

INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS IN OUR COMMUNITY

People with additional support needs face more barriers accessing opportunities within our community such as volunteering roles or community decision making. What can we, as a community, do to help with that?

Over 2023/24 we carried out some research and spoke to several members of our community who were involved in the voluntary sector. This involved volunteers, both with additional support needs and those without, as well as volunteer coordinators and managers of a handful of local organisations. This gave us an insight into some barriers that might be faced by those with disabilities as well as the ability to explore some potential solutions.

UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS



TRAINING & RESOURCES

Many organisations offering volunteer opportunities are small and lack the capacity to train staff or volunteers to manage individuals with disabilities or additional support needs, leading to hesitancy in assigning these responsibilities without proper training. While there is a willingness to include volunteers with additional needs, the lack of dedicated support makes it challenging to provide these opportunities without straining already limited resources.

TRANSPORT

The lack of public transport in rural areas creates significant isolation for those without private transport, with community car schemes helping to alleviate this issue, though they struggle to meet demand due to their reliance on volunteers. Even when available, individuals may lack the confidence to arrange transport through these schemes, feeling uncertain or that others' needs might be greater, highlighting the need for additional support in utilising such resources.



PHYSICAL ACCESS

Modern buildings generally have good disabled access, but older buildings or outdoor volunteer opportunities may present more challenges. While organisations are willing to make accommodations for volunteers with physical disabilities, such adaptations can be resource-intensive and are often reactive, potentially discouraging individuals whose needs aren't initially met.

SHIELDING AND ACCESS TO SOCIAL CIRCLES

The well-intentioned protection of individuals with additional support needs can inadvertently limit their independence and engagement in the community, making it difficult for them to explore opportunities and develop confidence. This protective approach, compounded by challenges in social integration and data protection limitations, can hinder these individuals from getting involved in volunteer roles, ultimately preventing their voices from being heard and reducing their opportunities for personal growth.



POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION AND INCLUSIVITY

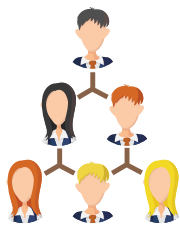
Local organisations are eager to accept volunteers from diverse backgrounds, but limited time and resources lead them to prioritise individuals with specific skills that match their needs. While there's no evidence of discrimination against those with additional support needs, these individuals may be less likely to be approached due to a focus on selecting volunteers who are seen as immediately useful.

FUNDING

Funding can be both a barrier and a solution, as funded programs often have limited timeframes and minimum participation requirements, which can disadvantage small rural communities. If participant numbers drop below the required threshold, programs risk losing funding, as illustrated by an example where a successful program ended due to reduced attendance.



EXPLORING SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS



STRUCTURE & RESPONSIBILITY

A thorough structure, including task matching and clear communication, is essential for reducing support needs and fostering respect for volunteer roles, which many volunteers view as their job. Consistent expectations, regular hours, and reliable organisational support can help volunteers transition to paid roles and avoid disheartening experiences like being unattended after showing up for a scheduled shift.

FLEXIBLE ROLES

Creating adaptable volunteer roles is essential for attracting a diverse group of volunteers and maximising their involvement. Many organisations have found success by holding introductory meetings to align roles with individual interests, which may require extra time initially but could ultimately balance out over time.



SUPPORT & AWARENESS

Having nearby support can provide comfort and independence to volunteers, with family members offering familiarity and long-term commitment, while organisations might provide more independence but face potential funding and staff continuity issues. Emotional support, often overlooked, is crucial for individuals with invisible disabilities, who need understanding and flexibility in their roles to reduce guilt and improve inclusion, ultimately increasing awareness and reducing stigma in the community.



FURTHER INFORMATION

You can read the full report, including the supporting background research as well as key actions that GALE hope to make here:

galeactionforum.co.uk/additional-support-needs-research



Scan for the full report