

case study: The National Trust

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Here, we look at how two organisations have tried to make their volunteering opportunities more accessible.

Interview with Georgiana Hockin, Youth Volunteering Development Officer, The National Trust.

How much of a priority is accessible volunteering?

Accessibility has always been part of the considerations for making sure that volunteers can work with the Trust in a way that is rewarding both for the volunteer and the organisation. Our aspiration is 'for ever, for everyone' so being accessible is part of our core purpose.



Who is responsible for taking accessible volunteering forward?

The Trust has had a member of staff in place for many years who is responsible for taking a lead on accessibility issues.

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This post is supported by central, regional and property-based staff and volunteers, our Senior Management Team (where it is championed by our Director of Customer Services) and our Council and Trustees.

What has been achieved so far to improve accessibility?

So far, the Trust has introduced:

- An Equality and Diversity Policy
- A comprehensive training programme for all staff and volunteers
- Accountability on regional staff for leading on issues of access, working with the Head of Access for All
- Accessibility audits of historic houses, offices and an assessment process for countryside sites.

Currently 11% of our volunteers identify themselves as having a disability.

Have you encountered any difficulties? How did you overcome them?

The development and implementation of a training programme to increase staff and volunteer disability awareness and confidence in working with disabled people was a challenge, considering that the National Trust has around 43,000 volunteers and 5,000 staff.

The training, which was developed with input from staff and volunteers, was delivered to groups of people in each region who then delivered the programme to their colleagues and volunteers. This made the training sustainable and built up local knowledge and contacts in all our 11 regions.

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A booklet was developed, along with video and internet based resources. This training is now included as part of our induction for new staff and volunteers. This makes sure accessibility is viewed as integral to the work we do.

How worthwhile do you feel that the work has been?

Testimonies we receive from volunteers suggest very worthwhile! Working with partners from disability and volunteering organisations for the disability month of the 2005 Year of the Volunteer resulted in more involvement of disabled people. It is very important to the Trust to be seen as being an organisation that welcomes anyone who wants to volunteer and provides a huge variety of roles.

What work still needs to be done?

We need to continue to work with external partners to develop our volunteering approaches appropriately. Providing more information for volunteer managers about sources of advice about accessibility and working with disabled people is a key aim to move forward. This is coupled with making sure we describe our volunteer opportunities accurately so that people can make their own decisions as to whether they feel an opportunity is appropriate for them. A programme of further disability training covering specific impairments is also being developed. This will make our properties even more welcoming for disabled volunteers and continue to increase the diversity of our volunteers.

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Interview with Carol Watson,
The Maze Project.

What is The Maze project?

The Maze Project is a mentoring service specifically designed to recruit, train and match volunteer mentors to disabled mentees aged 14 and over. Volunteers support mentees to achieve goals which can range from learning to swim, to acquiring social and practical skills or learning to be more independent.

What type of training do you offer volunteers?

Training is on-going for all volunteers and we provide a structured training programme for new volunteers which includes Disability Equality Training and the option to take National Vocational Qualifications.



Volunteers at The Maze Project

We also invite other organisations in to give presentations to the volunteers to widen their knowledge of local and national facilities and services available. Many volunteers use the training and qualifications provided to further their career development.

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How diverse is your volunteer group?

Our volunteers come from a range of backgrounds. They can be disabled or non-disabled and have different reasons for wanting to volunteer. Some want to participate in our training packages to enhance their education or employment prospects, others find they have the time to help other people at this time in their lives.

We find that disabled volunteers have a lot to teach non-disabled volunteers, and vice-versa. This is also true of volunteers from different cultures and community backgrounds.

How have you tried to make your opportunities accessible?

We have a fully accessible office and ensure that all our staff and volunteers are disability equality trained.

We advertise our opportunities through a diverse range of organisations, including local employers, Social Services, Day Centres and organisations involved with Black and Minority Ethnic groups. We also hold Development days to introduce people to our work. All adverts state that applications from disabled volunteers are welcomed.

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What reasonable adjustments have you had to make?

We have a volunteer working with us who is registered blind.

To accommodate this volunteer, all printed material was made available in 16 point text, and information was available in Braille. The volunteer is now able to offer advice, support and information to both staff and volunteers, thus raising awareness of the issues and barriers that face others with sight impairments, and how those barriers can be overcome.

The necessary adjustments were funded by the project itself.

Information and letters are translated into Braille at a cost of £1.70 per sheet, and a Dictaphone was purchased

costing £40 so that the volunteer can record information at the mentoring meetings.

What makes a good volunteer?

We welcome anyone who feels they can benefit from volunteering at the project. The benefit to the project is always positive when enthusiastic, supportive people are involved.