

**The Volunteer Project Findings  
April 2004 to March 2007**

The aim of this evaluation report is to review the Volunteer Project from April 2004 to March 2007 and examine whether we have fulfilled the original aims and objectives, as described in the original application funding.

**The Aim of the Volunteer Project**

It has always been acknowledged that volunteers are invaluable and are the core essence of Gateshead Access Panel (GAP) and they are, in the main, responsible for what the Panel is today. All volunteers are an integral part of each project within GAP and it is our wish that they remain so.

That is why the Volunteer Project was set up in March 2004 with a dedicated worker in place this would provide the time needed to meet the individual volunteers needs.

The overall aim of the project is to generate an environment where disabled residents of Gateshead will wish to become involved as volunteers, they will be trained in the work of GAP and where their knowledge, skills and experience will assist them and the Panel, to work towards a fully accessible environment, give advice and information on disability issues and legislation to all stakeholders, whilst developing the individual volunteers confidence and skills to assist them in meeting their needs.

**Specific Aims**

- To expand the number of volunteers who wish to be involved in the Panel and gain a full understanding of their skills, knowledge, ability and needs. Up to twenty-five volunteers where expected to be involved during the three year funding from Volunteer England.
- To provide a progressive programme of volunteering opportunities that will enable disabled people to improve their confidence, skill and independence as well as any ambitions for education or employment. Offering training not only in Disability Equality, and providing an awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and its implications for service providers, but also identify and encourage volunteers to take up any training that will help them in their chosen volunteer placement.
- To network and liaise with outside organisations in order to broaden the scope of volunteering opportunities to disabled people.

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- Work closely with the project workers and volunteers to identify volunteer opportunities that may be most suitable for meeting the needs of the individual volunteer.
- Volunteers attend various meetings/committees with service providers throughout the borough, with a brief to advise that group of the issues affecting disabled people. They will provide awareness of the issues surrounding many impairments and not just their own, although they will also have the opportunity to give first hand experience of receiving services as a disabled person. They will report back to the Access Panel meetings with any issues raised for discussion, and take these views back to their group

### **Expected Outcomes**

- Volunteers will have a direct influence on the policies and practices of a wide range of service providers, making the services more accessible and better at meeting the needs of disabled people across the Borough. This process will happen after the volunteer reports back to the Access Panel meetings with any issues raised for discussion. The views of the Panel are then taken back to the group or a higher level either by writing e mails, reports, letters, papers or arranging meetings with head of services or/and the chief executive, that seems to be most effective.
- Volunteers attend various meetings/committees with service providers throughout the borough, with a brief to advise that group of the issues affecting disabled people. They will provide awareness of the issues surrounding many impairments and not just their own, although they will also have the opportunity to give first hand experience of receiving services as a disabled person.
- Staff of service providers becoming disability-aware, enabling them to develop policies and services which recognise the needs of the disabled people in the community
- The volunteers will become more confident, skilled and have increased knowledge, which, will help them to become more involved and included in society, as well as the possibility of pursuing further education and /or employment.

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### Volunteer Recruitment

Currently we have 23 volunteers the total number of volunteers recruited throughout the volunteer project has been 32. As obtained from the Volunteer monitoring Forms

Gender		Employment Status	
16	Female	2	Unemployed
16	Male	1	Carer
		21	Long Term Limiting Conditions
		4	Retired
		1	employed
		2	students/training
		1	Primary carer
Ethnic Group:			
All White/British			
Age:		Main impairment:	
Four in age range	16-25	Physical	15
Nineteen in age range	26-55	Hearing	1
Seven in age range	55-64	Visual	3
Two in age range	65+	Mental Health	6
		Learning	6
		Non-disabled	1

This of course is a simplistic breakdown of impairments groups, and this is probably the way impairment groups are seen/broken down for most statutory bodies. As with many of our volunteers as indeed with many disabled people the nature of an individuals impairments can be/or are complex. Some are seen for example as 'wheelchair users' or 'ambulant disabled' however just because someone is ambulant disabled does not mean that they do not have as well for example learning disabilities and /or mental health problems. The issue is why the individual perceives themselves to be disabled – are they being discriminated against because of mental health issues, learning disability or physical impairments? Therefore they do not necessarily fit into a particular 'category' and statistics therefore do not reflect the true picture of complex needs and multiple impairments. The next set of figures give a more realistic picture of the range of impairments the volunteers have.

