



Volunteer Charter

One year on

This pack has been developed to celebrate the charters' success, and to support shared learning. It includes case studies from three organisations who have pledged to the charter.

About the Charter

The [Disability Action Alliance Volunteering project group](#) developed the [Volunteer Charter](#) in December 2014. It sets out core principles that we believe organisations should adopt when recruiting and working with volunteers that are disabled people. The charter is now a year old and over 100 organisations have pledged to it!

Organisations are invited to pledge support for the charter and take the necessary steps to ensure that its principles are applied in practice. Organisations that do not directly work with volunteers, but want to promote the principles of the charter, are also welcome to pledge.

We intend to support this work by encouraging shared learning in a number of ways, including the publication of the case studies below. In these case studies three organisations that have adopted the Charter discuss what they pledged, what they have achieved so far and what have been the challenges. They also offer advice to other organisations that want to work with disabled volunteers.

An Introduction from Jemma Mindham (Volunteering Project Chair)

Having a disability should not prevent anyone from volunteering. [Volunteering Matters](#) has for over 25 years promoted the rights of disabled people to be active citizens in their communities, and this year was awarded Charity of the Year at the [European Diversity Awards](#). We know that one of the most powerful ways to contribute, participate, and make a difference is through volunteering and social action.

We are proud to Chair this group of like-minded organisations who have developed the Volunteer Charter. Working together nationally, and with organisations locally, we are promoting the abilities of all community members and will continue to do so in order to make volunteering accessible for all.

In the next section of this pack you can find case studies from three organisations who pledged to the charter, sharing their experiences.

Case study 1 – [Cambridgeshire Alliance for Independent Living](#) (Pages 3-5)

Case study 2 – [Mencap](#) (Pages 6-8)

Case study 3 – [Volunteering Matters](#) (Pages 9-10)

We hope you find this pack useful.

Volunteer Charter Case Studies

Case Study 1 - Cambridgeshire Alliance for Independent Living

About Us

We are a pan-disability organisation run by people with disabilities for people with disabilities, their families and their carers. We work to empower people to raise their voice and improve the services that they receive.

What We Pledged

- Provide opportunities for disabled people to volunteer.
- All our volunteering opportunities are open to all; promoted through local volunteer centres, Do it website, and with specialist supported volunteering projects.
- Training is provided in a flexible way to ensure that everyone can participate; training includes theory, presentations, discussions and skills practice so that information can be absorbed and learnt in different ways.
- Promote the value of volunteering to disabled people as a positive experience.
- Regularly attend events to talk with people about volunteering.
- Set out and agree a structure for each volunteering opportunity.
- A role description is established for each role.
- Each volunteer is able to talk about the role they would like to do, identify support that they will need to achieve the role.
- Provide a named point of contact.
- Each project has a lead and volunteers work with the lead and meet with the lead on a regular basis.
- Provide appropriate support, make reasonable adjustments and reimburse reasonable costs.
- Each volunteer is offered regular group meetings to discuss the project they volunteer on.
- Each volunteer is offered regular one to one meetings to discuss their own volunteering and support and development needs.
- Each volunteer is encouraged to identify their support needs and what assistance they will need to volunteer.
- Volunteers are reimbursed travel (it is acknowledged that different forms of travel may be needed rather than the most economical e.g. taxi as it is quicker than a bus), refreshments are provided as appropriate during volunteering activities and training.
- Undertake regular reviews to support personal development.
- Throughout their volunteering volunteers are offered support meetings, receive coaching during activities, asked about training needs or information events to help them develop skills/knowledge to further their volunteering.
- Provide a reference wherever appropriate.
- We are happy to provide a reference after 6 months of active volunteering, detailing when volunteering started and training attended.

Pledges achieved and how

All the pledges have been achieved. The highlights are:

- 74% of the volunteers we recruited for our Voice Network Project either have a disability, lifelong condition, are an older person or are a carer of someone with a disability.



- 100% of our Independent Representatives on our Partnership Boards project, (www.cambridgeshirealliance.org.uk) have a disability, lifelong condition, are an older person or are a carer of someone with a disability.
- Our volunteers have a broad range of disabilities, visible and unseen.



- Training for the Voice Network Project was delivered 6 times during the year, each time taking in to account the specific needs of the participants. These needs were identified by asking people about their needs early on in the volunteer recruitment process.

