



State of Gloucestershire

Opportunities and housing for disabled people and people with mental health challenges

Volunteering



Introduction

In 2021, Barnwood's Insights team carried out an Opportunities and Housing Survey. We asked disabled people and people with mental health challenges living in Gloucestershire to tell us about their housing and their experiences of accessing different types of opportunity.

Over 260 people from across the county responded to the survey. Those who took part in the survey told us they had a range of different impairment types. Looking at population data for Gloucestershire suggests that the proportions of respondents with different impairments broadly mirrors the overall county make-up. However, it should be acknowledged that these research findings may not reflect the experiences of all disabled people and people with mental health challenges in the county.

As well as carrying out the survey, we've also looked at the findings of research conducted by a range of other organisations, to contextualise the survey responses.

In this booklet, we share key findings from our survey and our review of research undertaken by others that are related to accessing volunteering opportunities.

This booklet is one in a series exploring the findings of this research by theme (other booklets look at education/training, employment, leisure activities, and housing).

For more information about the methodology of the research please contact **Roz Warden**, Head of Insights, on **01242 539935** or roz.warden@barnwoodtrust.org.

What have we learned?

Disabled people and people with mental health challenges face numerous barriers to accessing volunteering opportunities in Gloucestershire.



1 in 3

people can do the volunteering they want to do



1 in 2

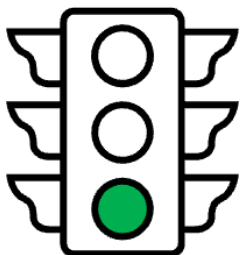
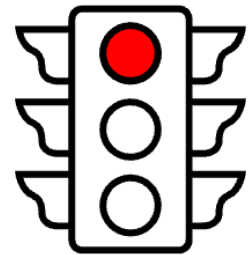
people said that their **health** made volunteering difficult



1 in 2

people said that **flexibility** would make it easier for them to volunteer

Many people said that their health was currently a barrier to volunteering. Difficulties travelling to places, a lack of confidence, and needing other people's help were also mentioned frequently.



A lot of people, however, also said that if organisations made volunteering opportunities more flexible, volunteering opportunities would be easier for them to access. This indicates that if conditions are changed these barriers can begin to be addressed.

From insights to action...

Together, the research findings from the survey and other national data highlight the importance of proactive **engagement** with disabled people to generate solutions, **accessible information** provision, and greater **choice**.

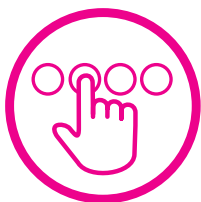
For volunteering, some suggestions for how you might do this are included below. More detailed recommendations can be found at the end of this booklet.



Engage | Engage with current volunteers to understand their experiences. Develop channels to understand barriers for those not represented



Inform | Advertise volunteering opportunities in a range of accessible formats. Where flexible arrangements and adjustments can be made, make this really clear



Choice | Create opportunities that match people's availability and enthusiasm. Consider the frequency with which you need the volunteer, the time of day they are required and the processes used to recruit them

For a conversation about funding or initiatives to support your organisation to take forward actions from this research, please contact the Strategic Development Management Team via development@barnwoodtrust.org or **01242 539935**.

Our survey findings:

Access to volunteering opportunities

In our survey, we asked the respondents:

- If doing volunteering is something that matters to them
- If they can do the volunteering they want to do

- **32%** told us they cannot do the volunteering they want to do
- **44%** told us that doing volunteering matters to them

There were variations in the responses given by people with different impairment types:

- Only **11%** of the respondents who told us they have an autism spectrum condition agreed that they can do the volunteering they want to do

- The comparable figures for the other impairment type groups ranged from **35%** (for people who reported having a neurological condition) to **50%** (for those reporting visual impairments, learning disabilities and hearing impairments)



Other findings

The Office for National Statistics found that, in 2021, the proportions of disabled and non-disabled people who had volunteered at least once in the last 12 months were similar.

This was the case for both formal and informal volunteering¹.

Our survey findings:

Barriers to volunteering opportunities

In our survey, we asked the respondents:

- What, if anything, made it hard for them to do the volunteering they want to do

We listed barriers that people might experience and asked them if they faced any of these or any other barriers.

The three most frequently reported barriers were:

- My health (e.g. my disability means I need a lot of rest) (**46%**)
- It's difficult for me to travel to places (**30%**)
- I don't feel confident enough (**28%**)

Other common barriers included 'I need other people to help me' (**21%**).

Although health was identified as a barrier to taking part in volunteering activities, respondents also reported a range of ways in which opportunities could be more accessible and inclusive.

This reflects the social model of disability which describes how people are not disabled by their impairment or health condition but by barriers in society (for example, inaccessible buildings).