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### Multiple Impairments:

### Main Impairments:

Physical	18	15
Hearing	1	1
Visual	4	3
Mental Health	9	6
Learning	8	6
Non-disabled	1	1

The figures above indicate that we are well within the target indicated in our original bid of at least 12-16 expected to participate in this project at any one time. The recruitment of volunteers has been through a combination of advertising, exhibitions and word of mouth. Once volunteers are recruited they are placed within the whole project in areas they are interested in. Their choices at the moment are:

Advocacy	Training	Representatives at Partnership meetings
Office Work	Focus Groups	Consult tees in Responses Papers
Research	Access Issues	Advice Information and Support
Newsletter	IT	Exhibitions

The Volunteer Project supports the workers within the other projects established within GAP to make sure the volunteer is suitable for the tasks undertaken and they receive sufficient training to carry out their roles. All volunteers and staff are aware of the policies and procedures within the office surrounding volunteers and any differences or concerns that may occur, and how best to deal with these events.

We do seem to have diversity within our volunteers in the areas of age, gender, employment status and impairment and although not disclosed in figures in religious background as well as sexuality. Although in spite of our best efforts we have failed in our recruitment of disabled people from black and ethnic minorities. We continue to work with Gateshead Volunteer Forum to engage with BME groups. We are also looking at ways of engaging younger people into the volunteer project.

### Progression Route

All volunteers have a recorded progression route written so that progress can be easily monitored and visualised by the volunteer and the co-ordinator. Each

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volunteer is met with on a regular basis so that trouble shooting, support, supervision, guidance, direction, target setting and evaluation of their work can take place. A review sheet is used to assist this process of their work can take place. A review sheet is used to assist this process of recording the volunteers' experience. This allows amalgamation of the formal constraints of work with the formal chat that is necessary to put individuals at ease and establish a rapport. The review includes:

### **Personal Development**

- Confidence.
- Self- esteem.
- Making a useful contribution to society.
- The volunteers sense of motivation.
- A willingness to try new things.
- A sense of things to look forward to.

All volunteers have benefited/progressed in these areas. See attached: Appendix 1. Michael

### **Skills Development**

- Improvement in ability to communicate with people.
- Work as part of a team.
- To make decisions
- Improvement in social and communication skills
- Organising time.
- Ability to lead or encourage
- Technical skills such as office work or IT skills.

See Appendix 2. Steven

### **Their sense of Cultural Identity**

- The understanding of different cultures
- Sense of belonging to the community
- Opportunities to express their own identity.

Equality and Diversity Training ensures that volunteers understand different cultures not only from black and ethnic minority issues but also from within impairment groups such as learning disabilities and mental health issues. Being involved with partnership meetings enables volunteers to observe other cultures. Through volunteering and attendance of focus groups/partnership meetings (citizenship) volunteers feel more of a feeling of connection to community through knowledge and input into local issues. There is still a somewhat feeling of

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estrangement by many with regard to the 'new' culture initiatives surrounding Gateshead through regeneration where this involves building of prestige buildings such as the Sage Gateshead and the Baltic Centre of Contemporary Art.

Provision of leisure facilities in the Borough are felt to be inadequate but through involvement with the Panel many have learned of inclusive projects such as Gateshead Stadium Gym service and one volunteer returning to compete in discus not having done this since leaving school.

Opportunity to express their own identity is observed through focus groups, office discussions – formal and informal, partnership meetings, events and conferences. At a recent regional event organised by One North East and the Learning Skills Council, around the Disability Equality Duty (in particular service user involvement). It was noted that GAP members were more vocal and informed than other service users who participated in the discussions/debates that ensued.

To see a flavour of some of the meetings attended by GAP see appendix 3

### **The Quality of Their Local Environment.**

- Access issues
- Focus Group Issues

Being part of GAP's focus group has given disabled volunteers an opportunity to express their needs around access issues in the borough.  
See Appendix 4.

### **Access to Training Courses and or /Certificates**

- Whether it is important for the volunteer to obtain accreditation or qualifications.
- Understanding that the organisation supplies access to free training.

People volunteer for all sorts of different reasons, so not all volunteers felt that it was important to them to accrue qualifications or accreditation within their volunteer placement. But all volunteers understood the reasons for training, whether that training was around disability or if it was based around a specific task the volunteer was working on within the office. They all understood that any training offered was only around the role undertaken within their volunteer placement and would be free of charge.

### **Support and management of the Volunteer Project**

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- Do you feel that your skills are well utilised
- Are you aware of what is expected of them most of the time
- Are you aware of that the organisation expects from the volunteer
- Do they feel you get the support you need whenever you need it?
- Do you feel the volunteering must be better organised
- Do you feel that your contribution is valued within the organisation?

In this part of the assessment process, I have to answer to the volunteer, if they feel there are areas that need to be addressed within the volunteer project this is the time to talk about it. So far all the volunteers are satisfied with the quality of support and the management they receive whilst with GAP.

