

Say Yes To Disabled Volunteers



LOTTERY FUNDED

Gateshead Volunteer Forum

Promoting good practice
for volunteers from
socially excluded groups



Gateshead Access Panel

Disability Equality in Gateshead and the Region

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Produced by: **Gateshead Access Panel
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Introduction

Research (SCOPE, 2005¹) has found that 1:3 disabled people have been discouraged from volunteering because of their impairment and that discrimination, lack of financial support and accessibility issues are just some of the barriers faced by disabled people when looking for volunteering opportunities.

Individual cases reported by Gateshead Volunteer Forum members (Gateshead Access Panel and Gateshead Volunteer Centre) indicate that this picture is reflected in the Borough of Gateshead where volunteer-involving organisations have refused to take on disabled volunteers due to lack of staff time and resources to provide the necessary support, inability to pay taxi fares and a lack of knowledge of the issues.

In November 2006 Gateshead Volunteer Forum decided that they were determined to work together to challenge this situation and ensure that disabled people were given the same opportunity as non – disabled people to volunteer and benefit from the advantages that volunteering offers.

Gateshead Volunteer Forum secured Awards for All funding in 2007 to progress the ‘Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers’ initiative. Match funding in worker time (£1042 equivalent) was also provided by Gateshead Access Panel’s GoldStar Project. This report outlines the work undertaken in 2007 – 2008.

Aims

‘Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers’ in 2007 – 2008 marks the beginning of a long-term strategy which aims to

- make Gateshead an area where disabled volunteers are actively sought, valued and retained within volunteer-involving organisations
- create a culture in Gateshead where disabled people have the same opportunities for volunteering that non-disabled people currently enjoy

¹ SCOPE, 2005, *Time to get equal in volunteering: tackling disablism*. London:SCOPE

Objectives and Outputs

'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' intends to achieve and deliver this by

Objective 1	Output
<p>highlight the issues relating to disabled people and volunteering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hold a Business Breakfast for volunteer- involving organisations • launch a good practice toolkit • Q & A session with panel of disabled volunteers • Volunteer-involving organisations sign up to 'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' initiative • ongoing support and training

Objective 2	Output
<p>support volunteer-involving organisations to improve work practices for including disabled people as volunteers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information sharing at Gateshead Volunteer Forum meetings • direct support to individual organisations • follow up event to award improved working practice

Objective 3	Output
<p>supporting volunteer-involving organisations to create volunteering opportunities for 150 disabled people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 150 disabled people volunteering since October 2007

Outputs and Achievements

Business Breakfast

The 'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' project began on 26 October 2007 with a Business Breakfast event which was held at the Marriot Hotel, Gateshead. Over seventy people including officers from local volunteer-involving organisations and stakeholders from the public and private sectors attended the event.

During the 'breakfast' a video loop displayed positive images of disabled people in volunteering opportunities. The loop was put together by Steven Clough an IT



volunteer with Gateshead Access Panel, a Forum member. The keynote speakers, Dr Tom Shakespeare, Research Fellow, Newcastle University and Sheila Hawkins, Head of Health and Social Care at Volunteer England, highlighted the barriers that exist for disabled people trying to volunteer, the benefits that both disabled people and volunteer-involving organisations gain from increased access and participation and the fact that disabled people represent a pool of

valuable but untapped volunteers.

In addition to this, two disabled Volunteers, Dawn Trotter and Adrian Ward from GVOC, a member of Gateshead Volunteer Forum, shared their personal experiences of volunteering. This served to demonstrate some of the positives and negatives that had been experienced and identified some of the steps that had been taken to address some of the issues.

