

VOLUNTEER **NOW**
connect · build · change

**Leonard
Cheshire
Disability**

Just Go For It

Volunteering for people
with disabilities



Volunteering happens when you give your time and energy for the benefit of the community, the environment or people outside your family. It is something you do without expecting money in return.

Why should I get involved?

- It can change your life in so many ways:
- For a start it is a great way to make new friends and to meet people from different backgrounds to your own. "I love company, so getting out and meeting people was great".
- It can be really enjoyable. "When you like something you are doing it doesn't feel like work".
- You can really make a difference to the causes you care about. "My role is an assistant in a charity shop and by carrying this out I am making a difference in developing countries".
- It can help you to feel better; volunteering can help to exercise your mind and your body. "It is good for your health and well-being- it gives you a sense of purpose and self-worth".
- It can develop your skills and confidence; it can contribute to your personal development and help you gain skills which may assist you to obtain a job. "It will build your confidence. Work within your limits but plan for your development".
- It can make you more connected to your local community; it can help you to feel part of something bigger, outside your family and friends. "You can become isolated staying in the house and can lose social skills- volunteering helps you to get out and about and keep your social skills up".
- It can give your day a structure. "It is something to do and look forward to".

What can I do?

- **Think about what you would like to do.**

Is there an issue you feel strongly about?

Do you want to work on your own or in a group?

Do you want to be involved in the management side or are you keen to be at the centre of what is going on?

Are you a 'people person' or would you feel more comfortable doing practical tasks?

- **Think about the time you would like to give.**

It is easy to feel that you want to volunteer every day for a cause you care about however experience shows that a small realistic commitment is more likely to last. It is better to make a small commitment of an hour or two per week and then build this up if you are enjoying it.

- **Be clear about why you are offering your time.**

If you have a special reason for becoming involved as well as simply wanting to help, then you need to share that with your prospective volunteer placement. For example, if you want to volunteer to practice a skill you have such as word processing, the organisation needs to know that to give you the right opportunity.

"Volunteering gives me something to do with my spare time and has helped build up my confidence".

- Sheila

Here are some examples of the kind of things volunteers do. But remember that volunteering is individual- don't be limited by this list, be motivated by what interests you.

“By volunteering I've learnt a new skill with Leonard Cheshire Disability which is using computers and the internet, now I use this to help other disabled people use computers.” - Geraldine

- **Volunteer with children and young people -** Playgroups, homework clubs, youth groups, holiday schemes, scouts, guides, mentoring.
- **Volunteer with older people-** Visiting, befriending, offering, practical help such as gardening or shopping, helping at day centres, organising activities, meals on wheels, transport.
- **Volunteer with children or adults with disabilities-** Providing practical support to someone with a disability, befriending, helping at group outings, providing respite for carers, recording books and newspapers for people with visual impairments.
- **Volunteer in hospitals-** Visiting patients, providing transport to and from appointments, hospital guides, hospital radio, organising the loan of books and magazines to patients, helping out with activities.
- **Advice work-** In a Citizens Advice Bureau or other local advice centre working with people on issues of welfare and consumer rights. There are also more specialist advice organisations dealing with young people, lone parents, unemployed and homeless people.
- **Counselling-** Alcohol and drug problems, relationship problems, victim support, youth counselling, the Samaritans. Counselling can take place in groups, individually or on a telephone helpline.
- **Volunteering with families-** Giving support to families who are finding it difficult to cope.
- **Volunteer with those who have mental ill health-** Befriending and assisting with social activities.
- **Volunteer with the criminal justice system-** Prison visiting, support for prisoners and their families, special projects for ex-offenders.
- **Volunteering with homeless people-** Information and advice, assisting in hostels or outreach programmes.
- **Volunteer in the environment/conservation-** Restoring canals, uncovering archaeological sites, clearing paths and communal areas, planting trees, wildlife restoration, dry stone walling.
- **Fundraising-** Organising events like cake sales or sponsored walks, participating in treks or cycling events overseas, working in a charity shop, helping with a flag day, being part of fundraising committee.
- **Emergency services-** Mountain rescue, lifeguards, lifeboats, search and rescue.
- **Management-** Joining the management committee of a voluntary/community organisation.
- **Sports and leisure-** Coaching, leadership, organising activities.
- **Asylum seekers and refugees-** Helping out with orientation sessions, teaching English.
- **Arts and heritage-** Helping in museums, backstage at performances, community arts and drama.
- **Community development-** Becoming involved in your local community. Helping out at the local community centre, joining the residents group, campaigning or lobbying on local issues, organising a community 'clean-up'.
- **Volunteer with animals-** Helping at an animal sanctuary, horse riding for people with disabilities, dog walking.
- **Campaigning-** Joining a campaign or a cause you care about or start your own campaign.

How do I get started?