Volunteers also have their own peer support group which meet up on a regular basis. They discuss issues around volunteering and elect a volunteer representative to attending trustee meetings, this volunteer is independent from the trustee board, therefore does not have voting rights and the roles and responsibilities of a trustees. All members of the Board of Trustees are also disabled people.

### **Employability/increased earning power**

- Has volunteering increased your ability to get paid work
- Has the organisation helped me look for paid work.

As I stated before people volunteer for all sorts of different reasons. Not all people are looking for work, those who are, feel they have enhanced their skills and confidence significantly, thus improving their chances of finding paid work. Although it is not within the brief of this project to find volunteers employment. Some volunteers have been proactively supported in their quest for employment.

One of our volunteers is actively seeking work. He has now registered with the Shaw Trust who are looking for a work placement in the area of interest expressed by the volunteer. This individual has only ever worked for two days with disastrous results even though he is forty. But this person as a result of his volunteering now feels he is ready to explore the world of work. Another two of our volunteers progressed into full time work and one volunteer is in part time employment.

### **Training Undertaken by Volunteers**

All volunteers receive training of sorts and this can be varied depending on the role of the volunteer. But all volunteers receive:

- Disability Equality Training

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- Equality & Diversity Training
- Policies Practices and Procedures

Those who volunteer in a specific area receive training apt for that volunteer role either from project workers or from external courses targeted appropriately for example Volunteer Advocates are given specific training this includes:

- Principles of Advocacy
- Community Care Issues
- Advocacy Progress
- Managing Procedure

Some volunteers have been assisted on to courses, others have been supported and encouraged to look for courses and enrol themselves. Examples of some of these training and development opportunities volunteers attended are:

2. went on to further education. .
4. explored other volunteer opportunities.
3. were supported through University. Three obtained 2-1 Hons degrees
1. is currently being supported to achieve a Diploma in Social Care.
3. completed Train the Trainer courses at local colleges
3. were supported through adult learning courses on computers
4. for basic skills in literacy Adult Learning
1. for confidence course (Economic Development Gateshead Council)
1. completed 'Understanding and Monitoring an Outcome Focus'
1. for reception duties course (Economic Development Gateshead Council)
1. completed an Equality and Diversity course 'level Three City and Guilds'
4. completed the City and Guilds 9425 in adult learning training, This course was delivered by Gateshead Collage it enables the volunteers trained to identify other individuals in need of assistance with a basic skills need.
9. completed Service User Involvement training Training.

This is first step training for service users and carers. Who want to be involved, bringing personal experiences for example into social work training, the Council and PCT meetings etc.

This included:

1. Team building/roles
2. Differences between children and adult learners
3. Effective Learning
4. When is a group not a group
5. Learning Styles

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6. Planning SMART Goals, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Bound.
7. Citizenship

**Below are areas of training that volunteers have contributed to or helped deliver**

### ***Access Audit Training***

Access Audit Training packages are used to equip participants with the knowledge to enable them to carry out audits of buildings based on best practice and equal opportunities. Using the Social Model of Disability, to show how disabled people's lives are adversely affected by badly-designed environments, current legislation including the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), British Standard 8300:2001, and Part 'M' of the Building Regulations are referred to in some detail. The training enables participants to understand that it is society and the environment that disable people and not necessarily the person's impairment. The training also considers how attitudes can maintain an inaccessible environment, and create dependency of disabled people on others. Ultimately, participants examine and understand what 'auditing' is and how to carry out an access audit of a building; whilst considering current legislation and best practice.

### **Disability Equality and Awareness Training**

Our training gives participants an understanding of the main barriers that concern disabled people. The training leads to improved service provision through greater awareness by those who provide and develop services. We address these issues by looking at how language and terminology can stereotype and, therefore, lead to discrimination. We also look at what disability is and how people view disabled people. We discuss the Medical, Social, Religious and Charity Models of disability and how they can either empower or disempower disabled people. Independent Living is discussed in detail. Physical and sensory barriers to services are discussed whilst addressing "How to make your Venue Accessible". We discuss specific access issues and show how bad design affects everyday life and forces disabled people to be dependent. Legislation is covered including the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). The experiences of volunteers demonstrate how disability, discrimination and design affect them in their daily lives

### **Disability Discrimination Act Training**

GAP have provided DDA training to professionals in Local Authorities, Emergency Services, Primary Care and Health Trusts; Adult Learning, Community Education and Higher Education; local architectural practices; as well as voluntary organisations and access groups.

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Areas covered include access to Employment; Services and Facilities; Access to Egress; Implications for Designers; and Facilities Management.

