

Tapping into [untapped] Resources

Leonard
Cheshire
Disability



**involving
people with
disabilities
as volunteers**

In Northern Ireland, **Leonard Cheshire Disability** campaigns to change attitudes towards disability. We provide a range of support services for people with disabilities, which foster and encourage the ethos of independent living. These services include five supported living services in Belfast, Londonderry, Banbridge and Lurgan and a resource centre in Omagh.

Leonard Cheshire Disability was founded by a volunteer and volunteers are now an established and integral part of our organisation, as well as being crucial to our success. The activities of our volunteers are vital to the quality and diversity of our work. As well as working directly with disabled people, our volunteers are involved in fundraising and campaigning for the organisation. Leonard Cheshire Disability seeks to involve volunteers wherever appropriate and to ensure that volunteers are well supported by the organisation.

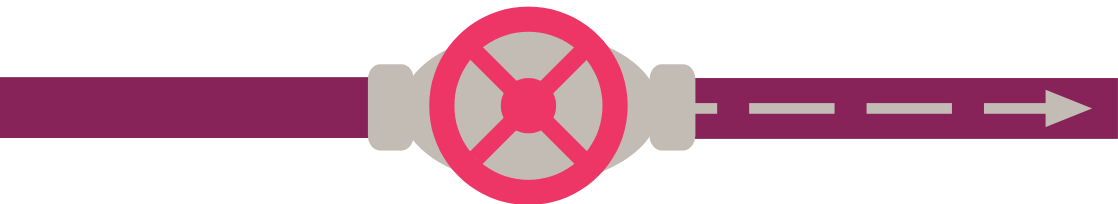
This publication is designed to help organisations to involve people with disabilities as volunteers.

Volunteering is the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of the community, the environment or individuals outside one's immediate family. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain.

In Northern Ireland, 21% of adults living in private households have some degree of disability.¹ By considering ways in which your organisation can be more welcoming to people with disabilities, you are widening the pool of potential volunteers who could be a resource for your organisation.

The evidence is that in Northern Ireland disabled people are under-represented in the volunteering population. *It's All About Time – Volunteering in Northern Ireland 2007*² indicates that only 3% of people volunteering with organisations have a disability.

There is a challenge for volunteer involving organisations in Northern Ireland to be more open to involving people with disabilities.



¹ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, The Prevalence of Disability and Activity Limitations Amongst Adults and Children Living in Private Households in Northern Ireland, July 2007.

² *It's All About Time*, Volunteer Development Agency, 2007

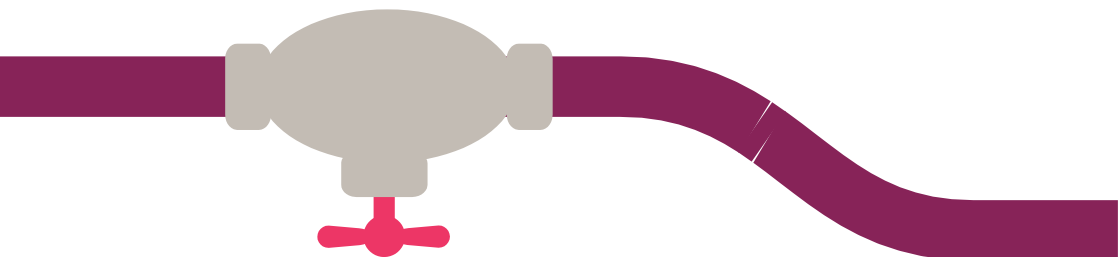
Defining Disability

The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act defines a disabled person as anyone with “a physical or mental impairment which has substantial and long term adverse effect upon his ability to carry out normal day to day activities.”

Disability can take a number of forms

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|---|---|
| Physical impairments | – difficulties in moving parts of the body; |
| Sensory impairments | – hearing or sight; |
| Communication difficulties | – speech impairments; |
| Learning/intellectual difficulties | – e.g. Autism, Downs Syndrome; |
| Mental health issues | – e.g. depression, schizophrenia; |
| Hidden disabilities | – e.g. epilepsy or diabetes. |

Disabled people can experience exclusion from volunteering opportunities because of environmental, attitudinal and organisational barriers rather than as a result of the effects of their disability.





