

TAKING ON VOLUNTEERS WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

We are all created in the image of God and have our unique part to play in God's world. When the church is able to welcome and affirm the gifts of all it mirrors the inclusive nature of God and the diversity of God's world.

Sometimes it is easy to see what people's abilities are. Sometimes it requires a bit more effort to discern potential and to provide the support necessary for that potential to be realised.

Starting points

The points below may help you to consider what is involved:

1

People have "gifts that differ"

as St Paul reminded the early church.

- You want to empower volunteers to use the gifts that God has given them.
- For some that will be using skills they are already aware of.
- For some it will be about developing in new ways.

2

Involvement is important and is one the ways in which churches can encourage people to develop and mature as disciples, as well as building a community where all are valued.

- Sometimes the focus of volunteering will be on the volunteer's opportunity for involvement rather than on just getting something done.
- This type of volunteering can be hugely beneficial for all concerned but requires you to be able to invest energy and time in considering how to make it work.

3

There may be obstacles that hinder some people getting involved

- These might include things like lack of confidence, a need for additional support, some adjustments to how the task has previously been done, physical adjustments to space or equipment etc.
- It pays to be realistic (but also imaginative) about the obstacles and how it is possible to overcome them.

4

Some may have a ministry to enable others to be involved

- Some people are good at enabling others to use or discover their potential and overcome any possible obstacles.
- Some may have specific skills or experience, such as mentoring, while other may have unnamed but invaluable gifts.

Practicalities

1

Identifying different volunteers' needs

All volunteers have needs: some are standard and some require more thought to respond to. In order to adapt to different people's needs, it is necessary to identify any barriers that might make it hard for them to be involved.

- Sometimes the need will be for physical or practical adjustments (e.g. the volunteer using a wheelchair).
- Sometimes a volunteer will have particular support needs. (e.g. fuller explanations, another volunteer alongside to mentor them etc).
- Some volunteer involvement will include addressing particular formalities (e.g. for those claiming benefits or with a criminal record).

3

Volunteers in specific circumstances

It is possible, and often helpful, for people to **volunteer whilst on benefits**.

- See www.gov.uk/volunteering/ for guidance about volunteering when on benefits.
- Be aware of the complexity of getting involved in volunteer schemes that are linked directly to people's benefits.

A **criminal record** need not be a bar to all types of volunteering and it can be important for those with criminal records to be given an opportunity to provide evidence of their skills and willingness to be involved.

2

Making reasonable adjustments

There is no legal requirement to make adjustments for volunteers, because they are not paid employees. However the church can reflect the inclusive nature of God by enabling all people to use their gifts.

- A lot of advice and guidance is available about making adjustments in order to overcome particular barriers experienced by people with specific conditions. Many specialist organisations supporting people with a particular need can offer valuable guidance and suggestions.
- NCVO has useful [information about equality and diversity](#) including some straightforward [guidance on inclusive volunteering](#).

4

Balancing idealism and reality

The church rightly wants to involve and support people, but needs to discern which particular roles and contexts will enable a volunteer to flourish and which will not be appropriate. This is for the benefit of the volunteer as well as the church.

- A realistic conversation about what someone is hoping for and what can be provided is an important part of matching volunteers to roles in a way that is positive for all.
- It is important to treat people as individuals rather than make assumptions based on stereotypes.