### **Service User Involvement Training**

We have devised and trained service users and volunteers in a variety of settings and workshops to equip them for participation in the public realm.

For a list of some of the group/organisations that we have trained in these areas: See appendix 5.

A conservative estimate 200 total of service users that have benefited from this project over the 3-year period this is not untypical of this project. Service users have been contacted by our newsletter, focus groups, telephone and enquires, exhibitions, advocacy/information/advice and support cases and through attending Committees, Seminars and Consultation panels, attendance of which stems from requests from Local Authority service providers, Health Services, PCT and Transport Advisors.

Given the nature of the OFV project and the communities served, the steps we have taken towards extending equal opportunities and diversity during the course of the 3 years. We have continued to promote equality of opportunities for rehabilitation and inclusion into society of disabled people/people with limiting long-term illness in their endeavours to raise awareness of and improve access standards to buildings, services and facilities. Advancing the education of the public and service providers in matters of discrimination against disabled people where such discrimination involves provision of inaccessible buildings, services and facilities. We are looking at ways of engaging younger people into the volunteer project and we also work with Gateshead Volunteer Forum and through partnership working to engage with BEM groups. We also have representation on the Refugee and Asylum Seekers Interest group, the Police Authority Diversity Group and have participated in a volunteer recruitment drive targeted at refugees and asylum seekers this was run by Gateshead Volunteer Forum.

### **Investing In Volunteers**

One of the most significant changes to the management and running of your OFV project during its 3 years has been engaging in the Investing in Volunteers Standards, which is the UK quality standard for all organisations, which involve volunteers in their work.

The investing in Volunteers standard will help us to provide a quality service for our volunteers, which will enable us to sustain involvement and motivation from existing volunteers and hopefully encourage other people to volunteer when they know they will receive a high quality service from us.

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The work on Investing in Volunteers standard Mark has commenced and feedback from our assessor on our first interim report suggests we are well on the way to achieve this standard in the near future. We have met up with our mentor from the local CVS and worked out our development plan so we may incorporate any suggested changes by our assessor our mentor and by other members of staff.

### **Gold Star @ GAP**

One of the most important aspects of the project has been the promotion of good practice in volunteering highlighting the specific and sometimes, complex support needs of disabled people, the majority of whom do not have any formal qualifications and experience, and may need some Skills for Life support. We have found an emphasis on promoting volunteering as Adult Learning is particularly useful as a means to promoting best practice issues. The GoldStar Project is enabling us to train disabled volunteers to develop and deliver a training package and guide aimed at other organisations in Gateshead on best practice around recruitment management and training disabled volunteers. This has also given volunteers an opportunity to develop skills and enhance personal development. Helping to improve people's job prospects and making a difference to someone's physical or mental well being. See Appendix 6.

The project is called GoldStar @ GAP as the funding comes from the GoldStar Volunteering and Mentoring Exemplar Programme – a government initiative, which promotes good practice for volunteering from groups of people who are socially excluded e.g. disabled people. See: ([www.goldstar.org.uk](http://www.goldstar.org.uk))

There have been five volunteers involved in this project. One volunteer was interviewed, photographed and filmed and her testimony and image was used nationally in the promotion and publicity of GoldStar. See GoldStar website as above.

The other four volunteers and the development worker have been involved in the development of the project. In doing this they have designed training workshops, are developing a good practice guide and promoting the project to the voluntary and public sectors in a variety of ways.

- Five focus groups have been held to find out from other disabled people what their views and experiences of good practice are and what they think should be covered in the training course.
- The training and forthcoming guide have been promoted to the voluntary and public sector.
- Posters and Flyers have been designed and distributed to 9 exhibitions.
- Flyers sent to 600 other volunteer organisation through the local CVS mailings.

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- Information posted onto GAP's website [www.access.gateshead.dsl.pipex.com](http://www.access.gateshead.dsl.pipex.com)
- Information also appeared in Looking Good, GVOC Newsround and GAP Gossip.

### **Staff Training**

The generic training that all staff at GAP are given is Disability Equality Training, Equal Opportunities and Diversity Training and recently they have all undergone the training by the GoldStar team in involving disabled people and people with long term illnesses in volunteering opportunities. I myself have had the following training, support and development opportunities.

