

Tips for Creating a Culture of Accessibility for Volunteers with Disabilities

- Remember what the volunteer can do for you, not what you can do for them.
- Concentrate on ability rather than disability.
- Remember, you are interacting with a person, not dealing with a disability or condition.
- Use Person First Language to reflect a positive attitude in portraying disabilities.
- Listen to the volunteer; they understand their disability best.
- Ask the volunteer about their communication needs.
- All behaviour is communication. Keep in mind that a person's inappropriate or ineffective behaviours may be an attempt to communicate some need to you.
- Be clear and consistent about the role and the volunteer's responsibility to the organization.
- Be prepared to have some flexibility around role descriptions.
- Consider individuals' interests. People work better when they like what they are doing and feel they are contributing.
- Work with the volunteers to tailor the assignment to their strengths and any challenges they want to address.
- Create Individual skill development plans to fully develop the skills and interests of the volunteer.
- One-on-one mentoring is a great way to support volunteers with a disability.
- Think outside the box.

- Address negative attitudes towards disability - whether from staff, other volunteers or clients.
- Ask volunteers what, if any, accommodations they might need. Prepare the staff for the volunteer by making them feel comfortable working with people with disabilities through education and conversation.
- Make sure that volunteers with disabilities feel part of the team.
- Integrate the volunteer into the workplace. Include him or her in your conversations, coffee breaks, parties, and staff meetings, where appropriate.
- Respect your volunteer's privacy. Remember that supervisors and coworkers must know the individual's needs but can only be told the diagnosis if offered by the individual. For example, a supervisor needs to know that Mary needs frequent breaks but not that she has attention deficit disorder.
- Ask the volunteer for contact information in case problems arise during the workday that cannot easily be addressed. For example, if a volunteer with schizophrenia is disoriented one day, whom should be called for assistance?

Adapted from:

Scope Abilities: <http://www.scope.org.uk/support/disabled-people/volunteering/tips>

American Library Association:
<http://www.ala.org/ascla/asclaprotocols/accessibilitytipsheets/volunteers>

