



Engaging disabled volunteers

Created in partnership with
The Ripple Effect



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In 2024, we published our new strategy, **One Swim England**, which has a clear mission to...

“lead and serve an aquatics community to enable safe, enjoyable and successful experiences.”

This resource has therefore been designed to support you in making your environment more inclusive for all of your volunteers.

Whilst this guide is generally intended to give you a foundation of understanding in engaging volunteers with different impairments, please be aware that this is not a one-size fits all guide and what works for one volunteer, may not necessarily work for another. This guide also does not cover every impairment, but may offer some guidance to begin to address barriers.

You can find out more about our strategy [here](#).

Reasonable adjustments

The Equality Act 2010 places a legal duty on Swim England and each of our clubs to provide 'reasonable adjustments', taking positive steps to remove barriers that may prevent a disabled person from accessing the same services as their non-disabled counterparts. What is 'reasonable' is determined based upon factors such as effectiveness of the requested adjustment, health and safety, cost etc. We would ask and expect that clubs make every effort to meet these adjustments, working with members to find a mutually agreed solution.

If you are unsure or require any further advice, please contact equality@swimming.org

Volunteer opportunities

Volunteering opportunities should be open to everyone. Anyone who shows a level of commitment and passion in developing their skills and knowledge should be encouraged by Swim England and support offered.

There is a range of volunteering roles and descriptions on the Swim England web page including information on how to access training courses.

swimming.org/swimengland

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is not intended to be read all the way through!

The first section contains some general advice which we believe applies in the vast majority of cases, so it's a good place to start.

Our National Disability Sports Organisations (NDSO) partners have supplied more specific advice for certain impairments, but it would be impossible to try and list every type of impairment within this guide. We hope that everyone will read the general advice (which has been derived from the common points in the advice given by the NDSOs) and enhance that with specifics where necessary.

Please see the contents page for the relevant sections.

General advice

Safeguarding

- Adhere to [Wavepower](https://swimming.org/swimengland/wavepower-child-safeguarding-for-clubs/) guidance for working with vulnerable adults.
swimming.org/swimengland/wavepower-child-safeguarding-for-clubs/

Before your new volunteer starts

- Communicate with the volunteer ahead of time – ideally face-to-face, but phone calls or online meetings are fine if a face-to-face meeting is difficult to arrange.
- Provide clear job descriptions in advance, indicating what will be required in the proposed role.
- Ensure that key documents – registration forms, sign-in sheets, briefing materials and so on – are accessible. This might mean them being changed to an electronic format, using certain typefaces or increasing the size of text. Try to use simple, direct language as much as possible. Let yourself be led by the disabled person in terms of the specifics.
- Support workers/parents/personal assistants (PA)/buddies – will the disabled person be attending with anyone else, or would they like you to provide someone who can help them navigate the environment they will be volunteering in? What will that person need, if applicable?

- Make sure that your facilities are accessible for the volunteer – many so-called “accessible” facilities do not meet the needs of all disabled people. An example of this might be a wheelchair user who requires a toilet with a hoist. If in doubt, ask!

Communication

- Do not assume anything about a disabled person’s impairment, support needs, preferred language or communication preferences. Ask them how they would like to be supported, what language they would like you to use when referring to them or their impairment, and how you can best communicate with them. They’re the expert, so use their knowledge!
- If a disabled volunteer attends with a carer of some nature, always speak to the volunteer first.

Leading up to the event

- If someone is volunteering for the first time, consider inviting them to visit the pool prior to their first session. It’s extremely difficult to predict ahead of time exactly what support an disabled volunteer may need in a new environment, so a low-pressure experience to identify potential issues could be very beneficial.

- Be prepared to make accommodations to make the volunteering environment and roles accessible. This might include use of a wheelchair poolside, modifications to equipment to make it easier to hold or use, or adjustments to procedures to allow for disability-imposed limitations.
- Include disabled volunteers in your emergency action plans, such as fire alarms and building evacuations.

On the day of the event

- Make sure that disabled volunteers have a point of contact on the day and that they know how to contact this person easily if

something isn't quite right. This point of contact should be someone who doesn't have a demanding role at the event which would restrict their ability to support the volunteer.

- The key contact mentioned above should proactively check on the volunteer, not just wait until an issue arises.