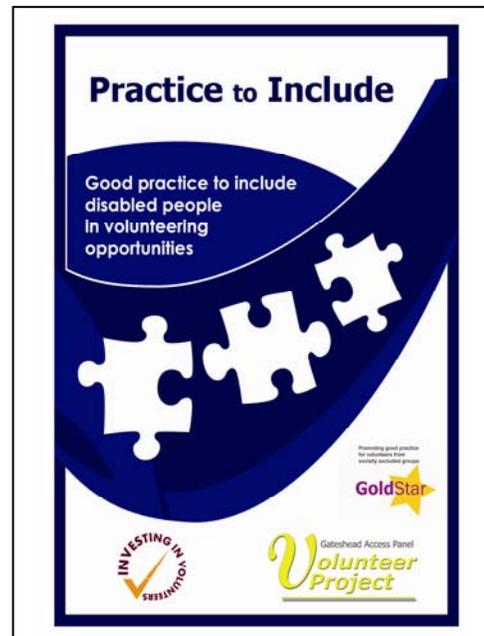




Good Practice Toolkit

The Business Breakfast provided the ideal opportunity to launch 'Practice to Include' a good practice manual for involving disabled people as volunteers. The manual, produced by Gateshead Access Panel, was introduced by Frank Lewis who was an integral member of the team that worked on the manual. A copy

of 'Practice to Include' was given to everyone who attended the event.



Question & Answer Panel

A team, from Gateshead Access Panel, of disabled volunteers, Sam Grey, Frank Lewis and Lynne Paterson and the Volunteer Coordinator, Julie Earl, dealt with a series of questions posed by delegates. The questions covered a wide range of issues which included:

- paying travel expenses
- providing personal care
- responsibility for health and safety

- language issues
- legal and policy requirements
- asking about reasonable adjustments
- disclosing disability and confidentiality
- accommodating personal assistants
- support and training
- funding provision
- volunteering and benefits

The session provided a valuable opportunity for delegates to raise issues of concern, for fears to be outlined and addressed and for ideas and solutions to be shared and explored.



Signing Up

Fifty-five organisations signed up to the ‘Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers’ initiative either as a direct consequence of the Business Breakfast or follow up work carried out by the Volunteer Centre in Gateshead. This pledge means that volunteer-involving organisations will proactively include disabled people as volunteers by accommodating individual need and providing support where possible.

Information Sharing

Gateshead Volunteer Forum bi-monthly meetings have provided the arena for discussion and information sharing on issues of good practice for including disabled people as volunteers. Forum member organisations that have particular experience and specialist knowledge of different impairments e.g. learning disability, head injury, mental health, physical disabilities have shared good

practice and approaches. Volunteer-involving organisations that support the Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers initiative are invited to these meetings.

Direct Support

In addition to the above, volunteer-involving organisations have been able to access direct support on specific issues of good practice for involving disabled volunteers in their individual organisations. Support that has been given in a wide range of areas which include:

- risk assessment
- supported volunteering
- insurance issues
- progression routes
- impact assessment
- personal care provision
- policy development

Awarding Improved Practice

'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' initially intended to hold a follow up event to the Business Breakfast to present awards to volunteer-involving organisations who could show an improvement in their practice for involving disabled people as volunteers. As the initiative progressed it became clear that the development of standards and monitoring systems for a 'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' Good Practice Award required a more work to make them meaningful as a recognised practice standard for Gateshead volunteer-involving organisations. In view of this it was felt more realistic to hold an event to promote good practice and celebrate the achievements of volunteer-involving organisations in Gateshead if the target of 150 opportunities for disabled volunteers was reached.

On Going Support and Training

As described above on going support and informal training has been made available to volunteer-involving organisations through the Volunteer Forum

meetings and direct support available from Forum members.

The discussions that this work provoked indicated that some people are still resistant and have fears regarding the needs and responsibilities of recruiting and supporting disabled volunteers. A 'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' event was held to provide more support and information to enable volunteering organisations to adopt practice that include disabled volunteers who they may see as requiring different or special placements.

'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' Event



In July 2008 volunteers at Gateshead Access Panel, supported by GoldStar workers, organised an event on behalf of the Gateshead Volunteer Forum. The event aimed to further promote good practice and offer support to volunteer-involving organisations for including disabled people as part of their volunteer workforce.

The day was held at Beamish Hall Country Hotel and was a great success by all accounts. The content and structure was informed by a needs

analysis carried out with organisations that had indicated support for the 'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' initiative. A 'speed dating' activity gave participants the opportunity to meet disabled volunteers and find out what adjustments, if any, they would need in order to volunteer. Glue and glitter was the order of the day as people took part in a 'Blue Peter Moment' to creatively address the idea of 'task shaping' while 'progression routes' were explored through the personal experience of a disabled volunteer. A quiz on the thorny issue of Risk Assessment prompted a lively discussion around concerns about insurance cover, individual risk assessment and personal evacuation planning amongst other topics.