I have attended the following conferences/Seminars:

- Goldstar National Event. This created not only extensive networking opportunities, but enabled us to see the work that other Goldstar projects were working on and share information on how we dealt with similar issues on volunteering.
- Attended a consultation exercise organised by the HM Treasury Cabinet Office 'Working together – Creating a New Partnership with the Third Sector'. A Review of the role of the third sector and economic regeneration.
- A seminar run by Sunderland University for North East England Stakeholders on 'Improving the Life chances of Disabled People'
- Diversity and Employment Conference Equal Partnership
- Valuing the Difference Making Social Benefit Count (Social Accounting)
- Urban Forum Members Seminar
- Urban Forum AGM The Next Generation

I have attended the following training:

- I attended training on Volunteering and Asylum Seekers.
- 9295 City and Guilds in Adult Learning
- Business and Strategic Planning
- Impact Assessment Toolkit Training (Volunteering England)
- Evaluation and Monitoring/Funding Information
- Exit Strategies (Volunteering England)
- Desktop Publishing
- Diversity in Volunteering (Volunteering England)
- DIY Guide to Volunteer Recruitment (Local VCS)
- Planning Ahead and Making Partnership Work.

### **Other Involvements**

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I represented service users on a panel who conducted the interviews for the service development Worker within community Based Services in particular the Physical Disabilities and Sensory Impairment Group (HIG). The post holder was to co-ordinate the work of the HIG, ensuring service users and care involvement remains central to all stages of planning development and monitoring of service delivery, also identify skills gaps and lead on workforce planning. Service users were consulted on questions they wanted put forward to candidates for the post and the answers the required.

We were part of the steering group organised by Economic Development that held an 'Employers Breakfast' we also participated in giving presentations. This was an opportunity for us to not only influence/train employers why they should and what is the best way of employing disabled people. One member of our team gave presentation on the DDA, and three of us including a volunteer gave accounts of our own barriers to employment and how they could be overcome.

My self and a volunteer were interviewed and broadcast on/by Channel Four News Team about the changes in the Welfare Reforms in particular the Incapacity Benefit reforms and the possible effect it would have on individual disabled people and people with long term illnesses.

### **Evidence of Best Practice**

All of us here at Gateshead Access Panel feel that we work to best practice standard and in this report there is evidence to prove this.

But recently we have had outside organisations recently validate our good work also.

The Gateshead Involving Volunteers Award 2005/2006

This award was given to us by Volunteering Gateshead who first held this competition in November of 2005. (2005 1<sup>st</sup> place, 2006 2<sup>nd</sup> place) Organisations were judged on entries of principles of good practice in the support of volunteers, training, communication, and reaching hard to reach groups of people. Helping to improve people's job prospects and making a difference to someone's physical or mental well-being. This award meant a lot, as it was the volunteers of this project who put us up for nomination.

### **Volunteer of the Year**

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of November this 2005. Frank Lewis a longstanding volunteer with GAP was awarded a regional Year of the Volunteer Award from CSV to celebrate Frank's amazing volunteering work over the years. It was presented by the Mayor of Gateshead in a ceremony in the Mayor's parlour. I had initially nominated Frank for this award, but the whole team here at GAP endorsed this nomination. We also had supporting letters from, Pauline Nelson Director of GVOC, Sue Taylor,

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Chief executive of Gateshead and South Tyneside Sight Service, Ian Hunter, Gateshead Lifelong Learning Partnership coordinator and Lifelong Learning Manager, Gateshead Council and Darren Ramshaw the Property Investment Officer (Access) in Development and enterprise Gateshead Council.

### **Is Volunteering Adult Learning Conference**

Ian Hunter, Gateshead Lifelong Learning Partnership coordinator and Lifelong Learning Manager recently gave a presentation in London at an event asking the question 'is volunteering adult learning?' He used a case study of one of our volunteers who came to us with no current qualifications/skills and lack of self esteem and confidence and with the support of GAP went on to build up her confidence skills/education to finally take a degree course and graduate with a 2/1 Hons degree, then go on to seek full time employment. He found this example of good practice 'inspiring'

### **Conclusion**

The evidence presented in this report proves that the Volunteer Project has successfully fulfilled all of its aims and objectives and expected outcomes presented in its original funding bid to Volunteer England.

Council officers realise that we believe in Gateshead and want to work with them to fulfil the vision of the Gateshead Strategic Partnership "Local people realising their potential, enjoying the best quality of life in a healthy, equal, safe prosperous and sustainable Gateshead". To achieve this for disabled people may be a bit more difficult but by working in Partnership with local authorities and others on the partnership we are pushing disability equality higher onto the agenda.

We have faced some challenges/difficulties along the way. One of those being transport for volunteers in particular transport costs, this is our biggest expense item due to the need to pay for taxi fares. If all our volunteers could access public transport or the Nexus Taxilink Service (This is a door to door service run by Local Transport Authority, for disabled people using accessible taxis) then expenses would drastically be reduced. This does not seem as if it will happen in the near future. Taxilink staff have done their best to accommodate our members indeed we have three of our volunteers on regular bookings, but the service is oversubscribed.

