

Volunteers: your questions answered - 9

*This series of information sheets has been developed to help you recruit, train and retain volunteers, both disabled and able-bodied, to support sailing programmes which include disabled people. To safeguard yourself and your volunteers, please ensure that you also read the series entitled **Volunteers - essential information**, available from www.rya.org.uk/AboutRYA/RYSailability/Bestpracticemanual.htm*

Supporting and keeping volunteers

Volunteers need to feel that they are useful, needed, valued, welcome and benefiting personally from their activities. Here are some suggestions for ensuring that they are well supported in their roles, and will want to stay with you long-term. See sheet 3 too - the benefits that you offer will encourage your volunteers to stay!

- Find out what skills each individual has, and how he/she wants to use them, as well as what he/she wants from you. Identify what he/she is expected to achieve, and when.
- Acknowledge volunteers by name in your programme – not on the back page but along with the members, instructors and paid personnel – and show them on your organisational structure charts. Make sure that everyone in the organisation shows them consideration. Always use their names - never refer to them as ‘the volunteer’.
- Ensure that all team members appreciate that bullying and harassment on grounds of disability is totally unacceptable.
- Recognise that volunteers have lives, often with families and jobs. Acknowledge that they have other commitments and be prompt in releasing them at the end of their ‘shift’. Give them time out when they need it, especially during residential activities. Make their needs a priority, as well as your own.
- Agree a time to discuss any issues, and give regular feedback, recording achievement. Provide sensitive support, and ensure that you review their support needs and any aids they require. Keep this confidential when your integrity is not compromised.
- Be approachable, open and honest – all volunteers should feel that management cares for and about them.
- Keep in touch with volunteers when they are unable to work. They will then need minimal retraining and will still feel a part of the organisation.
- Involve volunteers in the recruitment of other volunteers and paid personnel, as well as in planning, organising, monitoring and evaluation of the activities in which they are involved. Ask for their feedback on the activity, their welfare and your support.
- Provide regular opportunities for training (see sheet 8).
- Find tasks that volunteers can do while you are waiting for references and police clearance. During this time, they must be supervised in a controlled environment.