Benefits of being more inclusive

- **New ideas and fresh approaches**

Different people from different backgrounds and with varying experiences have different ways of doing things and seeing the world. Every organisation can benefit from being open to this range of experience in its staff and volunteers. It can improve the services provided when people see things from a different perspective.

- **Keeping your service relevant**

It can help to keep the work of your organisation relevant to the wider community if you involve people from lots of different backgrounds.

- **Presenting a more welcoming face to the public**

It can make your organisation more accessible to all members of the public if they see a wide range of people involved in delivering your service.

- **Wider skill pool**

If you restrict the type of person you recruit as a volunteer you may be reducing the skills available to your organisation. A person with a disability may be a talented web designer or a skilled counsellor and if you exclude them as a volunteer you exclude the skills they bring.



- **Good practice**

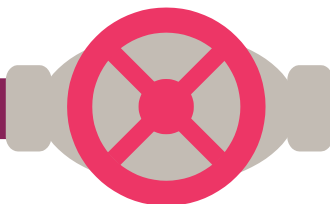
The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) applies to employment and vocational training; goods, facilities and services; education; and premises. In general, the DDA does not apply to recruiting volunteers. However it is best practice to ensure that where legislation like this does exist, volunteering practice reflects the provisions of the legislation.

- **People with disabilities may be more committed volunteers**

Evidence from the commercial world indicates that employees with disabilities can be more loyal and have fewer sick days than non disabled employees. This indicates that there are potential benefits in recruiting volunteers with a disability.

- **People with disabilities may be better problem solvers**

Again evidence from industry shows that employees with disabilities can be creative thinkers. This may be as a consequence of trying to manage their disability in a society that is not always ready to include them. This points to evidence of potential benefits of recruiting volunteers with disabilities.





Where to start

👉 **Policy and value base** – As with all volunteer involvement the place to start is with the organisational value base and policy. You need to consider why you want to involve volunteers and your policy should encapsulate your plans to achieve the best in volunteer involvement for your organisation. It should include a statement about your organisation's commitment to equal opportunities in volunteering and as such should underpin the involvement of volunteers with disabilities. You should also ensure that other organisational policies include volunteers e.g. Health and Safety.

“ 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 A Nicholson]

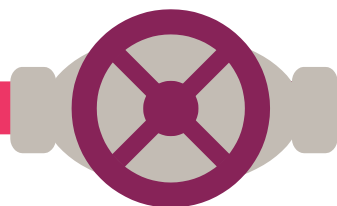
👉 **Physical accessibility** – Good physical accessibility improves the environment for everyone. You should consider issues such as whether building access is level, are the door ways wide enough, are toilets accessible, are signs clear, are there procedures to evacuate in an emergency, is the lighting good and is the decoration plain and not distracting? You can get more information about making your premises more accessible from a variety of local organisations. (See Contacts)

👉 **Training and preparation for existing staff and volunteers** – It is important that all staff and volunteers in an organisation are aware of their responsibility to provide an open and welcoming environment. Organisation wide support for involving people with disabilities as volunteers is important to ensure that the person is involved in social

activities as well as the more formal work related activities. This can be vital to ensuring the success of a placement.

Volunteers with disabilities who were consulted as part of the process of writing this publication identified that where staff supporting them had been on disability awareness training, they found the process of settling into their placement much easier. This training could have other benefits for your organisation as well as in terms of volunteer recruitment and support. Where possible, disability awareness training should be delivered by disabled people themselves and there are a range of local organisations which provide it. (See Contacts)


However if your organisation does not have the resources to pay for this kind of training, it is then crucial that the person supervising the volunteer has a clear responsibility to ensure that the person is made to feel welcome and included and that appropriate support is provided.



☛ **Protection of vulnerable adults** – The Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order 2003 makes provision for people working in a ‘care position’ with ‘vulnerable adults’ (as defined by the legislation) to undergo pre-employment (criminal record) checks and to be referred to the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety in certain circumstances if there is concern about their conduct. This legislation does not apply to people providing support to volunteers who are vulnerable adults, as it only applies to ‘care positions’.