Also we have recognised that disabled people are often referred to us or approach us for volunteer opportunities firstly, on the basis that it is a disability organisation when really these people would prefer to experience other voluntary opportunities.

We deal with this by working with the individual to find out what they really want to do, then through the extensive network that GAP has developed, find a suitable

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volunteer placement. However this has at times proved difficult, as not all organisations/groups have a dedicated person employed to coordinate/supervise volunteers and when they advertise or interview a potential volunteer want someone who will be able to perform a variety of tasks, at a high standard and require minimal supervision, support and training.

For many disabled people the nature of an individual's impairment can be complex, for example; mental health problems/or learning disabilities combined with physical access issues. And while they can still contribute as a volunteer and perform tasks they may be limited and need training and/or one to one support For that reason a lack of/or an extremely slow progression is made. See Appendix 7

Whilst the GoldStar project is training other groups on best practice around volunteering. We have identified that many disabled volunteers benefit/need from a structure similar to supported employment to determine a way forward. Not only, for the disabled volunteer but also the organisation/group that the disabled person wishes to engage with.

This would allow for task/role shaping with volunteer tasks/roles, enabling the disabled person to participate as a volunteer, and gradually increase in confidence and skills. Identify and provide if needed specialised one to one support for the volunteer and set up regular meetings to support both staff and the individual volunteer to review progress or resolve any issues.

We ourselves have had several more enquires requesting volunteer placements from disabled people with complex needs. But due to lack of this specialised support resource we have had to curtail any further recruitment, although at the same time recognising we need to strengthen the Advice/Information and Support Team and encourage more volunteers to train to be representatives of GAP at the numerous partnership and stakeholders meetings.

We are preparing a funding bid to enable us to provide this service in the Gateshead Area. Hopefully, employing another two paid workers.

As we have proved in this report we do a lot of excellent work. To carry on this project we are now looking into funding from the usual Trust Funds, the Big lottery etc. However the problem we have, as with a lot of voluntary groups like ours is sustainability and we will be approaching Volunteer England for advice on this matter. We have also produced evidence that our volunteers have progressed in various ways with positive outcomes, and we have proved that volunteering is a form of adult learning so we so we will also be approaching the Learning Skills Council, Health and Local Authority around this with a focus on funding. So we can continue our plans and further our standards of service delivery which will enable us to fulfil our objectives to benefit the disabled community of the borough of Gateshead.

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**Appendix 1.**

**A VOLUNTEERS JOURNEY**

Two years ago I was introduced to Gateshead Access Panel (GAP), at the time I was a mature student at Northumbria University. My self-esteem was practically non-existent. I thought I was not likely to be able to graduate. In fact, I rather thought the staff at the university had made a mistake by even allowing me to join one of the degree courses in the first place. I was living on what was very much a day-to day basis and giving little if any thought towards the future. When I did consider it I found it seemed to be unremittingly bleak. The extent of my planning for the future was the somewhat vague idea that I would like to do work which somehow involved working with books. When life did present me with a choice I was paralysed by decision and would just wish that someone else would take responsibility for taking the decision off my hands. Looking back I probably missed out on several opportunities to help myself simply because I thought that I was not 'worthy' of being considered an equal to the 'normal' people that I would have had to come into contact with. I was worried that even the sight of me would have caused them offence. When strangers tried to speak to me in the street I would put my head down, continue walking and pretend I had not heard them. If anyone tried to physically approach me I would run and hide. At this time I lacked any vocational and interpersonal skills whatsoever.

In less than two years with the help of the others in the GAP office my life has been completely turned around. I started there as a volunteer working one day a week updating the office's files. I recall when I was new to the group being asked if I wanted to contribute to an article concerning volunteers' experiences at GAP and declining. I was afraid to do anything that would attract attention to my presence. The idea of speaking to strangers produced in me an unreasoning fear.

Since the first time I met everyone at GAP they have treat me like any other member of the community. That is, someone who is capable of learning to perform complex tasks even though I may have made the occasional mistake along the way. In the early days of my association with GAP my inability to make a decision must have been exasperating for the others who worked there. Looking back I practically needed permission from one of the others before I picked-up a paperclip from the floor.

Over time they have given me more responsibility for my work. Also the extent of my duties has increased. I now work on the reception desk two days per week and my duties include answering the phones and welcoming callers to the offices, as well as basic office administration and finances.

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In addition to these duties I also participate in the Focus Group, which normally meets on Fridays for the purpose of giving service providers information about how the services they provide effect the lives of people with impairments.