- Training for the Independent Representatives was carried out by first asking the members what training and support they would like, this led to an interactive workshop where members were able to explore and develop their skills further. As part of the workshop members were asked what further training or support they would like, either as a group activity or an individual basis to ensure that they were able to give their best to the project.
- Volunteers are asked what support they would need from us to help them in their volunteering. As part of this we have provided:
 - Meetings and events in accessible venues (with appropriate parking nearby).
 - Refreshments that meet their individual dietary requirements.
 - Transport to and from events (either by taxi or through the reimbursement of mileage).
 - Documents in different formats (font, text size).
 - Documents in different formats (language, Easy Read).
 - Speech To Text Reporting.
 - British Sign Language interpreters.
 - Water bowls for assistance dogs.

What were the challenges and how did we overcome them?

A key challenge has been financial resources needed in providing appropriate support to volunteers. As part of our proposed budgets for projects we ensure that we provide evidence of accessibility and support needs to potential funders.

Where we identify that further resources are needed to ensure that peoples volunteering can be appropriately supported we:

- discuss with the volunteer about how we can meet their needs.
- identify other ways in which the support could be provided.
- review budget headings to identify savings that could be re-allocated and discuss these with the funder.
- discuss further with the funder.

Our advice for other organisations

Identifying support needs:

Communication is the key; being clear with people that they have a right to support to help them in their volunteering from the beginning of the recruitment process.

This can be done quite simply with appropriate pictures and a paragraph about the types of support available on request.

Funding:

Budget for the support that people might need.

Case Study 2 - Mencap

About Us

Mencap is the UK's leading learning disability organisation. Everything we do is about valuing and respecting people with a learning disability, and their families.

What We Pledged

- Update the 'Volunteering' section of our website to make specific reference to our commitment to volunteers with a disability and include Volunteering Charter.
- Learn from other organisations' best practice for involving volunteers with different disabilities and sensory impairments.
- Learn from other organisations' best practice for involving volunteers with different disabilities and sensory impairments.
- Prepare young people with a learning disability to volunteer in other organisations by supporting them through the Young Ambassador programme, our 6 month supported volunteering project for 16-25 year olds with a learning disability.



- Produce and share our own resources and case studies with other organisations on how best to involve volunteers with a learning disability specifically.
- Actively design volunteering roles for those with a learning disability which make the best use of their skills and expertise.
- Pilot a series of connections with local organisations to ensure successful transitions to supported volunteering opportunities for a small number of graduate Young Ambassadors in autumn 2015.

Pledges achieved and how

- We have recently signed off content to be used on our new Mencap website, due to be launched next year. This will lay out our commitment to supporting disabled volunteers to make a contribution with Mencap.
- Members of our team have been attending conferences and groups of professionals working in volunteer management to share our practices and learn from others. Expertise is then shared among the team. For example, our Head of Department ran a workshop on Accessible Volunteering at Association of Volunteer Managers Conference October 2015, with over 60 attendees from across the sector.
- The Young Ambassadors project continues to work with young learning disabled volunteers in London, Leeds and Manchester to develop the next generation of skilled-up volunteers who can spread the message about equality for people with a learning disability and the value of volunteering.



- Our Volunteering team have produced several documents such as Easy Read role profiles and Guidance for Managers supporting volunteers with a learning disability. These are being distributed around Mencap in order to build confidence in staff around giving appropriate support for disabled volunteers.
- Mencap's Volunteer Coordinators continue to work with teams to devise meaningful roles for people to volunteer in, using their experience of having a learning disability to change people's attitudes. For example, our Communities Team have been recruiting volunteers with a learning disability to participate in co-delivering training sessions raising awareness about learning disability. This builds the volunteer's confidence and public speaking skills, while channelling their past experience into useful training for others.
- Our current Young Ambassadors (graduating October 2015) are being supported by Mencap's Employment team on a 1-to-1 basis to secure volunteering (and paid work in some instances) with external organisations. This will lead to a really positive transition for volunteers supported by Mencap, as well as encouraging other organisations to be ready and capable of taking on disabled volunteers themselves.