Remember:

Be open, honest and don't be afraid to ask questions. Where possible, ensure personal questions are relevant to the volunteering role and responsibilities.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

This resource has been created in partnership with The Ripple Effect, a project that was funded by Spirit of 2012 and has worked in conjunction with the seven National Disability Sports Organisations (NDSOs):

British Blind Sport, Cerebral Palsy Sport, Dwarf Sports Association UK, Limbpower, Special Olympics Great Britain, UK Deaf Sport and Wheelpower.

The guide is designed to provide guidance on how to support a volunteer with an impairment, with each of the NDSOs having inputted their knowledge of these disabilities and what may work in supporting volunteers in aquatics.



British Blind Sport

British Blind Sport is the national sports charity for children and adults with sight loss in the UK. They use the power of sport to change the lives of people with sight loss and support them to lead more active, healthy and independent lives.

britishblindsport.org.uk



How to best communicate with a volunteer that has a visual impairment

- **Initial communication:** It is recommended that a phone call or face-to-face meeting takes place as a form of initial communication. For blind and partially sighted people (BPSP), this allows them the opportunity to discuss any accessibility or support needs moving forward.
-
- **Electronics access:** Depending on the level of vision, all communication needs to be in a format that can be accessed by anyone. Adaptations on phones and laptops - such as zoom functions, and/or screen readers can help volunteers to read and listen to what is on screen. Documents such as registration forms, information guides and posters should also be available electronically. Social media content should also be accessible, for example, the use of 'alt text' to describe images.



Alt text example:

"Disabled volunteer in wheelchair at a Swim England National event"

- BPSP may not always have access to devices and computers. In this instance, a telephone number and address should be provided to ensure they have all the details needed to get in touch.



What you can do to support volunteers with a visual impairment

- **Ask questions:** This allows you understand the level of the individual's sight loss and to potentially reveal any previous barriers they may have experienced. If possible, go to the venue they will be working in and find out things like how the light affects them and what the environment is like regarding their sight. All of these questions will help establish a good relationship with the volunteer.

- **Adaptations:** Do they need a guide/buddy to help with navigation? What other support may be needed for them to understand any relevant information?

- **Colour Difference:** Different sight loss may mean difficulty with certain colours. Can you change the colour of certain equipment or use coloured lines/tape to identify things? The more conversations with your volunteers, the more help and support you can offer that individual and the more success they will have within your club.



Inclusive language

There are many phrases to use when describing someone with sight loss. Individuals will describe themselves differently.

Phrases may include:

Blind

Partially sighted

Visually impaired

Severely sight impaired [SSI]

Sight impaired [SI]



TOP TIPS FOR BEING INCLUSIVE

✓ **The best way to be inclusive is to offer equal opportunities for BPSP where possible.**

Don't only offer visually impaired swimming events to the volunteer. Get them involved in all aspects of aquatics and ensure they work with all staff and volunteers. Allow the volunteers to try different roles; some roles may complement their sight condition more than others.

✓ **Always ensure good communication is used when involving those with sight loss.**

Good verbal descriptions as opposed to physical demonstrations may be all it takes for the volunteer to take part in the same activities as all of the other volunteers.

✓ **Volunteering is a great gateway for BPSP to get into paid work if they want to, so their experiences as volunteers need to be positive and engaging but most of all, inclusive.**

CASE STUDY



Frankie Rohan

Aged 37

Visually Impaired

How did you first get into volunteering?

After being diagnosed with sight loss, I couldn't work as I also had other medical conditions, at the time. When my health improved, I got involved in visually impaired

tennis, and loved it. After playing for a while, I decided I would like to try coaching to help others enjoy tennis, as much as I did.

When taking part in my qualifications I made sure that I got as much experience as possible, so got into volunteering and helping other coaches. I helped disability clubs, as well as non-disability. I wanted to volunteer, in order to give back, in ways that others had helped me.



CASE STUDY

What barriers/challenges have you faced (if any)?

Having sight loss presents many barriers, especially when it comes to attending places and activities that you aren't used to. For example, public transport can often be difficult to access, and often isn't reliable and means longer journeys. It is also hard to navigate yourself, if you aren't familiar with the area and the route you have to take.

Communication can also be difficult. Documents that are shared with volunteers aren't always accessible for those with sight loss. Therefore, it can be difficult to understand your volunteering role fully.

Practically, it can be hard to keep up with others, during what you are doing, which can often mean that confidence levels can be low, as it's hard to complete some tasks with ease, if you are visually impaired.