You can contact your local Volunteer Centre or Volunteer Now. Volunteer Centres are a network of local organisations that have information about volunteer opportunities in your area. You can contact them by phone or in writing or call in and see them. You can search the database of opportunities they offer at www.volunteernow.co.uk where you will also find the contact details of your local volunteer centre.

You can also make direct contact with an organisation which you know is looking for volunteers.

What is the process I need to go through to become a volunteer?

Most volunteer roles require you to complete an application form and the organisation may also request a reference. If you cannot provide an employer as a referee, a friend or someone outside your family will be fine. If you would like to work with children or vulnerable adults you will need to have a criminal record check and this can take a few weeks to be processed. Having a criminal record does not mean you are not able to volunteer but you should declare it if requested to do so.

Most organisations will ask you to come in for an interview or a chat to get to know you and decide if you are suitable to volunteer with them. It is also an opportunity for you to get to know them and decide if the placement is for you.

What if I need extra support?

Be up front with the organisation about the extra support you need, people are often happy to help if they know what is required.

If you need extra support with choosing a role or working through the selection procedure then contact your local volunteer centre or Volunteer Now.

You may also be able to get extra support from a range of organisations providing specialist support to people with disabilities such as Leonard Cheshire. A list of these organisations is included at the end of this publication.

Will my benefits be affected by volunteering?

Where you are undertaking genuine voluntary work there should be no impact on your benefits. It is best to tell staff in the Social Security Agency that you intend to volunteer in advance of starting. The Social Security Agency has a leaflet outlining the benefits of volunteering while on benefits, you can download it at www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/264508/dwp1023.pdf

If you are offered reimbursement of the expenses you incur as a result of your volunteering, your benefits should not be affected, as long as the expenses paid by your organisation reflect the actual cost you incurred. If the organisation pays more than the expenses you have actually incurred this may affect your benefit.

“It gives you confidence to be a person in your own right - not focused on your disability.”
- John

New Beginnings

Most organisations offer an induction to new volunteers. This is an excellent opportunity to find out more about the work the organisation does and the specific role you will be playing as a volunteer. The type of induction will vary depending on the nature of the organisation and the type of volunteer role.

Sometimes the organisation will offer trial period or a taster session as part of the induction programme. These can be very useful in order to see if the kind of role is suitable for you. They can also provide a good opportunity to see if any adaptations to the role or the volunteering arrangements are necessary because of your disability.

Often organisations have a written agreement with their volunteers, this document outlines the agreed expectations that you can have of each other. These can be very useful in helping to establish a volunteer placement and they provide a good reminder of what has been agreed.

Take time to review your volunteering commitment periodically to ensure that it still matches your motivation, interests and lifestyle; you may want to consider whether you have any training or support needs which have become more evident over time. Many organisations will offer this kind of review as part of their support for volunteers and if it is not offered you should request it.

Tips for Success

In preparing to write this publication we spoke to a number of people with disabilities who were volunteering. Aside from the wide spread enthusiasm for their individual volunteering roles, they had some common suggestions for how to make it work well. These are:

- Take things in small realistic steps
- Enjoy it
- Work within your limits but plan for your development
- Try a taster to start with
- Just go for it!
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Useful Contacts:

Volunteer Now- developing and supporting volunteering across Northern Ireland.

Tel: 028 9023 2020

Email: info@volunteernow.co.uk

Web: www.volunteernow.co.uk

Contact information for Volunteer Centres is available on this site.

Leonard Cheshire Northern Ireland- works for a society in which every person is equally valued.

Tel: 028 9024 6247

Email: northernireland@leonardcheshire.org

Web: www.leonardcheshire.org

Disability Action- works to ensure that people with disabilities attain their full rights as citizens.

Tel: 028 9029 7880

Textphone: 028 9029 7882

Email: hq@disabilityaction.org

Web: www.disabilityaction.org

Mindwise- works to support those at risk of, and affected by, severe mental illness and mental health difficulties.

Tel: 028 9040 2323

Email: info@mindwisenv.org

Mencap- the voice of learning disability.

Tel: 028 9069 1351

Email: mencapni@mencap.org.uk

Web: www.mencap.org.uk

RNIB Northern Ireland- supports children and adults with sight loss to live full and independent lives.

Tel: 028 9032 9373

Email: rnibni@rnib.org.uk

Web: www.rnib.org.uk

Action on Hearing Loss- changing the world for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Tel: 028 9023 9619

Textphone: 028 9024 9462

Email: information.nireland@hearingloss.org.uk

“I decided that I wanted to volunteer because it was giving my free time and using it for something that would benefit members of my local community. It gives me a sense of accomplishment to know that I can help others”. - Dominic



This document is also available in other formats on request.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the disabled people who contributed to the production of this publication.

Leonard Cheshire is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England No: 552647, and a registered charity No: 218186 (England & Wales) and No: SC005117 (Scotland) VAT No: 899 322375. Registered office: 66 South Lambeth Road, London SW8 1RL.

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