



NCVO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Good employment practice case study: Recruitment, retention and diversity

Skill is a national charity promoting opportunities for young people and adults with any kind of disability in post-16 education, training, and employment. As part of its mission, Skill has devoted time to promoting the importance and value of disabled people taking on volunteering roles.

A great number of voluntary and community organisations would not survive without volunteers and there is no reason why they should not look to people with disabilities to fulfil some of these volunteering roles. Skill works with employers, organisations, and policy makers to promote good practice and raise awareness about the benefits disabled bring to the workplace.

Skill also seeks to encourage individuals to access volunteering opportunities as a way to develop confidence and self-esteem, to gain workplace experience and to gain the transferable skills associated with the workplace. For some individuals it is hoped that volunteering may lead on to employment, either with the organisation concerned or through having gained these additional skills and experiences. For some, it will help to support the learning that they are undertaking as part of a post-16 course or may open up ideas of what they might like to undertake as employment.

If you would like to find out more about Skill, please visit www.skill.org.uk.

What happened?

As funding has permitted, Skill has undertaken a number of projects to promote the role of disabled volunteers within the workplace and has a commitment to continue to do this.

There have been several initiatives to work with disabled volunteers within Skill's own Edinburgh and London offices between 1999 and 2001. This experience enabled Skill to promote volunteering by disabled people from a base of experience as well as organisational commitment.

Skills own disabled volunteers' experiences show the very positive impact that volunteering in the right environment can have on confidence:

Felix was forced out of employment through his deteriorating sight, volunteering at Skill's office showed him that with some slight adaptations, a hand lens and a large computer screen that he could continue to undertake administrative work. Feeling buoyed up and confident. He went on to further employment.

Andrew retired early from the finance sector due to increasing mobility issues. He used a stick. He came to Skill to undertake some administrative work and help with fund-raising. He needed to use a lift to access the offices, have more room around his desk to enable him to move around and he needed flexibility in his working hours. Not only did he work for Skill, but he helped a second disabled volunteer at Skills offices find employment.

Emma volunteered with Skill after she had been in an accident. She found volunteering helped her to re-develop structure for her life; she developed skills, confidence and enthusiasm. With her newfound energy she applied for and was accepted onto an NVQ Level 3 programme in Computer and Business Studies.

Of the 48 disabled volunteers who worked with Skill, all increased in confidence, and self-esteem as a result of being valued for the positive contributions, which they could make. Two went into Higher Education, one at undergraduate and the other at Masters level. 20% went into employment and 29% into further education or training.

These are positive outcomes. In addition, Skill learnt many useful lessons about good disabled volunteer management, although many of the lessons are the same as those for effective volunteer management for people without disabilities.

Who was involved (e.g. paid staff, volunteers, and trustees)?

Skill staff and volunteers, many of whom were disabled.

What has been the overall impact?

Skill has developed two booklets to promote work for disabled people, *Into Work Experience* and *Into Volunteering* and a comprehensive manual to support disabled volunteers for voluntary organisations, *Access to Volunteering*. These are based on Skill's own experience of working with disabled people in voluntary capacities and on its database of other organisations, which work with disabled people as volunteers.

Skill has developed a clear voice in talking about working with disabled volunteers and is one of only two organisations noted by the Russell Commission (2004-2005) for its recommendations on working with disabled people. The Russell Commission has taken up many of its recommendations. It has led a number of conferences and encouraged other volunteering organisations to attend its conferences about working with disabled people as volunteers.

Skill has been active in promoting the benefits of volunteering by disabled people both for the individuals themselves and for the organisations who employ them at conferences, through its website and publications, and as part of a process of working with policy makers and employers.

Skill draws policy makers' attention to some of the problems for disabled volunteers when they are volunteering. These include, volunteers not being able to access the type of statutory funding which they can when they are in employment or education. This is important as Skill has found that some organisations are concerned that engaging a disabled volunteer will lead to additional costs. Skill finds that it is often only some minor adaptations or some greater flexibility in working hours that is needed. However, where a particular piece of equipment is needed currently Government funding is not available.

Skill tries to debunk organisations' concerns about disabled people as volunteers and tries to get over their concerns that it will be hard or that they do not know how to work with disabled people. Skills can offer advice on how to assess needed and help organisations think through their processes of working with volunteers.

What did you learn?

Skill found that disabled volunteers may need a little extra support so that they knew clearly what was expected of them and what they were to do in the role. Disabled volunteers like any other volunteer need feedback about their work and contribution to the organisation. They need to be extended as their skills develop so that their experience is an on-going one of enrichment.

About HR and your workforce

How many paid employees do you have?

15 full time; 4 part time

How many trustees sit on your board?

10

How many volunteers do you have (non-paid staff, excluding trustees)?

85 part time

Does your organisation have an HR Strategy?

Yes

Does your organisation have a recruitment policy?

Yes

Does your organisation have a diversity policy?

Yes