilities are already employed there. It demonstrates that the organisation is engaged with the diversity of individuals within the wider community. This can also be enhanced through community outreach, engagement and partnership work with local charities and organisations.

5.3 Leverage for funding

Delivering inclusive volunteering and a commitment to a diverse volunteer team, can be used as a leverage for core funding for the organisation. Demonstrating to funders that a service is being provided for people beyond the traditional volunteer role can make a difference to a successful application. Further, it is important to evidence how *inclusive volunteering can make a positive difference to volunteers on an individual level, highlighting social, wellbeing and other factors* and to the organisation.

5.4 Bring skills and knowledge

Volunteers with additional needs can contribute a range of skills, knowledge,and experiences to the organisation. This might be from relevant educational qualifications, employment and volunteering roles. This has direct benefit for the organisation. Knowledgeable volunteer staff directly benefit the organisation by having a positive impact on the visitor experience in the museum context, for example, by contributing to visual displays, written newsletters, talks and tours.

5.5 Volunteers can be essential to running the organisation

Volunteers can be essential to the success of an organisation - many would not be able to function without volunteers. Inclusive volunteering has a strategic purpose, contributing to the workforce, increasing capacity and organisational growth. More generally, volunteer organisations may not have enough staffing resources. Volunteers undertaking roles that paid staff would carry out, whilst also contributing their own knowledge and skills can be essential to the running of the organisation.

> **We couldn't look after the gardens without volunteers. (Staff member)**

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- It is important to consider developing links with other volunteer settings and organisations in the community.
- There is a balance between meeting the business needs of an organisation that relies on volunteers and providing a service to volunteers with additional needs.
- When volunteers feel valued by the organisation (and its supportive environment) the quality of the service they provide improves. This helps to create a positive atmosphere, which can have wider benefits for members of the public visiting the organisation. The organisation then benefits through improved reputation.
- The individual benefits for volunteers with additional needs can feed into the organisation, such as improved services, reputation and fund-raising ability.

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