There may also be a lack of understanding from others and your peers, when it comes to your impairment, which again, means it can be quite frustrating, and can really affect your confidence.

What Successes/highlights have you had?

I have won a few volunteering awards, but most importantly, volunteering improved my confidence levels around working in sport, and progressing into paid work.

The experience I have gained through volunteering has meant that I have gained a full time job within sport, as well as a successful role as the national coach for the VI Tennis team GB squad.

What advice would you give to others who are considering volunteering?

I would definitely recommend volunteering, and encourage anyone to get involved.

I would advise that they are open about their disability, so that people around them, have the best understanding about how to support them, and make things as accessible and engaging as possible, for the volunteer. I would also suggest that they take opportunities to progress, if possible within their role, as it can often lead to more opportunities.



CP Sport

CP Sport encourages people with cerebral palsy to live lives that are more active by promoting the opportunity, capability and motivation involved in taking part in sport and physical activities. They provide sport and activity opportunities for people with cerebral palsy, a range of support services and use their platform to influence change for the benefit of disabled people.

cpsport.org



What you can do to support volunteers with cerebral palsy

- **Clarity:** Provide clear job descriptions to ALL volunteers before an event and ensure volunteers are happy with their job role.

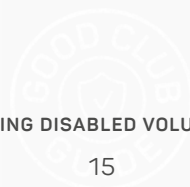
- **Use of adaptive equipment:** A wheelchair might be helpful for someone with CP due to reduced balance and a higher risk of slipping. However, never impose a wheelchair on someone. Ask beforehand if they would find this useful due to how slippery the poolside can get.

- **Accessible Facilities:** Ensure there are disabled facilities such as accessible toilets, changing rooms, parking, lifts and ramps. Ensure they have enough room on their chosen job due to wheelchair access or possible limited balance on poolside.

- **Provide Advance Warning:** People with CP can often have a heightened startle reflex. If there will be loud noises such as the starting system, advise the volunteer, and if possible / time allows, do a trial run with them so they are familiar with the sound.

- **Ask, don't assume:** CP can affect handgrip, so asking questions beforehand can ensure the right job is allocated. For example, holding a stopwatch, clipboard or pen.

- **Duty of care:** CP can sometimes mean a volunteer can get tired quickly. Make sure there is a chair or somewhere to rest and offer regular breaks.





Helpful questions/phrases to ask beforehand

- Is there anything we can do to ensure you have everything you need?
- How does your CP affect your movement?
- Would any jobs be more accessible or suitable for you on the day?
- Would you like to bring someone with you?
- Have you volunteered at an aquatic event before?
- We would like to ensure we are inclusive towards all of our volunteers. If something is not quite right, please tell us and we can find a solution together.

TOP TIPS FOR BEING INCLUSIVE

✓ Ensure that impairments are taken into account when risk assessing and thinking about fire and evacuation protocol. Safety is paramount.

✓ Gain medical details of ALL volunteers to ensure event organisers are aware of epilepsy and associated seizures.

✓ Never assume someone with a disability is incapable of doing certain jobs. Always communicate, ask and find ways to adapt by adding safeguards and modifications such as a stopwatch that has large buttons/display.

✓ Ensure all hazards are removed and the poolside is kept clear. Allow for mobility aids such as sticks, crutches, walkers and frames.

✓ Be patient and take time to understand your volunteer's needs and what they want to get out of the experience.

CASE STUDY

Ben Rees

Aged 27

Cerebral Palsy (wheelchair user)

**Mansfield Swimming Club – Volunteer
Level 1 Coach**

How did you first get into volunteering in aquatics?

At the time I started volunteering, I was swimming at a national level, and for three separate swimming clubs – the club mentioned above, which was my local club for mainly non-disabled swimmers (only having myself and another para swimmer at the club since 2007); a disability specialised club; and also, the main county squad in Nottinghamshire. Squad fees were high, and my main club allowed swimmers who volunteered their time in earlier sessions to take that time back by offering free training sessions on the day someone volunteered.

What barriers/challenges have you faced (if any)?

Access to poolside at certain pools/competitions when supporting younger swimmers, as some of them did not have enough space around poolside to move around safely in my chair.



What Successes/highlights have you had?

Seeing the swimmers I have supported throughout my time at the club grow, become confident, faster as athletes.