I have recently started helping out in a charity shop in Newcastle two days per week. This requires me to have more contact with members of the public than I would have been able to imagine myself doing before I started at GAP.

I have completed my university degree obtaining a 2-1 and I am looking forward to a career. I do not think I would have been likely to even have completed my course at university had I not had the support of my friends and the people at GAP to rely on. Although it is unfair to single any one person out for praise when everyone has been so generous with me, I have relied on Julie Earl the Volunteer Coordinator at GAP, who given me support and advice continuously throughout my volunteer placement.

Outside the office I am now finding it easier to become involved with community activities. To choose just one example I have recently joined a book group that meets in Newcastle's town centre. I had always wished I could join one of these groups but before finishing university and my association with GAP I did not have the confidence to apply. I had imagined that they would reject me at once as being beneath their notice. My future has never looked brighter than it does nowadays. This is largely as a result of my association with GAP and is the reason I hope that GAP will continue to exist and to improve the situation for other people with impairments for many years to come.

**Appendix 2.**

**A Volunteers View**

Going back just a little while, I was fortunate in that I always enjoyed school and did quite well academically. I was able to go to university, where I studied art and successfully gained my degree. After this, I worked independently as an artist while also being heavily involved with another disability organisation for about 3 years.

But when I then decided to apply for full time employment I quickly realised that I didn't have any real experience to back up my qualifications, plus I was a little unsure of my own physical abilities to work. To be honest, I felt a little bit lost and wasn't sure which direction to go in. So when, through the Shaw Trust, the possibility of a work placement came up at GAP I jumped at the chance.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience of working alongside Steve Smith and to learn from his vast experience and knowledge of the technical side of the organisation. I have enjoyed the diversity of the work, from the design and production of GAP's publicity and informational material, website work and the development of an interactive training CD to general technical support.

Through my comparatively short time here at GAP I feel that I have been able to dip my toe into the work environment with no pressure and risk free as far as my benefits are concerned. I have gained the experience of an actual work environment, of working as part of a team and I have something relative to put on my CV with the kind of reference that I previously couldn't have had. I feel more confident in terms of myself and employment, as I have been able to explore many of the potential difficulties and unanswered questions that I had – Would work leave me too tired that I couldn't function properly with regards to the rest of my life? Would I be too tired to do my shopping and cleaning or even go to the gym? Would I have to limit myself to a certain amount of hours?

With the help and support of all the staff and other volunteers at GAP and with regular informal reviews with both Julie Earl and Steve Smith I feel that I have been able to ease myself towards full time employment at my own pace and when I am ready. It is an experience of which I am very grateful and an organisation of which I have very quickly become proud to be involved with.

Steven.

## Appendix 3

### Networking and Liaisons

These are a few of the groups/meetings that volunteers either attended/are attending or feed into through our focus groups.

- Gateshead Strategic Partnership
- Gateshead Cultural Partnership
- Lifelong Learning Partnership
- Gateshead Transport Partnership
- Gateshead Health and Social Care Partnership
- Gateshead Volunteer Forum
- Gateshead College Diversity and Equality Group
- Gateshead Council Development and Enterprise Involvement/Consultancy
- User and Carer Group Gateshead Equipment Services
- Direct Payment Partnership Board
- Compact Working Group
- Asylum Seeker and Refugee Interest group
- Advocacy Support Group
- Gateshead Advice Forum
- Community Care forum
- Disabled Children's Forum
- Sunderland University Social Work Degree Curriculum Group
- Sunderland University Service user and Carer Influence in Social Work Training group
- Carers Strategy Group
- Learner Voice.
- Physical Disabilities and Sensory Impairment Partnership
- FullFilling Lives Sub group (Learning Disabilities Partnership)
- Gateshead Housing Company Disabled Persons Forum
- Nexus Transport For All Group
- Countryside Mobility/Watergate.

**Appendix 4.**

**Group in Focus**

David is a new member to the Friday focus group. This is his record of some of the things discussed in the meetings:

1. We talked about ramps that were too long and steep.
2. We also watched a slide show about different places that we thought needed improvement and discussed what we thought should get done to solve any access problems.
3. We talked about roads which where a danger to cross for anyone because there were no paths, no crossings or footbridges to get across.
4. We also talked about the easy access buses and how easy we thought they were to manage. I had four problems with them –
  - People on foot try to push in front of you when the driver is putting the ramp out.
  - Too many prams on the bus and not enough room for the wheelchair user to get in the wheelchair space.
  - People standing in front of the ramp when the driver is trying to let you off the bus
  - The driver is only meant to let two prams on with a wheelchair but sometimes when I get on I get trapped in with three of them which makes it harder to get off at my stop.
5. We have also talked about the blue badge scheme and how it works now and I discussed a few things about how it worked when my dad used it, because a few things that got mentioned I didn't know about, with some of the scheme having changed.
6. Today we talked about people who have problems with sight and hearing. I have learned a lot from just listening to Frank and other people's points of view and found information very helpful. I will think about everything that I have heard and learned today whenever I am at a meeting in case there is anyone in the meeting with the same kind of needs, and I will try to

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understand them that I can and hope that they can understand me and that I am not talking too fast for them.

