

Involving volunteers with learning disabilities, learning difficulties, or additional support needs

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This page will help you understand the value of successfully involving volunteers with diverse experiences and guide you towards further specialist support.

Understanding the differences

To best involve volunteers, it's helpful to understand the distinctions between different experiences.

- **Learning disability:** These are lifelong conditions that affect intellectual ability and daily living skills. Examples include Down syndrome or global developmental delay.
- **Learning difficulty:** These refer to difficulties in specific areas of learning, such as dyslexia or Dyspraxia. A learning difficulty does not affect general intellect. It is possible for a person to have both a learning disability and a learning difficulty.
- **Additional support needs:** This is a broader term covering any extra support a person might need, which may not be diagnosed. This could include mental ill health or autism spectrum conditions.

It is important to note that people may perceive their needs differently to the definitions given above.

Why involve volunteers with different lived experiences?

Promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities for everyone, reflecting the true spirit of volunteering.

Embracing volunteers with diverse lived experiences enriches your organisation in many ways and demonstrates commitment to **inclusion, equity, and diversity, a fundamental element of the UK Investing in Volunteers quality standards.**

The benefits of involving volunteers with different lived experiences include:

- Promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities for everyone, reflecting the true spirit of volunteering.
- Bringing unique perspectives and skills to your team, fostering innovation and a more comprehensive approach to your mission.
- Enhancing community engagement by truly reflecting the diversity of society and building stronger connections.
- Developing a supportive and accessible volunteering culture that benefits all, encouraging broader participation.

Investing in Volunteers (IiV) is the UK quality standard for good practice in volunteer management.

Things to consider

As you develop inclusive volunteering opportunities, keep the following key considerations in mind. These are often the questions organisations ask and addressing them proactively will lead to a more successful and welcoming experience for everyone.



- **How can we truly make our recruitment process welcoming?** Think beyond standard forms. Could you offer informal chats, taster sessions, or support with filling out applications?
- **Are our volunteering roles flexible enough?** Can tasks be broken down, adapted, or tailored to an individual's strengths and preferred ways of contributing?
- **What kind of communication works best?** Consider using plain language, visual aids, demonstrations, or consistent one-to-one support rather than relying solely on written instructions.
- **How will we provide ongoing support?** Will there be a dedicated buddy, mentor, or a specific staff member who can offer regular check-ins and guidance?

- **Are our physical spaces and information accessible?** Think about everything from building access and clear signage to “Easy Read” versions of important documents or visual schedules.
- **What training do our staff and existing volunteers need?** Equipping your team with awareness and practical skills in inclusive communication and support is crucial.
- **How can we ensure the volunteer feels valued and their contributions are recognised?** Regular, positive feedback and opportunities to celebrate achievements are vital for all volunteers.
- **How will we learn and adapt from this experience?** Consider building in ways to gather feedback from volunteers with additional support needs themselves, to continuously improve your approach.
- **Where can we get specialist advice?** Remember you don’t have to be an expert in every type of need or lived experience. There are local and national organisations and charities you can consult for specific guidance.

Further information

For more in-depth guidance and support, consider reaching out to these valuable resources:

Innovate Trust Volunteering Hub

Supports inclusive volunteering and employment opportunities for adults with learning disabilities.

<https://volunteering.innovate-trust.org.uk/>

Mencap Cymru

Offers advocacy and resources specifically for people with learning disabilities.

<https://wales.mencap.org.uk/>

County Voluntary Councils (CVC’s)

Can provide general guidance on inclusive volunteering practices and connect organisations with local groups, networks and opportunities.

<https://volunteering-wales.net/get-in-touch>

Learning Disability Wales

provide training and advice on creating ‘Easy Read’ resources

<https://www.ldw.org.uk/>

All Wales People First

All Wales People First is the united voice of self-advocacy groups and people with learning disabilities in Wales

<https://allwalespeople1st.co.uk>

Disability Rights UK

Provide up to date policy on disability rights

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/about-us>

Scope UK

Campaign to transform attitudes to disability, tackle injustice and inspire action

<https://www.scope.org.uk/>

Sense

Sense support disabled people with complex needs to feel connected and included

<https://www.sense.org.uk/about-us/>

People with learning disabilities are more likely to experience sight loss, hearing loss and mental ill health.

These following organisations provide useful advice and guidance on understanding an individuals needs:

RNIB Cymru

work in partnership with organisations across Wales to provide local services

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/nations/walescymru/>

RNID in Wales

Supports individuals who are deaf or has hearing loss or tinnitus and helps others that provide support

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/nations/walescymru/>

Mind Cymru

Mind Cymru make sure everyone in Wales has access to the mental health information, support and services they need

<https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/mind-cymru-mind-in-wales/>