What advice would you give to others who are considering volunteering?

Research clubs that have an inclusive and robust volunteering programme, so that any additional needs can be discussed and taken care of. This way, the club knows what they can do for you and what they can expect from their volunteer.



Dwarf Sports Association UK

Dwarf Sports Association UK aims to make regular sporting opportunity accessible and enjoyable to anyone and everyone with dwarfism. DSAuk work to promote recreational sport for the benefit of any persons of restricted growth. We promote competitive sport for dwarf athletes both in the United Kingdom and internationally to provide opportunities for dwarf athletes to train for and compete in the World Dwarf Games, the Paralympic and the Olympic games.

dsauk.org



How to best communicate with volunteers with dwarfism

- **Be open and approachable:** Ensure a friendly and open attitude. Encourage volunteers to express their preferences for communication.

- **Respect personal space:** Recognise the importance of personal space. Avoid leaning or hovering over individuals with dwarfism during conversations.

- **Adapt communication styles:** Be flexible in your communication style. Some individuals may prefer written communication, while others may prefer verbal or visual methods.

- **Listen actively:** Give volunteers ample time to express themselves. Pay attention to non-verbal cues and be patient in understanding their perspectives.



What you can do to support volunteers with dwarfism

- **Accessibility:** Ensure that the volunteer's workspace and facilities are accessible. This includes adjusting the height of desks and chairs. If necessary, provide assistive technology or tools that can enhance the volunteer's efficiency and comfort in performing tasks.
-
- **Flexible schedules:** Be open to discussing and accommodating flexible working hours or schedules to support the volunteer's specific needs. For example, some individuals with Dwarfism may not be comfortable standing on poolside all day and may only be able to do a morning or afternoon session.
-
- **Training and awareness:** Conduct training sessions for staff and volunteers to raise awareness about dwarfism, dispel myths, and foster an inclusive environment



Inclusive Language – positive language to use to a volunteer with dwarfism

- **Avoid stereotypes:** Refrain from making assumptions or perpetuating stereotypes about individuals with dwarfism. Treat each volunteer as an individual with unique abilities.
- **Mind your language:** Be mindful of the words you use. Avoid using derogatory terms or language that may be offensive or disrespectful.
- **Don't offer unsolicited assistance:** While the intention may be positive, avoid offering help without being asked. Allow individuals with dwarfism to decide when assistance is needed.
- **Respect privacy.** Refrain from asking personal or intrusive questions related to the volunteer's condition. Respect their privacy and focus on their abilities.

TOP TIPS FOR BEING INCLUSIVE

✓ **Promote diversity.** Emphasise the importance of diversity and inclusion within the organisation. Celebrate the unique strengths and perspectives that individuals with dwarfism bring to the team.

✓ **Create an inclusive environment.** Foster an atmosphere where all volunteers feel welcome, respected, and valued. Encourage teamwork and mutual support.

✓ **Regular check-ins.** Schedule regular check-ins to understand the volunteer's experience and address any concerns they may have. This helps in creating a supportive environment.

✓ **Accessibility assessment.** Regularly assess the accessibility of your organisation's physical spaces, digital platforms, and communication methods to ensure inclusivity.

✓ **Feedback mechanism.** Establish a feedback mechanism to allow volunteers to express their needs, concerns, and suggestions anonymously if desired.

CASE STUDY

Lauren Wright

Aged 23

**Galactosyltransferase 1 Deficiency,
Spondyloplastic Ehlers (Danlos
Syndrome)**

**Totton Swim Club / Ripple Effect
project**

**How did you first get into volunteering in
aquatics?**

I started volunteering with Worcester Swim Club when I went to University.

**What barriers/challenges have you faced
(if any)?**

I feel I have been quite lucky with where I volunteered because I haven't come across too many barriers. One thing that I have struggled with is manoeuvring around poolside when the floors are wet and standing for long periods of time because I tend to get a lot of pain.

What Successes/highlights have you had?

I wanted to get some experience working with professional athletes. While I was with the club, I was able to use some of the swimmers in my independent study research



project. I also led the land training sessions in the last year, which I was able to use to build my experience in delivering exercise-based sessions to professional athletes.

**What advice would you give to others who
are considering volunteering?**

I think it's always good to research the club beforehand and ask to go along and shadow a few sessions because this helped me to pick the right clubs that were friendly and helpful. Then putting in regular meetings with the coach to see how you are progressing and to make sure that everything is going well. This helped me to stay on track and meet my goals.



