**31st October 2023 Volunteer Coordinators’ Forum**

**Making Volunteering Accessible, Heather from Mencap at Housing 21**

* Stats on volunteering
  + Despite efforts in diversity, equity and inclusion in recent years, satisfaction is also lower among disabled versus non-disabled volunteers (88 per cent against 94 per cent). (NCVO, 2022)
  + Fewer volunteers say that their volunteering group is diverse
    - 73% of volunteers said there were people from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures in their group in 2019 vs. 66% in 2022 (NCVO, 2022)
* Benefits to volunteer, as well as organization – bring a different view and skill set - diversity
* What accessibility means
  + Making reasonable adjustments
  + Accessibility is human right
  + Accessibility is the process of making things more reachable/usable for as many people as possible.
    - In terms of disability, accessibility should mean that someone can do what they want to do with a similar amount of time/effort and impact on them as a person without a disability.
* Who might be affected?
  + Volunteers with disabilities
    - physical disability
    - learning disability
    - Mobility issues
    - Learning difficulties (dyspraxia/dyslexia etc)
    - Sight or hearing impairment
    - Dementia
    - Mention equalities act
  + Other conditions
    - Mental health, anxiety etc
  + People with lower income
  + People for whom English isn’t a first language
  + People without access to technology
  + People who aren’t free at certain times due to other commitments
    - People with children in school, young mums etc
* Potential barriers to volunteering
  + Exercise – ask them to come up with barriers
  + Potential answers:
    - Expenses – can you offer expenses quickly?
      * “Among non-volunteers, 14 per cent (up from 5 per cent in 2019) cite being worried about ending up out of pocket, a figure that is higher among 18-24 year olds at 18 percent (NCVO)
      * Only 55% of volunteers say their group would reimburse expenses
    - Language – are you using accessible language?
    - Location/building accessibility
      * “noticeable shift since 2019 towards remote volunteering”, with 31 per cent doing some of their work remotely and 18 per cent of recent volunteers volunteering exclusively this way.
    - Process, is your volunteer process accessible?
* Volunteer process (ask them ways in which they can be accessible at each stage as activity)
  + Advert
    - Include all information about role
      * Is the volunteer location wheelchair accessible?
      * Can you offer expenses?
      * Is the timing flexible?
      * Make it clear what the role is and the dates/times if possible
      * If you need a certain level of experience, make that clear (but always better to be open and support people to grow in the role)
  + Application
    - Have options for application
      * Video application
      * Easy read application
      * If available, support them to fill out application in person or over the phone on their behalf
      * Have questions asking if they have any support needs and how we can support them
  + Interview
    - Send out interview questions beforehand
    - Give option of in person, online or over phone
  + Checks
    - References – offer support before you ask about where you could find them
    - Accept character references
    - In certain situations, be flexible (accept 1 reference and set a try It out period which is supervised with targets for example)
    - DBS – make sure you are only requesting if required – barrier to many
    - Volunteer rainbow
  + Induction
    - Have consistent induction, but offer flexibility in delivery
    - Allow extra time, make reasonable adjustments
  + Ongoing Support
    - To volunteers
      * Be flexible around support levels
      * Offer buddies or shadowing is possible/required
      * Ask individuals what works best for them
        + Feedback, support, timings
      * Make sure you show them a good first day and have made sure any of their support needs are addressed
        + If they require wheelchair access, tell them where they can park, tell them the bus stop to get off at, make sure they can leave their stuff somewhere they can access etc
        + If they have mobility issues, do you have a mug instead of cup/saucer/paper cup they could use?
    - To volunteer managers
      * Offer regular support to volunteer managers, on how best to welcome and support volunteers
  + At every stage in the process – using clear, accessible language and only asking for what is absolutely necessary
* Ways you can support people to volunteer
  + Expenses
  + Flexibility
    - Things that would encourage non-volunteers to start: (NCVO 2022)
    - Flexibility on the time committed (30%)
    - flexibility about the way people give their unpaid time (26%)
  + Online or phone or in person flexibility during interview/induction process
  + Try it out sessions
  + Home based volunteering
  + Accessible training/application methods
  + Person centered/individual support approaches
  + REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS!
    - Make changes in advance, not reactively
* What we do at Mencap
  + Campaign for clear communications
  + Easy read (website, policy, documents)
  + Reasonable adjustments
  + Individualised/person centered support
  + Flexibility
  + Trying to make more remote roles
  + Trying to make our expenses more accessible
  + Involving people with a learning disability from the beginning of any development work, so they can help us ensure it is accessible
  + Make sure we have roles that can be done by a person with a learning disability, as we know what amazing volunteers they are!
* Time Well Spent Survey: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/time-well-spent-2023/>

Heather also shared two documents which are in the Toolkit:

Volunteer Recruitment Checks

Easy Read Volunteer Application Form