What were the challenges and how did we overcome them

- **Organisational uncertainty about managing risks involved.**
Overcome by protocols being reviewed and fed down from the top, so individuals feel confident with organisational risk assessment procedures for volunteers
- **Tendency to engage enthusiastic volunteers in numerous roles**
Overcome by ensuring that enthusiastic volunteers are assisted in managing their time and feeling confident picking and choosing how they volunteer.
- **Difficulty ensuring support for volunteers whose engagement is harder to facilitate**
We are working on mechanisms for making sure keen volunteers with transport difficulties or other needs are supported to volunteer where possible.
- **Too much paperwork**
Overcome by simplifying language used and only including essential information in paperwork

Our advice for other organisations

Always focus on what the volunteer is best at and enjoys doing. Match this with a role you really need. Make all reasonable adjustments so it's easy for the volunteer to give their time. That way, volunteering will always be a good experience for your organisation and for them.

Support we require to achieve/sustain pledges

We need to learn more from organisations supporting other people with different needs about simple and effective ways to make our volunteering roles accessible to everyone.

We need a way of hearing from other organisations about volunteering roles which are appropriate for people with disabilities, so we can sign post people outside of Mencap.

Case Study 3 - Volunteering Matters

About Us

Volunteering Matters (formerly CSV) is a national charity that for over 50 years has been leading social action and volunteering programmes to help build stronger and more inclusive communities all over the UK. Working at a grass roots level we work with disadvantaged people in some of the most deprived communities to enable them to have a positive stake in society.

This year (2015), we won Charity of The Year at the European Diversity Awards, recognising the wide breadth and inclusivity of our work. Providing support and training to volunteers all over the UK we are able to deliver a local community focused approach to addressing health and social issues, whilst maintaining a high standard of impact.

Our volunteer led projects and services cover four main areas: young people, older people, disabled people and families. We hold great expertise and knowledge in recruiting, training and supporting volunteers. Our work enables people to become more active, build resilience, self-respect, confidence and skills, and access training and employment. Children at risk of abuse or neglect; isolated older people; and teenagers looking to get on to the jobs ladder. At the core of what we do is the belief that everyone has something to offer no matter who they are or where they come from.

We are a Department of Health Voluntary Sector Strategic Partner in their Health and Care Strategic Partnership Programme, lead the Network of National Volunteer Involving Agencies, are an active Think Local Act Personal partner, and host and support the Secretariat for the Volunteer Europe network.

What We Pledged

We pledge to continue to prioritise the development of exciting opportunities for people with disabilities, particularly our very own service-users, young and old.

Pledges achieved and how

We are confident that we have achieved, and continue to support, our pledge, above through:

- Support and dissemination of the Charter – we have given several presentations to diverse groups, organisations, and events highlighting the Charter and encouraging sign-up. We have encouraged agencies in Newcastle to sign up via the Volunteer Centre there (which we are responsible for) and offer support.
- On going support and advice for pledgees – we have been in discussion with pledgees who require more advice on how they can achieve inclusivity within their organisation.
- Development of inclusive volunteering roles – we have developed a new volunteering programme – Futures – aimed at young people with additional support needs in Transition from education. We have launched this in Norfolk (in

September) and have worked with NDTI, In Control, and Step up to Serve to look at how volunteering can be opened up to young disabled people, giving presentations to diverse groups of providers, parents/carers, young people and commissioners in London, North East and Midlands.

- We have partnered with SPICE to develop a model of supporting and enabling disabled people to engage in volunteering with the added motivation of Time Credits which further enhance their social inclusion, and will be hosting a round table to launch this model in December.
- We have supported inclusive volunteering roles within our own offices and programmes (therefore not exclusive to the Supported Volunteering programmes we co-ordinate).

What were the challenges and how did we overcome them

Major challenges to developing inclusive volunteering roles with other agencies:

- Lack of understanding of diversity of disability – to overcome this, basic support and education is important to tackle misinterpretation of support needs associated with various disabilities.
- Funding – where a more intensive support model is required, funding to support the infrastructure of this is increasingly difficult to secure. I am not sure we have overcome this yet, but working in partnership with other organisations wishing to achieve the same goals enables a much more robust approach to be formed and a more inclusive outlook. Use the resources which are already there!
- Ensuring that the opportunity is open to all i.e. individuals receiving social care packages should also be offered the opportunity to engage in volunteering. This is a work in progress! However, personalised approaches and personal budgets should be enabling this to happen.

Our advice for other organisations

Be persistent, work together, and look at your own procedures first so you have a good understanding of how to make it work and can therefore be an expert by experience.

This pack has been developed by the [Disability Action Alliance](#) (DAA) [Volunteering project group](#). Published in December 2015.

The Disability Action Alliance is an alliance of organisations with an interest or specialist knowledge in disability.