LimbPower

LimbPower support amputees, individuals with limb difference and their families to bridge the gap between hospital rehabilitation and community and school engagement to rebuild lives and improve physical, social and mental wellbeing.

limbpower.com



How to best communicate with volunteers with a physical impairment

- **Be mindful of limb difference:** Be mindful that different people have their own views about their impairment and ability. Some do not like to be labelled as disabled so don't assume. Avoid labelling an individual and be respectful of disability identification.

- **Support for volunteers:** Provide clear pre-event instructions on directions, transport options and necessary arrangements. Ensure disabled-accessible parking and venue entry, including ramps, slopes, lifts, and accessible amenities.

- **General information:** Make sure the room is accessible, if there is no lift or the lift is broken; arrange to move the meeting to the ground floor. Let disabled volunteers know where the accessible toilets are. Suggest a small bag to carry anything needed to keep everything together and for ease. Offer to carry items that they may struggle with.



What can you do to support volunteers with limb difference?

- **Entry and exit to the pool area:** Consider diverse access requirements including alternative entry and exit points, ensuring they are accessible, clear of hazards and unlocked.

- **Tailor support based on different needs:** Wheelchair accessibility, prosthetic considerations, equipment adaptations for those with upper limb differences, and awareness of hazards such as water and poolside wires. A sturdy chair may be required to support the steadiness of the volunteer. Crutches are not encouraged poolside though as they can be a slip hazard.

- **Attending with a wheelchair:** Can their own wheelchairs go poolside? If this is not possible, is there a poolside chair that can be used?

- **Attending using a prosthetic:** Make the volunteer aware of any wet surfaces and ask if help is required to get to their destination. Safety is paramount.

- **Amputees with upper limb difference:** Volunteers might need adaptive equipment/tools for holding clip boards, stopwatches and back-up buttons.



Inclusive Language – positive language to use to a volunteer with a physical impairment

- Don't assume that all volunteers use the same disability language. Something that is offensive to one person might not be offensive to another e.g. the word 'disabled' and word 'stump'. Some people prefer the term residual limb.
- If in doubt, ask the person what terminology they prefer to be used.
- Ask if they are comfortable with what they are doing and have the skills and ability to fulfil the needs of the role.

TOP TIPS FOR BEING INCLUSIVE

✓ Ensure that the volunteer feels like a valued member of the team.

✓ Ask the volunteer questions regarding support needed, either in advance or during a private conversation.

✓ Preparation – have chairs, equipment etc., in place before the volunteers arrive, so that they don't feel like things are being adjusted for them or they are a burden.

✓ Showing appreciation for the individual's ability so that every participant feels heard, valued, and encouraged to contribute their insights.

CASE STUDY



Allyson Irvine

Aged 65

Double below knee amputee, missing digits due to Sepsis

J1 with Ripple Effect through Leander Swimming Club, and physical activity advisor with LimbPower

How did you first get into volunteering in aquatics?

I learned about Swim England's Ripple Effect project through LimbPower. I am an avid swimmer, and saw an opportunity not only to support others but also to achieve something meaningful for myself.



CASE STUDY

I joined the Ripple Effect programme from its inception, and have demonstrated commitment by dedicating evenings to complete the theoretical aspects of the training and weekends to the practical side of the qualifications.

What barriers/challenges have you faced (if any)?

Throughout my journey, I have received unwavering support from Swim England and subsequently, from The Leander Swimming Club based in Nottingham. Despite challenges in manoeuvring around the pool and climbing to be in the right place, I found a supportive mentor at my swimming club who assisted me in overcoming these obstacles.

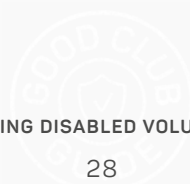
What Successes/highlights have you had?

I qualified as a Timekeeper and then J1 in a shorter period than I anticipated. I think a positive attitude, and the joy I find in my role, played a pivotal part in my progress. A particular highlight was attending the Winter National Swimming Champs as a qualified J1. My family and friends were very proud and have been supportive of my aquatic journey. I have been lucky enough to be nominated for two awards, Volunteer of the Year at the Swim England National Awards

and Inspiration of the Year at the Sport and Recreation Alliance Awards. I never thought that what I do would have an impact on other people with disabilities; I just like to help others!