Barriers to volunteering

Health

46%



Travel

30%



Confidence

28%



Other findings:

Barriers to volunteering opportunities

Over a third of the disabled people (**34.6%**) who had not participated in formal volunteering in the year ending March 2021 selected 'I have an illness or disability that prevents me' as a reason why they had not volunteered². This research did not, however, look at whether the disability or illness was a barrier for medical reasons or because of social factors, such as other people's attitudes or inaccessible venues.

Research conducted on behalf of the English Federation of Disability Sport found that the following barriers to volunteering were reported most frequently by disabled people³:

- I am not willing/able to commit to a volunteering role long-term (**59%**)
- I am unaware of opportunities near me that I would be interested in (**48%**)
- Volunteering is not something I have ever considered (**47%**)

25% of the disabled people who responded to their survey said they did not think that organisations would be able to support a volunteer with their needs.

Disabled people were also twice as likely to be concerned that they may be treated differently to other volunteers compared to non-disabled people (**17%** compared to **8%**). This research also found that, compared to non-disabled volunteers (**33%**), a higher proportion of disabled people (**48%**) reported having had negative experiences whilst volunteering⁴.

Research conducted by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations found that disabled volunteers were less likely to be positive about the level of organisation, structure and bureaucracy associated with volunteering opportunities than non-disabled volunteers⁵:

- **38%** of disabled volunteers said things could be much better organised
- **29%** said there's too much bureaucracy
- **16%** said things are too structured/formalised

Our survey findings:

The importance of flexibility

In our survey, we asked the respondents:

- What, if anything, they thought would most help them to take part in volunteering (we use the term 'enablers' below)

We provided a list of possible enablers and asked them to select the three that they would find most helpful.

The option to volunteer flexibly was the enabler selected by the greatest number of respondents (**46%**).

Flexibility was identified as a key enabler to accessing volunteering opportunities by respondents with all impairment types.

Across all impairment types, between **39%** (for respondents reporting a hearing impairment) and **60%** (for respondents reporting a neurological condition) of respondents stated that the option to volunteer flexibly was one of the things that would most help them to take part in volunteering.



Other findings:

The importance of flexibility

Research conducted by others also highlights the importance of flexibility in enabling disabled people to access volunteering opportunities.

The Office for National Statistics found that, in the year ending March 2021, disabled people were more likely to have participated in informal volunteering (**56.6%**) than formal volunteering (**30.4%**)⁶.

In addition, **22.9%** of disabled people who reported that their ability to carry out day-to-day activities was limited “a lot” by their condition had participated in formal volunteering compared to **32.9%** of non-disabled people.

Whereas very similar proportions of disabled people who reported that their ability to carry out day-to-day activities was limited “a little” by their condition (**33.8%**) and non-disabled people (**32.9%**) had participated in formal volunteering⁷.

Our survey findings:

What else would help?

After the option to volunteer flexibly, the enablers to volunteering that were selected by the greatest number of respondents to our survey were:

- Being able to easily find information about what volunteering is available (**34%**)
- Lots of choices of volunteering I could do (**31%**)
- Getting help when doing volunteering activities (e.g. support from a personal assistant) (**21%**)
- Inclusive volunteering practices (e.g. reasonable adjustments being made) (**21%**)

Recommendations

The recommendations which follow offer an approach that organisations and providers can take to establish what changes may be most impactful for the disabled people and people with mental health challenges they seek to work with.

This approach recognises that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to ensuring greater choice and accessibility for disabled people and people with mental health challenges.

If you would like to discuss any of the recommendations related to this research, please contact the Strategic Development Management Team on **01242 539935** or development@barnwoodtrust.org.

1

Proactively and directly engage with disabled people and people with mental health challenges to understand how to improve access to volunteering opportunities. Co-production and co-design can also help ensure that information about these opportunities is fully accessible

Engaging with groups of individuals who experience barriers to accessing meaningful volunteering opportunities and getting the support they need is vital to understanding how to address these issues. Working directly with people through co-production and co-design has the potential to generate solutions which encompass individuals' expertise about what would help.

For example:

Organisations looking to recruit volunteers may look to engage with those who are currently engaging in volunteering activities to learn from their experiences. This includes their views on how inclusive any venues, activities and practices are, and to identify any common challenges. Collaborating with local groups and community organisations may also build understanding in how to recruit a wider pool of volunteers and develop more inclusive practices.



Direct engagement can also help ensure information that is produced about volunteering opportunities is accessible. Incorporating lived experience and new perspectives around what makes communication accessible can help produce information that reaches everyone.

Undertaking regular engagement may be built into regular review processes and organisational policies to become standard practice. In carrying out this engagement, it is also important to consider creating an environment where people feel safe to share both the challenges they face and the support or conditions that could best meet their needs.

For example:

Engagement activities can help identify the information it is important to share about volunteering activities to make them more accessible, such as the facilities and features of the site where volunteering takes place.

