

Volunteers: your questions answered - 6

*This series of information sheets has been developed to help you recruit, train and retain volunteers, both disabled and able-bodied, to support sailing programmes which include disabled people. To safeguard yourself and your volunteers, please ensure that you also read the series entitled **Volunteers - essential information**, available from www.rya.org.uk/AboutRYA/RYSailability/Bestpracticemanual.htm*

Overcoming barriers - culture

There may be aspects of your club that make it difficult for people, both able-bodied and disabled, to volunteer. This sheet focuses on removing **cultural** barriers which are preventing people from becoming volunteers.

Image

Think about the image you may be showing to people who do not have the same level of involvement as you. Is your club friendly, supportive and fun? Or does it appear serious, bureaucratic, and only alright if your face fits? Remember that a businesslike approach is important if you want to make sure that volunteers are confident that you can deliver what you promise.

Issue awareness

Does your club appear to the outside world as a place where there might be discrimination with regard to gender, race, disability or age? Take a close look, and recognise any concerns that potential volunteers may have. Then you will be able to educate existing and potential volunteers through publicity, training, the use of mentors or 'buddies' or through reassurance that your club is a comfortable and safe place for all.

What discourages volunteers?

Potential volunteers will probably have concerns and anxieties about working with disabled people. They may feel uncomfortable, apprehensive, embarrassed, inadequate, frightened or just overawed by the prospect. On top of this, without the reassurance mentioned above, there are general issues that stop people from volunteering. These include nervousness about interviews and/or training courses, lack of social skills and confidence, difficulties with writing skills and application forms and lack of awareness of the opportunities available.

What discourages disabled volunteers?

As well as the physical problems they may encounter (see sheet 7), and the general ones (above), many disabled people live isolated lives. They may have become dependent, rather than providers, because of their disabilities, or they may fear losing benefit payments if they appear to be fit for work.

Overleaf are lists of suggestions to help you encourage volunteers by addressing the issues highlighted here.

Encouraging volunteers

- Provide high quality information to potential volunteers about what they can expect.
- Invite people to spend time at your club before making a commitment.
- Make sure that volunteers only have to work a few hours each week, and organise a communication system for last-minute cover.
- Reassess the way you conduct interviews.
- Recognise that everyone is different. Think of ways to get around problem areas, and discuss them with your potential volunteer.
- Involve volunteers in the culture of the club – clothing, uniforms, language, behaviour, communication methods and routes, equipment, aims, norms and the way in which success or failure is measured.
- Discuss the roles that a volunteer cannot, or does not wish to undertake.
- Recruit enough volunteers to cover all eventualities.
- Make sure that people have the appropriate resources for the jobs you are asking them to do.
- Consider giving on-the-job training.
- Include clear expectations in your job specifications and guidelines. Explain the levels of commitment, regularity and punctuality you expect.
- Arrange for existing members and volunteers to receive equity training and disability awareness training.

Encouraging disabled volunteers

- Ensure that your advertising makes it clear that disabled people are as welcome as anybody else to become volunteers.
- Offer reassurance and training.
- In every way you can, make volunteering attractive!
- Recognise the specific concerns that disabled volunteers have, and monitor their progress.
- Offer mentors who can give support.
- Involve any existing disabled volunteers in the analysis, identification and removal of barriers