What advice would you give to others who are considering volunteering?

My advice is easy; just do it! Support is available, you just need to ask, and any goal is attainable regardless of age or impairment. I would encourage anyone to take the first step, and reassure them that there are people ready and willing to provide the necessary support.





Special Olympics Great Britain

Special Olympics Great Britain (GB) is a non-profit organisation and largest provider of year-round sports training and athletic competition in summer and winter sports for children and adults of ALL abilities with intellectual disabilities also known as learning disabilities.

specialolympicsgb.org.uk



How to best communicate with volunteers with an intellectual impairment

- **Use clear, simplified language:** Try speaking slower, not louder. Volunteers with an intellectual impairment are not all necessarily hard of hearing. Speaking louder won't make them understand you better.
-
- **Set expectations:** Many volunteers need to know ahead of time what will happen. As you go through your procedures, describe what you will be doing now, and perhaps the next one or two steps that will follow as well.
-
- **Expect to get a lot of questions:** Many volunteers may be very curious about what you are doing and also just about you. If the questions get too invasive, it's okay to say, "I'm not comfortable with answering that."



What can you do to support volunteers with an intellectual impairment?

- **It's the person, not the impairment:** Remember that the person is still an individual and just like all volunteers, will have a wealth of skills and experiences that can add value to your organisation. Work with them to design roles that best fits their interests.

- **Ask the expert:** An individual with an intellectual impairment will have experienced numerous barriers and therefore will be best placed to suggest how they can be removed. This also helps to start from a place of understanding and recognising that each person has unique abilities and preferences and can be supported in a variety of ways. Understanding this will help you tailor the volunteering experience accordingly.

- **Offer alternative training and support:** individuals with an intellectual impairment may take on board information differently. Therefore, ensure that your training accommodates different learning styles and paces. This might include hands-on training, visual aids, role-playing scenarios, easy-read documentation and demonstrations.

- **Peer Support/Mentoring:** It may also be a good idea to explore avenues of using existing volunteers or staff as a mentor or buddy for ongoing support and guidance. Pairing a volunteer with an experienced individual can lead to further encouragement and guidance, whilst also promoting a sense of belonging. It also provides opportunities to learn from each other in a unified way.



Inclusive language – positive language to use to a volunteer with an intellectual impairment

- Refer to individuals, persons, or people as having intellectual disabilities, rather than “intellectually disabled people” or “the intellectually disabled.”
- Distinguish between adults and children with intellectual disabilities.
- Do not sensationalise the accomplishments of people with disabilities. While these accomplishments should be recognised and applauded, the disability rights movement has tried to make the public aware of the negative impact of referring to the achievements of people with physical or intellectual disabilities with excessive hyperbole.
- Above all, if you are uncertain as to what terminology to use, try asking a person with the impairment! Inclusion is about recognising the humanity that connects all of us. Starting a conversation is the first step.

CASE STUDY

Will Browning**Aged 21****Downs Syndrome****Special Olympics GB and
Ripple Effect project****How did you first get into volunteering in
aquatics?**

I wanted to get some qualifications so I can use my voice to help more people like me to take these courses. The Ripple Effect team helped me choose the course that was good for me. I said I wanted to help at swimming lessons and the course will help me with what I want to do in the future.

What Successes/highlights have you had?

I was shy and nervous at the start. People helped me and it got easier. I went to the Special Olympics Global Youth Summit in Baku, it was amazing. I also won a gold medal at the World Games in Berlin. I haven't been able to do Swim England courses before. I found the test at the end of the timekeeper's course too hard. My sister helped me understand some of the words in the assistant's course, as they were tricky.

**What advice would you give to others who
are considering volunteering?**

Volunteers are very important. I go to swimming galas with volunteers, they help lots of people and make sure everyone can join in and have fun. The project has been really fun and good for my future. Don't be scared to get involved and to ask for help if you need it.



UK Deaf Sport

UK Deaf Sport works in partnership with key organisations to ensure that deaf children, young people and adults have equal opportunities to participate and excel in sports and physical activity as their hearing counterparts from grassroots to elite level.

ukdeafsport.org.uk



How to best communicate with a volunteer that has a hearing impairment

- **Talk clearly and face the volunteer:** Don't turn your back when giving out instructions. If the volunteer lip-reads, make sure your lips are easy to see and try not to mumble.

