

Volunteering in sport for disabled people

It is our aim to build up a useful and informative resource section to support all those involved in or wishing to volunteer in sport for disabled people.

EFDS have run programmes specifically on volunteering, so are happy to discuss your requirements or ideas to improve inclusive opportunities. For example- have a look at the Advocacy and Activity Buddy Scheme in [Past Programmes](#).

If you have any resources you feel would be a useful addition to these pages or would like to see information on a certain topic please [contact us](#)

Volunteer Support for Disabled People Participating in Sport

Volunteering within sport for disabled people on the face of it is no different to any other volunteering. The benefits may arguably be more rewarding and the delivery more challenging but ultimately it achieves the same purpose; to support participation and the enjoyment of sport.

Both disabled and non-disabled volunteers should be welcomed into any volunteering programme. The more inclusive an environment, the more open to new members and participants a sports or physical activity club is- the more members will join and get involved!

It is at the disabled person's discretion to identify themselves as 'disabled', and it should never be assumed that if a person is disabled they will require assistance.

Preferred Terminology

Disabled people realise that there needs to be terminology relating to them in certain situations. It is not about 'being politically correct' but more about respecting disabled people and their wishes. What we say and how we say it can have a profound effect on how people feel about themselves and also how positive a first experience disabled people have when accessing sport or physical activity for the first time.

Here are a few preferred terms to assist you:-

- People who are blind or visually impaired
- People who are deaf or hard of hearing
- People with physical impairments
- People with a learning difficulty or intellectual impairment
- Disabled people (not people with disabilities) and non-disabled people (not able bodied)
- People with mental health issues
- People with speech impairments
- People with sensory impairments or dual sensory impairments (i.e. visual and hard of hearing)

Barriers to Participation

As a volunteer it is helpful to recognise that many barriers exist for disabled people and hinder them in going about their everyday lives. Examples of common barriers faced by disabled people in accessing sport and physical activity are:

- Physical barriers- accessible parking, signage, changing facilities/toilets, doors, no lift of ramp, lighting etc.,
- Transport- how to get to the club? can the person drive?, is there public/community transport? extra cost etc.
- Communication- no text phone or type talk facility, no hearing loop, marketing material not in alternative formats, poor signage, language used by staff/volunteers
- Social and Psychological; first impressions, stereotyping and assumptions, people's lack of understanding, 'health and safety risk', body conscious, nervous and unsure, no one to support and motivate them (volunteers)

When Working with Disabled People, regardless of their impairment:

- Do not underestimate the intelligence or ability of the disabled person
- Do not assume that all disabled people require assistance. Ask if they need a hand, or wait to be asked.
- Always address the disabled person, not the person they are with.
- Be aware of personal needs and preferred ways of communicating and working and respect their requirements
- Try and work around the issue, rather than avoiding it
- When assisting, ask the disabled person how best to do this. For specific information, ask the individual (if this is unsuccessful, ask their permission to ask their personal assistant, parent or carer)
- Demonstrate what you mean if you are not getting the message across successfully verbally
- Don't interrupt, correct, speak for the person or be tempted to finish sentences off for them
- A wheelchair should be viewed as part of the user's body space. Keep an appropriate distance and never use the chair as something to lean on.
- It is perfectly acceptable to offer to help guide the wheelchair user to negotiate obstacles such as doors. But only push someone's chair if they have said that it is OK for you to do so.

Volunteer Boundaries

Whether you are working one-to-one or with a group of disabled people, it is human nature for friendships to develop. To maintain a professional distance it is advisable that the relationship should not develop outside the sports/ physical activity centre or site. To ensure that, as a volunteer, you remain professional yet friendly there are a number of common sense points to be aware of when entering into a volunteering role:

Do:

- Avoid getting into situations that could be misunderstood
- Think before you agree to something

- Remember that the key focus of the relationship is the needs and progress of the other person.
- Recognise your own personal boundaries

Don't:

- Give out your home phone number or address
- Take the other person to your own home
- Become emotionally over-involved
- Get involved in an intimate relationship
- Accept any form of harassment, violence or abuse from the other person
- Buy gifts or give money to the other person
- Lend money/material goods or ever borrow from the other person

More useful information can be obtained from:

[Volunteering England](#)

[NSPCC Child Protection in sport](#)

[V Inspired](#)