☛ **Risk assessment** – An organisation needs to be proactive in protecting the health and safety of all those who come into contact with it. It is good practice to have a health and safety

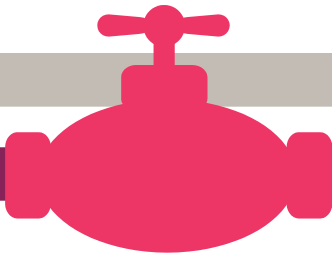
policy and risk management strategy in place. Ideally specific risk assessments should be conducted on each volunteer role. For more information on risk assessment and volunteering please see www.volunteering-ni.org and the publication '*Risk Assessment and Volunteers*'.

 **Volunteer management systems** – It is good practice for organisations planning to involve volunteers, to have in place a range of volunteer management systems. This includes things such as a role description, application procedure, interview, volunteer agreement, induction, trial period, volunteer expenses, support and supervision, exit interviews etc.

Volunteer Now has a number of good practice guides available to download free and it also provides training on volunteer management.


For more information please see www.volunteernow.co.uk

In many ways the volunteer management systems should be the same for any individual whether they have a disability or not. However you may need to make some adjustments to your systems and provide extra support in order to ensure that your placements are fully accessible. The next section will look at the kinds of adjustments you may need to consider.





Before Recruitment



Role descriptions are an essential component of volunteer involvement. The role description sets out what the volunteer is expected to do and provides information about location and time of placement. In order to ensure that volunteer opportunities in your organisation are attractive to people with disabilities you will need to consider the tasks and whether it is possible to make adjustments which make the placement more attractive to volunteers with a disability. It may also be useful to state your commitment to equal opportunities and to making reasonable adjustments. Consider providing role descriptions in different formats such as large print.

Think about where you are placing your publicity materials asking for new volunteers and ensure that you are advertising in a wide range of formats and locations. Include a welcoming statement regarding equal opportunities, welcoming applications from disabled people and your ability to make reasonable adjustments. Ensure that all your documentation is written in plain English and is 12 – 14 pt in a clear text such as Arial.

Initial Contact

The first contact with a volunteer is very important in either making someone feel welcome or in closing the door to potential involvement. Respond to requests for information efficiently and where someone informs you that they have a disability be welcoming and realistic about your ability to involve them. Where your organisation does not offer the kind of volunteering role they are seeking you can refer them to your local Volunteer Centre. (See Contacts) It may also be useful to offer assistance in completing the application forms. In certain cases it may be necessary to seek communication support if the person with a disability indicates this is required. Signing interpreters and speed text operators are the most common and advice on communication support is available from RNID. (See Contacts)

Interview

In order to ensure that a person with a disability can attend for an interview you will need to consider what adjustments may be necessary. Don't make assumptions, check what the person needs and respond to that by offering appropriate support.

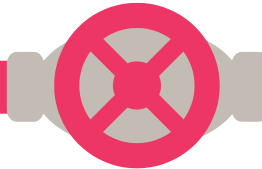
At the interview, focus on the individual's abilities and interests and not their impairment. Use the interview as an opportunity to outline what the organisation has to offer to potential volunteers and what the role entails. Do not be afraid to ask the volunteer about their support needs, as you will not be in a position to meet their needs until you know what they are. Be as flexible as you can in looking for solutions and as realistic as possible in which adaptations can be made. A successful volunteering relationship needs to ensure that both individual and organisational needs are met and this should be addressed at the volunteer interview.

“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 M]

Just a Taste...

If you can offer a taster session following the interview it can be mutually beneficial. This allows the person to try out the placement without obligation to see if it suits them and the same is true for the organisation. Be prepared to look for practical solutions to individual issues as you go along.



Support

Ensure that the volunteer has a named person to go to for support and that person has regular review sessions with volunteers to ensure that any adaptations agreed are proving effective.

When involving volunteers with disabilities, organisations may also have to liaise with a person’s support worker, carer or parent. It is important to always communicate with the volunteer in the first instance and to establish agreed boundaries for the involvement of any other person.

Recognition

All volunteers should be thanked for their contribution and it is good practice for organisations to publicly recognise

their volunteers' contribution. This is also the case for volunteers who have a disability. Your organisation could consider taking part in national campaigns such as Volunteers' Week, which is celebrated from 1- 7 June each year.

Training and Accreditation

Ensure that volunteers are appropriately trained to carry out their role. If possible training should be accredited. The disabled people consulted in order to develop this publication indicated that training was important as volunteering provided a means to improve their skills and as a route into employment.