- **Use visual aids and demonstrate if necessary:** It can help if drills and techniques are demonstrated first, so that deaf volunteers are visually aware of what you are asking participants to do.

- **Check for understanding:** If volunteers don't understand, try re-phrasing the instruction/ information or writing it down.

- **Before the session starts:** Discuss with deaf volunteers what position in the group or on poolside best supports their communication needs and makes them feel most comfortable.



What you can do to support volunteers with a hearing impairment

- Ask the volunteer about their communication needs and preferences prior to their first experience volunteering.

- Offer to meet the volunteer before the session takes place to give any prior information.

- Make sure all volunteers have been given any prep information e.g. timetables and session details before they arrive to volunteer.

- Consider spatial acoustics when discussing information with volunteers.

- Learn some basic sign language to support and welcome your volunteers who are British Sign Language users- ukdeafsport.org.uk/compilation-of-bsl/



Inclusive Language – positive language to use to a volunteer with a hearing impairment

- UK Deaf Sport uses the term '**deaf**' to represent all people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a hearing loss, whether this is acquired or from birth.
- UK Deaf Sport uses the term '**deaf community**' to represent all people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a hearing loss or anyone who has a lived experience of deafness such as family members, friends, allies, colleagues and other professionals.



TOP TIPS FOR BEING INCLUSIVE

✓ Consider booking a British Sign Language interpreter or Communication Support Worker to assist with communication.

✓ Gain the deaf volunteers attention before communicating and ensure you have eye contact.

✓ UK Deaf Sport offers a Deaf People's Inclusion in Sport eLearning course that could help you to support deaf volunteers:
ukdeafsport.org.uk/deaf-people-inclusion-in-sport-elearning-course

CASE STUDY

Martin Lee

Aged 54

Profoundly Deaf

**Great Britain Deaf Swimming Club
Head Coach**

How did you first get into volunteering in aquatics?

After my 3rd Deaflympics, I had to retire from swimming due to a knee injury. I had so much enjoyment out of swimming I felt the need to put something back into swimming and this was when I decided to do my teaching and coaching qualifications. GB Deaf Swimming were always on the lookout for helpers and I knew the Head Coach and Director of swimming at the time and offered my services. They accepted and I have been there ever since.

What barriers/challenges have you faced (if any)?

The barriers and challenges I have come across when volunteering tend to be around the lack of understanding of Deaf people and their needs. Quite often when doing coaching courses you will have people who do not have basic deaf awareness like facing a deaf person when speaking to them.



Again, because many theory courses get done online now we are disadvantaged if the material being used on the courses do not have captions or subtitles making it difficult to follow the course.

On practical courses, there is more interaction but again there can be a lack of deaf awareness. The atmosphere at swimming pools means that these



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courses can be noisy due to external pool noise and poolside locations are not always the best layout for poolside tutoring. These factors always make listening on the poolside a lot harder for volunteers.

Meeting around a square table without any interpreters also make conversations difficult to follow, as you cannot lip-read without moving to another position every time someone speaks. This is a result of pools not always having a room that allows us to create a circular table format.

What Successes/highlights have you had?

I had a successful career through swimming at National and International level. I swam for Scotland as part of the senior team in mainstream swimming. I swam for GB Deaf swimming as part of various competitions including Europeans and Deaflympics. I swam in three Deaflympics. First Deaflympics I won two silvers and a bronze medal at 16 years old. Second Deaflympics I won five golds and a bronze and two world records. Third Deaflympics I won a gold, silver and bronze and set a world record.

Last year I was inducted into the British Deaf Sports Heritage Hall of Fame.

What advice would you give to others who are considering volunteering?

If you want to volunteer to do something that you enjoy or can make a positive contribution to then you must do it! Share your experiences with others as this can sometimes help them with their career and avoid any issues you found with yours. Even if you help one person, then it is worthwhile.

Your knowledge and experience can make a difference regardless of how big or small.

Volunteering is a great way to achieve self-satisfaction.



WheelPower

British Wheelchair Sport

Wheelpower

We have been providing opportunities for people with physical impairments to take part in sport for over 75 years. From first-timers to Paralympic medallists, we support and promote participation at all levels. We have seen how playing sport can enrich lives, offering tremendous physical and psychological benefits, whatever your age or ability.

wheelpower.org.uk



How to best communicate with volunteers with a physical impairment

- **Address the volunteer:** If the volunteer has a personal assistant with them, make sure to still address the volunteer, unless there is a clear reason why this would not be appropriate.
-
- **Don't make assumptions:** Try not to make assumptions about the volunteer's abilities, it is better to ask what they are capable of and have an open discussion about this.