7. I have just found out that they have stopped the Metro services from Sunderland, so people who want to use them can not.

David

**Appendix 5.**

**Disability Equality, Disability Discrimination Act and Access Auditing and Planning**

Care Services Commission  
Durham County Council  
Gateshead Carers Association  
Gateshead Council – various departments  
Gateshead Domiciliary Care Workers  
Gateshead Health Trust  
Gateshead LEA  
Gateshead Primary Care Trust  
Gateshead College Gateshead and South Tyneside Careers Service  
Gateshead Welfare to Work Committee  
Newcastle Council  
Nexus Transport Authority  
Northumbria Police Authority  
South Tyneside Council for People with Disabilities  
South Tyneside LEA  
South Tyneside College  
Sunderland Coalition DP  
Sunderland CVS  
Sunderland LEA  
Sunderland Council for the Disabled  
York Council  
York Health Trust  
York Physical Disabilities Forum  
Tyne & Wear Learning and Skills Council  
South Tyneside Community and Adult Learning  
Sunderland Learning Partnership  
Newcastle Community Learning  
Sunderland University Students on Social Work Degree Course  
Tunstall Group

**Appendix 6**

**GoldStar @ GAP**

**Anna**

GoldStar has given me a challenge in my life and a focus to work towards. Doing the presentations has given me a chance to put into practice some of the things I learnt about training. It's all coming together that's why it felt right to go towards the job of trainer.

**Frank**

I have been part of the GoldStar project since it started. My work on the project has been interesting sometimes difficult but very rewarding. I have been involved in setting up and producing the presentation and focus group sessions. Setting up the PowerPoint presentation was really good as it brought into effect the skills I had learned and had not used for sometime. Actually being able to present the PowerPoint and focus group sessions brought me a lot of satisfaction. I hope that I am able to learn more and go on to present the training sessions to people who may not have thought of taking a volunteer.

**Kirsty**

My name is Kirsty I'm 23 yrs old. I do admin for GoldStar and have given ideas for the training. I've been volunteering with the project for 4 months and really enjoy it. I feel I'm getting more confident because people treat me nice and they are so friendly.

**Steven**

I have been involved with the GoldStar project since it began in July 2006. Primarily, I have worked on the promotional material – which has thus far included flyers, posters, and website work. But I enjoy the fact that I am afforded as much involvement as I want. I have particularly enjoyed the challenge of beginning to create a visual identity for the project, which I hope to continue through training material and the production of the guide. This I hope will continue to compliment my other work at GAP.

In September I was lucky enough to attend the GoldStar National Conference in London as a volunteer representative. I very much enjoyed the experience, and in particular the opportunity to view the project in relation to the other GoldStar initiatives.

I have thus, thus far, both enjoyed and been excited by my work with the GoldStar project and feel sure that this will continue in the future.

## **Appendix 7**

### **Example one:**

One of our volunteers was volunteering for another organisation before she came to us but because she could not perform tasks given at the same speed as other volunteers due to impairment, she was made to feel inadequate when she was removed from the task. She consequently left!. She has commented that “she enjoys coming to GAP as she enhances her skills, is listened too and can work at her own pace”

### **Example two:**

Two national charity shops whose work is about raising funds for disabled people and whom advertise for volunteers were approached to take a disabled women as a volunteer. She lacks confidence and self esteem, but felt she would like to volunteer within a shop for just an hour at a time in the background maybe sorting clothes etc and gradually increase her time and expand on her skills when she felt more at ease.

Both managers at the shops refused to engage this person as a volunteer as they wanted someone who could multi task and would need little supervision/support or training. As they said they did not have the time to do this, themselves.

### **Example three:**

A disabled women, whose goal it is to gain employment as a receptionist. She wanted to engage in voluntary work to gain the confidence and skills to do this. She was successful in finding a voluntary placement. Although, she enjoys her work on reception and always has a sunny disposition and can answer the phone, she still has difficulty doing the basics on reception ie taking a message. The staff have tried various ways to assist her but lack the skills and the time to productively assist her to accomplish this task. She would benefit from a one to one worker whom is specialised in working alongside people with learning difficulties.