

Tip Sheet 9
Library Accessibility –What You Need to Know
Volunteers with Disabilities

Overview

Good news! Tweens, teens and adults with disabilities may be interested in volunteering at your library. It is to the library's benefit for library staff to welcome them. Individuals with disabilities have many of the same motivations as volunteers without disabilities: wanting to give back, resume building, community service requirement for graduation or an organization, or just filling the hours in a day. However, be aware that people with disabilities do not necessarily have the same opportunities to volunteer because of intentional or unintentional community barriers. If you can position your library as the go to place for potential volunteers with disabilities, you may find a substantial and consistent source of volunteers. Remember, the ability to read, walk, talk, etc. are not necessarily requirements for the volunteer job.

Tips

To address the needs of volunteers with disabilities with specific disabilities, please see the tipsheets on those disabilities. When considering volunteering in general, keep in mind the need to:

- Work with the volunteer to tailor the assignment to their strengths and any challenges they want to address.
- Individuals interests. Everyone works better when they like what they are doing and feels they are contributing to the institution.
- Be practical: a volunteer in a wheelchair may not be able to shelve books on the top shelf; a volunteer with classic Autism may not be the best greeter.
- Ask the volunteer what, if any, accommodations they might need.
- Prepare the staff for the volunteer by making them feel comfortable working with people with disabilities through education, and conversation.
- Integrate the volunteer into the worksite. Include him or her in your conversations, coffee breaks, parties and staff meetings where appropriate.
- Respect your volunteer's privacy. Remember that supervisors and coworkers must know the individual's needs but can only be told the diagnosis by the individual. For example, a supervisor needs to know that Mary needs frequent breaks, but not that she has attention deficit disorder.
- Ask the volunteer whom, if anyone, staff can contact if problems arise during the workday which can not easily be addressed. For example, if a volunteer with schizophrenia is disoriented one day, whom should be called for assistance?

- To effectively communicate with your volunteer. For example do not use complex sentence structures when speaking with a volunteer with a developmental disability or turn away from a volunteer who is deaf while speaking to them.
- Recruit volunteers in the disability community (see list below for more resources). People with disabilities may not necessarily think of the library as a place to volunteer.
- Purchase adaptive technologies which will make it possible for them to work in the library.
- Be flexible. Allow someone to work with a job coach; sometimes you get twice the work. Keep in mind that the coaching may be of a professional or informal nature. For example, a wife might assist her husband with mild Alzheimer's in reading to children, while a social service agency might pay to have a coach teach one of their clients how to read Roman numerals.
- If at all possible, hire those who do a good job.

Notify the following organizations that volunteer opportunities exist at the library.

American Council of the Blind

<http://www.ACB.org>

CHADD, (Hyper Activity Disorder/Attention Deficient Disorder advocacy Group)

<http://www.chadd.org/>

Down Syndrome Association

<http://www.ndss.org>

Learning Disability Association

<http://www.lidaamerica.org/>

National Federation of the Blind

<http://www.nfb.org>

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services

<http://www.ed.gov/>

United Cerebral Palsy

<http://www.ucp.org/>

YAI- National Institute for People with Disabilities

<http://www.yai.org/>