

NORTH OF TYNE VOLUNTEERING AREA OF EXCELLENCE

USING A VOLUNTEER INCLUSION PLAN

All VCSE organisations should have an Equity Diversity Inclusion (EDI) statement in place for staff, volunteers and the community they serve. An EDI statement demonstrates that an organisation values and welcomes diversity in all its forms and that they strive to make fair volunteer recruitment an integral part of their mission and values.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE HEALTH CHECK FOR VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

The Health Check for Volunteer-Involving Organisations considers whether you have a framework for providing support to your volunteers. This includes volunteers with a disability or long-term health condition.

THE VOLUNTEER INCLUSION PLAN

The Volunteer Inclusion Plan was developed by Volunteer Centre Newcastle in partnership with Launchpad North Tyneside, VODA and Gateshead Mental Health User Voice, 25 VCSE organisations and members of the public following discussions about EDI in action, the stigma of “labels” placed on individuals and the barriers associated with the perception of who has the ability to volunteer.

During the focus groups it was clear that there was stigma perceived on both sides:

Organisations were concerned with their capacity to manage volunteers who declared on their application either a disability or a long-term health condition and had to balance that with their EDI commitment.

Volunteers were concerned that the medical diagnosis approach to their “label” and the complexity of their health issues would pose a barrier so they either didn’t apply for a role, or they didn’t declare a health condition they felt would block their application.

Both focus groups admitted to a lack of “confidence in starting the conversation” so the partnership created a Volunteer Inclusion Plan (ViP) which was agreeable to all, and with the suggestion that it should be offered during recruitment at the initial point of declaration.

The Volunteer Inclusion Plan is simple, focused, non-clinical and should be used in conjunction with your normal recruitment process.

It is to be used when relevant to the role applied for and to enable an open conversation about the volunteer's needs in order to begin their volunteering role. It allows the volunteer coordinator to agree “reasonable adjustments” to facilitate this. The ViP is not a static document and during support sessions it should be reviewed, updates recorded where necessary, and it should be used to allow the volunteer to be valued and supported by the organisation.

The Volunteer Inclusion Plan should be seen as a volunteer agreement of support and mutual expectations rather than a contract, so the model document is produced in plain English with mutually agreed headings. It should be adapted to include your organisational statement on confidentiality with the document only being shared with relevant colleagues who may need to be aware of the reasonable adjustments that have been agreed by the organisation in order to ensure continuity of support.

The Volunteer Inclusion Plan should be embedded in your volunteer practice and have organisational “buy in” so that any reasonable adjustments are known and supported across the organisation.

