

advice for advisors

Often we are asked by various professionals to assist a person, often a client, in finding volunteering opportunities. It can be said that most of these people have an additional support need or previous circumstances which make them 'hard to place' and it is with this thought that we create this guide with a few things to consider when approaching this.

First of all; is volunteering what they need? More often than not in this situation the individual will actually get a much more fulfilling experience from participating in something rather than taking a level of responsibility for its function. Participation can be accessed generally by contacting the organisation and asking if they require a 'helper' the difference here is that there is a lower level of responsibility. Be aware that sometimes the organisation have enough participants and can't always include others.

At this point it is important to note that volunteering is not a replacement for other services which may have been lost due to funding etc. Volunteering is strongly about choice and there are questions and conversations about what level of commitment and focus the individual can offer.

If you have established that volunteering is suitable, then the readiness of the individual has to be established. Is that person ready for the responsibility, dealing with authority, following orders or dealing with the other volunteers / public? Do they have the confidence to travel there and fulfil the role? Will they need support and if so, who will support them? Most organisations cannot support a volunteer who is 'hard to place' and it may be that someone from your organisation needs to support them through the experience.

It is also worth considering how you will 'make the ask'. Sometimes potential volunteers don't want to disclose an offence for example but this will make a massive impact on their volunteering. For several reasons it is advisable that you make an introduction for the person either with them or in advance. It would be positive for all parties that the transaction between the volunteer and co-ordinator is purely a 'normal' one and any other discussion is had separately. Being part of making the ask is also useful as occasionally the potential volunteer cannot fulfil the entire role and it is about inviting the organisation to be flexible and think out of the box to accommodate this volunteer. They may only be able to deliver part of it for whatever reason and with a logical and credible explanation most organisations will endeavour to take people on based on that.

There will also be times when it will be necessary to manage the expectations of the potential volunteer.

For various reasons of ability or situation they will not be able to fill certain roles. They may be on a mission or a path which cannot be met by volunteering and sometimes we will have to think differently about the route and consider the transferable skills gained from an opportunity and to reassure the volunteer that this is constructive and leading somewhere. In the case of those who are trying to perform something which is beyond their ability, honesty is the best policy however if the process we have just discussed has been followed a clear and reasonable expectation from both parties should be achieved.