

Time to get equal in volunteering: **tackling disablism**

Executive summary



YEAR
OF THE
VOLUNTEER
2005

scope

About cerebral palsy.
For disabled people achieving equality.

Executive summary

Scope has been at the forefront of introducing the concept of disablism, which it defines as discriminatory, oppressive or abusive behaviour arising from the belief that disabled people are inferior to others. Scope's aim is to make this prejudice as socially unacceptable as sexism and racism. This report investigates the extent to which disablism exists within the volunteering sector. It builds on previous research carried out by the Institute for Volunteering Research into the link between volunteering and social exclusion, and by Skill: National Bureau for Students With Disabilities into access to volunteering for disabled people. Although our research has also investigated the attitudes of organisations toward their disabled volunteers, it has concentrated primarily on the experiences of disabled people themselves.

Methodology

The research was conducted via two surveys, extended case studies and some interviews:

- A survey form was published in the June 2005 issue of Disability Now, inviting disabled people to tell us their experiences and opinions of volunteering.
- We asked organisations and charities to tell us about their experiences with volunteering. This was conducted via our website, and was a lower-profile survey so as to avoid the risk of duplicating the research already carried out by Skill.
- Many people told us about their volunteering experiences in response to the survey. Some respondents were invited to give more detailed reports of their experiences in volunteering.

Key findings from the research

- Positive experiences were wide-spread, but a sizeable proportion of disabled volunteers were experiencing problems. Some reported extremely negative experiences.
- A disproportionately high number of disabled people volunteer exclusively for disability-related organisations or charities.
- Disabled people who volunteer in other charities and organisations have experienced significantly more problems with accessibility than those who volunteered for disability-related organisations.

- The lack of provision of reasonable adjustments is a problem throughout the voluntary sector.
- Negative attitudes and stereotypical assumptions about disabled people are a problem in areas of the voluntary sector.
- Volunteering has an 'image problem' for many potential disabled volunteers, who feel that volunteering is not for them.
- Organisations are not always aware of the range of skills and experiences that disabled people have to offer.
- There is a need for more government funding. This is needed to implement Disability Equality Training as an essential way of preventing negative attitudes and institutional disablism, and to make it possible to provide the reasonable adjustments that many disabled people require to be able to volunteer. This funding could be provided by extending the government's Access to Work scheme to include volunteers.
- 76% of physically impaired volunteers who have not had their need for reasonable adjustments met feel that an extension of the Access to Work scheme to include volunteers would be invaluable.

Conclusions

Disablism continues to be a major problem in the voluntary sector. Several things are needed to tackle it:

- Disability Equality Training (DET) to address prejudice and negative attitudes within organisations.
- Publicity to tackle negative images of volunteering among disabled people, and to show organisations the range of skills that disabled people have to offer.
- Funding for reasonable adjustments in order to overcome practical barriers.

There are areas of good practice, for example Scope's Access to Volunteering project, that show the way forward. Scope, as Britain's leading disability charity, can be at the forefront of the process of overcoming disablism by sharing its experience, and by giving advice on best practice in Disability Equality Training and in ways of providing reasonable adjustments.

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