Dealing with Difficulties

It is important that you have a system in place to deal with concerns raised by the volunteer, staff member or service user. Having a volunteer agreement in place can also help to prevent difficulties in the first instance as it ensures that volunteers and staff are clear about the boundaries of their role.

Endings

When the time comes to end the volunteering relationship, it is important that you offer an opportunity to obtain feedback from the volunteer about their experience in the placement. This is especially important for a volunteer with a disability who may have had difficulties with the placement that you were unaware of.

Extra Resources for Involving Volunteers with Disabilities

You may need specific equipment or training to involve volunteers with a disability. You can get information about grants available

for this from NICVA at Grant tracker (www.nicva.org). There are a number of organisations that can provide advice and assistance regarding specific equipment and adaptations. (See Contacts)

Volunteering and Social Security Benefits

There should be no impact on someone's benefits when they are undertaking genuine voluntary work. It is good practice for people to tell staff in the Social Security Agency that they intend to volunteer in advance of starting and you may need to provide a standard letter for volunteers to assist them in doing this. The standard letter should make clear that they are volunteering for a not for profit organisation and only receiving actual out of pocket expenses. The Social Security Agency has a leaflet outlining the benefits of volunteering while on benefits, you can download it at:

www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/ssa/ssani-publications/ssa_leaflets_list.htm

Organisations should only refund actual out of pocket expenses. If the organisation pays more than the expenses the volunteer has actually incurred, this may affect their social security benefit.

You can get more information from Volunteer Now about volunteering and expenses at www.volunteernow.co.uk



Top Tips from Practitioners

In preparing to write this publication we spoke to a number of organisations that involve volunteers with disabilities. Aside from the value they placed on their disabled volunteers, they had some common suggestions for how to make it work well. These are:

- Respecting a person's sense of independence is important – offer help but not overly so and respect the person's boundaries;
- Be flexible, willing to adapt and be creative;
- Establish honest, clear communication;
- Ensure that the organisation meets its own objectives in the volunteering relationship;
- Have a good volunteer agreement.



Useful Contacts

Volunteer Now- promote, enhance and support volunteering across Northern Ireland

Tel: 02890 232 020

Email: info@volunteernow.co.uk

Web: www.volunteernow.co.uk

Leonard Cheshire Disability Northern Ireland -

campaign for change and provide innovative services that give disabled people the opportunity to live life their way.

Tel: 028 9024 6247

Email: northernireland@lcdisability.org

Web: www.lcdisability.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

Web: www.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

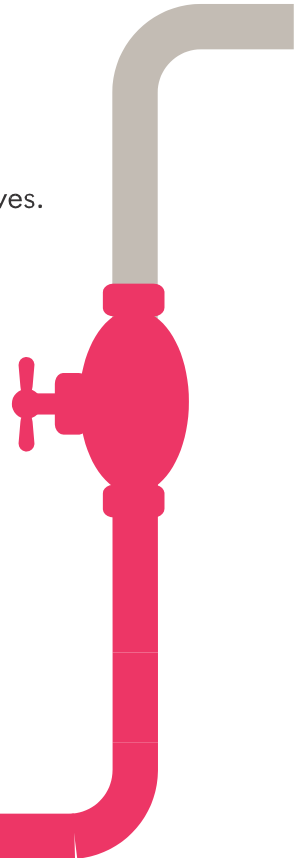
Action on Hearing Loss- changing the world for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss

Tel: 028 9023 9619

Textphone: 028 9024 9462

Email: information.nireland@hearingloss.org.uk

Web: www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the disabled people and representatives of volunteer involving organisations who contributed to the production of this publication. This document is also available in other formats on request.

The logo for Leonard Cheshire Disability, featuring the text "Leonard Cheshire Disability" in white on a red rectangular background.

Leonard
Cheshire
Disability

Leonard Cheshire Disability is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England No: 552847, and a registered charity No: 218186 (England & Wales) and No: SC005117 (Scotland) VAT no: 899 3223 75. Registered office: 66 South Lambeth Road, London SW8 1RL.

The logo for Volunteer Now, featuring the text "VOLUNTEER NOW" in purple and green, with "connect · build · change" in green below it.

VOLUNTEER **NOW**
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...in a world of
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**energy efficiency is
high priority;** to
squander vital assets
is both wasteful
and foolish.

So why ignore
untapped resources
on your doorstep?



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