

Engaging Volunteers with Disabilities

Volunteer teams benefit by being diverse and involving a wide range of volunteers, and this may include those with a disability or impairment. Whether you are considering involving a volunteer with an intellectual disability, sight or hearing impairment, someone recovering from an illness, or with a mobility issue etc, this resource contains some helpful considerations.

The time and skill of people with disabilities is often underutilised; they are disproportionately represented in employment statistics. They want to contribute to the community and the workforce the same as any other person. For some people with disabilities you could provide the first opportunity to become 'employed'. As with any volunteer some people may not be suitable for some roles.

When recruiting people with disabilities, apply the same process that you would in recruiting any other volunteer, ensuring they are able to carry out the required tasks. Sometimes it may take longer for people with impairments to learn and/or complete tasks however that does not mean that the work will be of poorer quality. As with any recruiting, it is about getting the right person for the right role.

Think about the role and the different way that tasks could be completed. Don't be afraid to ask the person how they might complete the task, they often have years of experience adapting everyday tasks and situations. Ask them what they can or can't cope with, they will understand their needs better than anyone else - don't decide for them what they are capable of. Keep the focus of the conversation on the completion of tasks not the person's impairment.

The attitude of the Volunteer Co-ordinator and other team members makes a difference, and impacts on the person's ability to carry out the tasks, and the satisfaction they get from a job well done. Encourage staff to support people with

disabilities and ensure they know to 'ask how they can help' rather than doing things because they think the person needs, or want the 'help'.

Many public environments have disability access; however, this is not always the case with back of house environments. To make sure your organisation is disability friendly, talk to people with disabilities, any organisation that specialises in a particular impairment e.g. vision, hearing, stroke, or contact one of the following organisations or websites for more information:

www.beaccessible.org.nz

www.ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz

www.socialchangetoolkit.org.nz

www.thinkdifferently.org.nz

You may need information about the physical environment, specialised tools or equipment, changes to training to ensure the impairment does not become a barrier. They can also provide information to staff so everyone can work effectively as part of an inclusive team, bearing in mind that privacy should be respected and the information provided should relate to the work.

Transport costs can be the biggest barrier to any volunteer, especially a person with a disability, in part because regular means of transport are not always suitable. Assistance with transport costs is always appreciated.

Providing opportunities to a wide range of people with a diverse set of abilities will enrich your team and your organisation.