In addition to the excellent food, great venue and good atmosphere participants commented that the event had

- ✓ provided the opportunity to openly express and share fears about involving disabled people as volunteers
- ✓ opened their eyes and changed their ideas about what was possible
- ✓ raised awareness of big issues
- ✓ provided a fantastic networking opportunity
- ✓ been really informative with lots of useful discussion

Volunteering Opportunities for 150 Disabled People

Forty four of the fifty five organisations that signed up to the 'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' initiative were volunteer-involving organisations. At the time of writing this report, information gathered through a telephone/email questionnaire (appendix 1), from seventy five percent of these organisations, indicates that 117 disabled people had been recruited into volunteering opportunities during 2007 – 2008. As figures were not available for all organisations within the given timescale, it is likely that the total figure is greater than 117 and may exceed 150 target.

This information (appendix 1) also provides further indication of the support volunteer-involving organisations need to develop or maintain future commitment to the inclusion of disabled people as volunteers.

Conclusions

The details outlined in this report demonstrate that Gateshead Volunteer Forum's 'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' initiative, with the exception of presentation of Say Yes Awards, has achieved its specific objectives and projected outcomes.

The work carried out so far demonstrates that there are volunteer-involving organisations in Gateshead that are actively including disabled people as volunteers and are able to provide the necessary adjustments and support where

possible. Other organisations are prevented from creating equality of opportunity for disabled people due to inaccessible premises or lack of resources to provide adequate support when required.

'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' highlighted the fact that some organisations are still resistant to and fearful about the needs and responsibilities of recruiting and supporting disabled volunteers. A general perception of disability as referring to wheelchair users and severe impairment appears to underlie many of the concerns.

In order to fulfill 'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' long term aims

- make Gateshead an area where disabled volunteers are actively sought, valued and retained within volunteer-involving organisations
- create a culture in Gateshead where disabled people have the same opportunities for volunteering that non-disabled people currently enjoy

further work needs to be carried out with volunteer-involving organisations to address the issues, minimise fears and improve work practice.

It is also apparent that, alongside the support and training offered to volunteer-involving organisations, strategic partnership working needs to be progressed on issues such as:

- supported volunteering provision
- direct payments/individual budgets including component to support volunteering
- provision of door to door transport
- 'Access to Volunteering' fund
- developing recognised standards of good practice

Appendix 1

'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' Survey

Aim

The aim of the survey is to find out

- the number of disabled volunteers recruited since the start of the Say Yes project (October 2007)
- future requirements to enable volunteer-involving organisations to include disabled people as volunteers

Method

Gateshead Access Panel, on behalf of the Forum, sent a copy of the questionnaire and covering letter to all volunteer-involving organisations who had signed in support of the initiative. This was followed up by a telephone call to go through the questionnaire. In some instances organisations responded by completing the questionnaire by email.

Survey Population

44 of the 55 organisations that signed up to 'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' initiative are volunteer-involving organisations. 34 (approx 75%) of these were able to provide responses within the given timescale.

Findings

No. of Disabled Volunteers

In total 117 disabled people were recruited as volunteers in the year October 2007 – 08. This was achieved by 24 (approx. 70%) organisations. 26 organisations had, as far as they were aware, included disabled people as volunteers prior to October 2008.

Volunteer Roles

Volunteers are involved in a range of activities and the assignments are of a short or long-term nature. Volunteer roles undertaken in groups or by individuals include:

- reception
- admin
- research & policy work
- advice & information
- advocacy
- mentoring & befriending
- gardening
- fundraising
- campaigning
- event organisation & support
- drop-in provision

- hospital support
- travel buddies
- newsletter production
- computer input
- access audits
- youth forum
- brailing & reading
- training

Saying No

A total of 9 organisations had been unable to include disabled volunteers. The reasons given are listed in order of frequency.

Reason	No of organisations
Inaccessible premises (including toilet)	9
Unable to provide 1:1 support	7
Lack of funding & resources (including transport)	7
Unsuitable for volunteer role	3
No changing place facility	1

Support to Say Yes

Organisations identified a range of support requirements that would assist them to improve work practice and 'Say Yes' to disabled volunteers. These are listed in order of frequency.