What you can do to support volunteers with a physical impairment

- Ensure accessible facilities are available such as parking, changing rooms and toilets – each with sufficient space for manoeuvring a wheelchair.

- Consider local accessible transport links.

- Ramps and accessible lifts should be in place if required.

- Volunteers with a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) may struggle with temperature regulation – both hot and cold. A tetraplegic (quadriplegic), for example, may not be able to perspire and may, therefore, require more frequent breaks in order to re-hydrate and/or may need access to a method for cooling themselves down/heating themselves up.



Inclusive language – positive language to use to a volunteer with a physical impairment

- Have you volunteered at an Aquatic Event before?
- How can we help in ensuring you have everything you need?
- Is there a particular role or position that would be more suitable on the day?
- Do you need a carer or assistant with you on the day to support you?
- We would like to ensure that we are inclusive towards all of our Volunteers. If something doesn't work or isn't quite right, please tell us and we can work out a solution together.

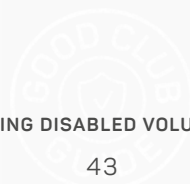


TOP TIPS FOR BEING INCLUSIVE

✓ Ask a volunteer what they might need ahead of time, to ensure that appropriate adjustments can be made.

✓ Treat volunteers with respect and do not assume what they might or might not be able to do – have a dialogue to find out!

✓ Educate yourself on inclusive language.



CASE STUDY

Nicola Hughes

Aged 47

Right above knee amputee. I don't wear a prosthetic poolside so I am dependent on my wheelchair.

Durham City Swimming Club. The Ripple Effect project

How did you first get into volunteering in aquatics?

Since becoming an amputee, I have been happy to take on new challenges. My first experience was at the Manchester World Para Championships as a Medal Chaperone. I loved the experience of being with other volunteers who were in a similar situation as myself. I had the opportunity to join other volunteers on the Ripple Effect project and try a new role as a Technical Official.

What barriers/challenges have you faced (if any)?

Being in a wheelchair poolside brings its own challenges but the clubs I have worked with have been great in accommodating my impairment. Poolside can be tricky with space and safety issues but by discussing it with the club and referee when in the venue



it is possible to work out any issues and discuss the practicality of being in a chair poolside. Clubs have been great in moving briefings downstairs when there is not a lift or the lift is not working so that I have been included. Also, talk to the venue if you have any concerns regarding parking or access.

What successes/highlights have you had?

Going to a gala as a qualified J1 has been my greatest highlight so far. Rolling out with other volunteers and feeling proud of what I have achieved has been very special. Also volunteering at a World Event and National events along with both disabled and



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non-disabled people and being appreciated for what I can do rather than focusing on my impairment has been a particular highlight in my volunteering journey.

What advice would you give to others who are considering volunteering?

Absolutely do it! There is something about being part of an inclusive community that makes me incredibly happy. Being part of a team and giving back to make an event happen is something very special. Having an impairment does not stop me volunteering – the roles might need a bit of adjusting at times but go along and talk to the organisers and see if it is a possibility for you. If you don't try you will never know, so give it a go!

We hope you have found this guide informative. Thank you for proactively taking the time to learn more about how you can make your club more inclusive and support volunteers with disabilities.

Should you have any questions or need further support please contact equality@swimming.org.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all of the National Disability Sport Organisations that have provided the information that has been shared throughout this guide.

Thanks must also go to those who have shared their experiences as part of this guide in the hope that their case studies can inspire others to volunteer in aquatics in the future.

Final thanks must also go to **Spirit of 2012**, who have funded Swim England's Ripple Effect project and made these learnings possible.

Useful Links

These links have been included to guide you to more information that may help in supporting volunteers with impairments.

Swim England Inclusion Hub
swimming.org/swimengland/inclusion

Activity Alliance & Buddle Disability Inclusion Hub
buddle.co/tools/disability-inclusion-hub

Swim England Foundations of Inclusivity CPD
swimming.org/ios/course-information/foundations-of-inclusivity



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Tel: 01509 618700 | swimming.org/swimengland



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