

# Case study: Sharing stories of inclusion

## The role of the Support Worker

**It is important that volunteer-involving organisations diversify their workforce. In the current climate it is vital to look at the volunteer opportunities volunteer-involving organisations provide through a different lens.**

With the challenges in finding enough volunteers to provide service, is this the right time to look at the volunteer opportunities that you offer and see if they are fit for purpose?

For example:

- Do the opportunities need to stay the same or could they be done in a different way?
- Could the tasks be broken down into a way that can be done by a group of volunteers rather than an individual?
- Could the tasks be broken down into a way that can build skills as confidence grows for the volunteer?
- Could your organisation build an ongoing partnership with a local education provider or disability support service?
- This is the time to look at your workforce and see if it reflects your local community, your customers. Is your organisation a welcoming, inclusive, accessible, and safe space?

One solution is to build a partnership with a disability support organisation. By working with a disability support organisation, the role of the support worker comes into play. It is important to understand the role of the support worker for an individual or group who are volunteering for you, to ensure a successful volunteer experience for all.

### **The Support Worker**

The support worker is a key member of the team and can make or break a volunteer experience for both the volunteer-involving organisation and individual / group volunteering. As a volunteer leader it is important that you understand their role in supporting an individual or group of volunteers living with disabilities.

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The key point to keep in mind is that the support worker is not volunteering their time to your organisation. They are being paid to perform their job supporting the individual or group to get the most out of their volunteer opportunity. It is important to understand that the support worker is paid from the National Disability Insurance Scheme funding of the individual, so the support level needs to reflect the outcomes identified within an individual's National Disability Insurance Scheme plan.

Each individual on the National Disability Insurance Scheme will have set specific goals, and their funding and supports are aiming to support the individual to achieve these. For some, this will be learning independent living skills and to achieve employment, where for others, it will be to learn some new skills to allow greater independence in their daily lives, and support to access and contribute to their community, with an understanding that they will be reliant on supports for many years.

It varies from individual to individual as to how they build their support team, with some individuals attending programs run by disability support providers where the support is provided onsite or working on an individual basis. Some people will require support in every aspect of the volunteer role, and some people will require little support and initiate this response independently as they require. For some, the support can be in the means of transport to and from the volunteer-involving organisation of choice.

It is crucial that from the first conversations between the disability support organisation/education provider and the volunteer-involving organisation that these requirements and expectations are clear and realistic. Not every volunteer-involving organisation is able to provide suitable opportunities or have the structural accessibility required to suit every volunteer and their support person.

### **How to ensure a successful outcome for all involved:**

- Initial conversations need to be honest from both sides.

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- Communication channels need to be consistent and open.
- The volunteer leader needs to have a clear understanding of the goals that are trying to be achieved.
- The potential volunteer, support worker and partnered organisation need to be aware of the tasks that are required to allow the volunteer-involving organisation to service their customers and the capacity that the volunteer-involving organisation has in facilitating these opportunities.
- Expectations need to be managed all the way through the process.

### **The Support Worker role is to:**

- Model appropriate behaviour during every interaction.
- Support skill development – identify gaps and recognise the steps required to learn these skills in a positive and accessible way.
- Act as a point of contact – not to overtake all communication but to facilitate communications.
- Communicate with the volunteer-involving organisation the plan / strategy for the individual/group and steps that are being taken.
- Provide feedback – to the Volunteer Leader, the disability support organisation, and to the individual participant about what is going well and what needs to be changed or adapted.
- Be flexible. Each day will look different – sometimes more support is needed than others.
- Champion volunteering and the experience this is giving to the volunteer.

### **The Volunteer Leader role is to:**

- Be open minded and willing to adapt volunteer opportunities if possible.
- Ensure that the workspace is safe and inclusive.
- Model appropriate behaviour.

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- Facilitate open and clear communication with the disability support organisation, the support worker, and the volunteer.
- Have a clear understanding of the goals / aims of the individual volunteer – Why are they volunteering? Is it for purpose to their week, for social interaction, to satisfy a passion or to learn new skills?
- Understand the role of the support worker and the importance of the position in supporting the individual/group in achieving their goals with the knowledge that every day is different and sometimes the volunteer will require more hands-on support and others for the support worker to step back and allow the volunteer to give it a go themselves.
- Ensure that induction processes are adaptable and inclusive.

### Challenges and barriers

- Lack of funding to facilitate a support worker for the hours required.
- Turnover of support workers.
- Cost of training – if the volunteer is required to attend a 2-day training course the support worker is also required to attend. This is two days of funding out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme package for this individual. The participant might have a different support worker on different days of the week – do they all require training? Do they have adequate screening clearances?
- Onboarding – does every participant and support worker have to go through the full onboarding process? Can it be adapted for a group? Can a memorandum of understanding be arranged with the partnership organisation to cover the support workers with the understanding that each support worker has undertaken a National Disability Insurance Scheme check which includes a police check and is valid for five years.
- Does the volunteer leader have power to make changes to processes and procedures? Do they have the support from the senior management to do so? What limitations are set down by the governing body?

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- Simplified and offered in a pictorial way, e.g. Social Stories
- Where to find the support required to make changes to processes/procedures to encourage inclusivity.
- Can the volunteer-involving organisation still provide the service they are expected if they adapt their volunteer opportunities?
- Do the volunteers, support workers and supporting organisations understand what the volunteer-involving organisation is providing and their position in achieving this?

### Key points

- Equity not equality.
- Not every volunteer-involving organisation has the capacity or space to facilitate volunteering in this way.
- Listen to those with lived experience – does your organisation's Board have anyone with lived experience?
- Accept people are where they are at – understand their previous experiences.
- Be genuine – treat everyone with respect.
- Communication is key.
- The support worker is not a volunteer – they are being paid to fulfil a role which is for the volunteer, not the organisation.
- Onboarding is a barrier – can the National Disability Insurance Scheme worker clearance check be used instead? How can this be administered? Can the individual participants sign a Statutory Declaration if they cannot provide enough identification documents?
- Volunteer opportunities need to be flexible and adaptable.

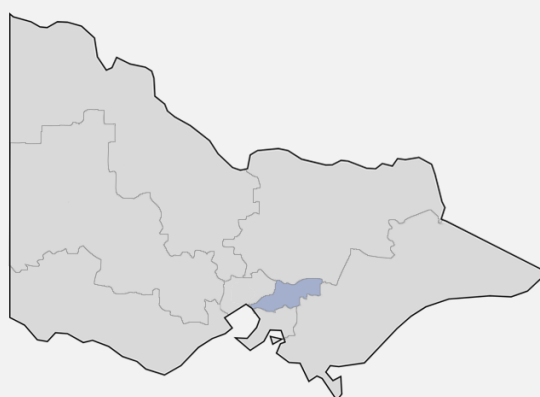
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<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>



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*Volunteering Victoria acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.*