It can also be an opportunity to find out about what would make people feel welcome when taking part in a new activity or visiting an unfamiliar space. This can be important to consider in ensuring any messages used in marketing materials convey that everyone is welcome. Feedback may also identify a wide range of sources to use to promote volunteering opportunities.

2

Provide clear and accessible information about volunteering opportunities in a range of formats and via multiple channels, along with the option for in person contact. Accessible information provision should consider all the useful information that might be provided to enable real choice

Clear and accessible information is essential in ensuring people can take part in opportunities that matter to them. This means providing timely information in a range of formats from Easy Read to audio, large print, and braille across a variety of media, print and digital.

For example:

Many volunteering opportunities are not widely advertised and more widespread advertising of opportunities, including at networking events and by sharing information across sectors, might be pursued. Providers may want to consider sharing information about opportunities in a local database (for example Go Volunteer Glos run by Gloucestershire VCS Alliance).



It's important to remember that clear information provision isn't simply about making written communications accessible. Having staff members available to answer questions and plan with someone around individual preferences and access requirements can make a huge difference to a person's experiences and be invaluable.

For example:

The option to meet or talk with a volunteer manager to discuss the arrangements that could best meet an individual's needs and wishes may help create an accessible volunteering opportunity.

Current volunteers can also be invaluable advocates and supporters. Providing mentoring opportunities for new volunteers may be supportive of any new recruits and also provide a new opportunity for existing members. This can help create a welcoming environment for anyone wanting to offer their time.

Engaging with individuals in this way can help create the conditions that make an opportunity accessible for an individual.

3

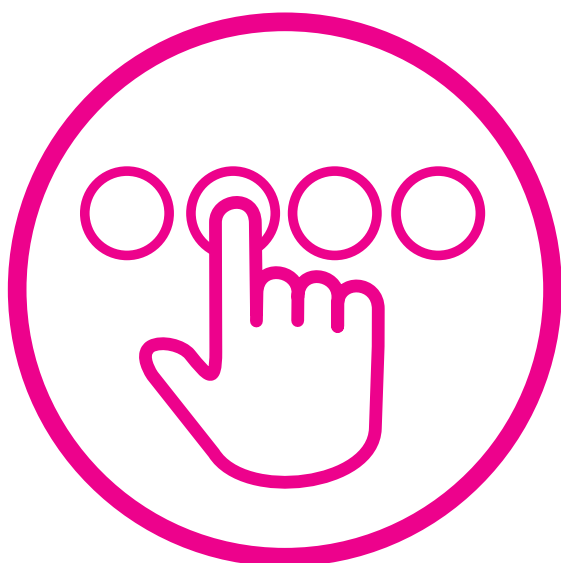
Take proactive steps to ensure real choice is available and accessible to disabled people and people with mental health challenges about volunteering opportunities. Choice is more than just a greater range of options, it's about making sure that what's currently on offer is accessible to everyone

Proactive steps to increase choice and variety through better engagement might include looking at current practices and support and thinking about and discussing factors where choice could currently be hindered.

For example:

Reviewing volunteer roles that are on offer at an organisation may include considering the range of opportunities currently available and exploring whether they are benefitting those giving their time as well as being useful to the organisation.

Organisations may wish to consider what scope there is to broaden the types of roles that are on offer to potentially be more open, flexible, and varied, according to the availability and enthusiasm of potential volunteers. This may include being aware that someone may not be available at a regular time slot or at short notice. Offering flexibility can be of huge benefit to volunteer retention.



Don't dismiss the possibility that current, available options might themselves be limiting choice. Remember that the conditions and context such as the volunteering environment, facilities within a premises, and accessibility of transport and parking are just as important as the variety of roles on offer.

For example:

Looking at how easy it is to reach a volunteering location, the availability of public transport and parking, and the facilities and accessibility features at a volunteering site are all important considerations. Offering opportunities at different locations and times, with the option of remote volunteering, may be supportive of a wider range of individuals taking part.



Sources

¹ Office for National Statistics (2022) Outcomes for Disabled People in the UK: 2021

² Office for National Statistics (2022) Dataset: Disability and Social Participation Table 26 Data available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/datasets/disabilityandsocialparticipation>

³ English Federation of Disability Sport (2017) Encouraging more disabled people to volunteer in sport

⁴ English Federation of Disability Sport (2017) see Source 3

⁵ The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (2019) Time Well Spent: A national survey on the volunteer experience

⁶ Office for National Statistics (2022) see Source 1

⁷ Office for National Statistics (2022) see Source 1

Barnwood Trust would like to thank everyone who took part in this research and partner organisations who supported in developing and distributing the survey.

For more information about this research, including copies in accessible formats please contact Roz Warden on 01242 539935 or roz.warden@barnwoodtrust.org.

To get involved in conversations about taking forward the recommendations of this research please contact the Strategic Development Management Team via development@barnwoodtrust.org or 01242 539935.

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