Support	No of organisations
Access to Volunteering Fund	8
Funding for mentors/support workers and supported volunteering	7
Resources to improve physical access	4
Training to address attitude & encourage inclusion	4
Increased staffing levels (including volunteer coordinator)	3
Affordable door to door transport	1
Support for volunteering included in individual budgets/direct payments	1

Changes to Recruitment and Retention Work Practice and Procedures

Organisations reported the changes they had implemented to work practices to include disabled people as volunteers. These include:

- adaptations to make format of application and monitoring forms more accessible
- offering support to complete forms
- development of individual risk assessments

- offering peer support where possible
- task shaping rather than specific roles for disabled volunteers
- welcome statement on recruitment material
- training on disability awareness

Future Events

Of the 34 organisations in the survey population, 29 would definitely be interested in attending future events. 3 expressed reservations due to staff resources and ability to attend. 2 would be unable to attend as their funding has been discontinued. Suggestions for future events included:

- legislation
- appropriate language
- support and networking
- sign language
- specialist equipment and communication aids
- information on available resource and support
- funding sources
- mental health issues and volunteering
- more on recruitment and retention
- anything

Other Comments

Survey participants raised a number of comments which included:

- ❖ volunteers don't always disclose their disability ... some deaf people or old people and people with mental health problems don't call themselves disabled so you tend to think of severely disabled
- ❖ we don't tend to get referrals from CVS regionally ... maybe disabled people decide not to approach us, or they think it's not suitable or their carers don't encourage them
- ❖ the events we recruit from may not have a high percentage of disabled people turning up
- ❖ we are pleased something is happening... all the events have been enjoyable and informative and provided the opportunity to ask questions
- ❖ the work has been an eye opener and raised consciousness about what we could do
- ❖ our inability to provide 1:1 support and our past experience means we are hesitant around mental health issues
- ❖ we know where to come if we have any difficulties ... we know we can call up and get ongoing support

Conclusions

- Gateshead volunteer-involving organisations have actively included at least 117 disabled people as volunteers since October 2007. It is likely that the true figure exceeds this for a number of reasons which include:
 - figures were not available for 25% of the organisations that signed up in support of the 'Say Yes to Disabled Volunteers' initiative
 - disabled people often choose not to disclose details of their impairments in case of discrimination
 - some people e.g. deaf people or people with mental health impairments do not consider themselves to be disabled even though these impairments are included in the Disability Discrimination Act definition of disability
 - non-disabled people's perception of disability often relates only to severe impairments

- Volunteer-involving organisations noted that they get fewer approaches / enquiries from disabled people than non-disabled people. It has been suggested that this may reflect disabled people and carers' views of their suitability or acceptability as volunteers and organisations' perception of disability.

- Disabled volunteers undertake a wide range of activities. This variety demonstrates that there is no requirement to create 'special' roles for disabled volunteers only the will to shape roles to enable participation.

- Disabled people in Gateshead are missing out on access to volunteering opportunities due to a number of factors. The main reasons are lack of adequate staffing for provision of 1:1 support, lack of funding for resources and transport, and inaccessible premises. It is possible that the latter is influenced by the perception that disability equates with wheelchair use.

- The above factors are reflected in the support requirements, identified by volunteer-involving organisation that would need to be met to enable them to develop good practice and become inclusive to all. Support needs included, support workers and supported volunteering and access to funding for staff, resources, transport and other reasonable adjustments. Continued training and networking was also highlighted and most organisations expressed interest in attending future events.

Recommendations

- Further training events on disability would work towards changing perceptions of impairment and disability and assist organisations to become more inclusive.

- Volunteer-involving organisations should demonstrate their positive approaches and the support they offer for including disabled people as volunteers. In this way disabled people may become less fearful of discrimination and feel better able to disclose details of their impairment and therefore get the appropriate support to volunteer.
- Organisations need to be proactive about promoting and disseminating information about their volunteering opportunities to disabled people rather than relying on mainstream recruitment channels
- In addition to the support and training offered to volunteer-involving organisations, strategic partnership working needs to be progressed on issues such as:
 - supported volunteering provision
 - 'Access to Volunteering' fund
 - provision of door to door transport
 - direct payments/individual budgets including component to support volunteering