



**Literature Review of the Inclusion of People with  
Disability in Volunteering for the Victoria ALIVE  
Project  
2019**

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## About the research authors

David Perry and Dr Judith Buckingham authored this literature review for the Victoria ALIVE project.



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David Perry has 20 years' experience in the Neighbourhood House sector and is currently the Policy and Research Officer with Neighbourhood Houses Victoria (NHVic).

He has conducted a number of research projects and co-authored research reports including "Community Career Counselling - Enabling career guidance and learner choice for people with disability in adult education" for the Adult Community and Further Education Board and "Multiple Benefits", an analysis of a survey of 46,000 Neighbourhood House participants in Victoria.

David administers, analyses and reports on an annual survey of around 380 Neighbourhood Houses for NHVic and the Department of Health and Human Services.



### Dr. Judith Buckingham

Dr Judith Buckingham has worked in adult education and disability service organisations for over twenty years.

Judy has been an advocate, trainer, and researcher in disability inclusion for many years.

Her PhD, which she completed in 2004 concerned the inclusion of people with disability into learning, employment and relationships.

Judy has undertaken numerous research projects including reviews into best practice in inclusion, career guidance and learning choices for people with disability and on career development for people with disability.

She currently undertakes consultancy and training work on disability action planning, and inclusion policy and practice for community and adult education groups.

## List of acronyms

Acronym	Explanation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
GSS	General Social Survey
ILC	Information, Linkages and Capacity Building
NHVic	Neighbourhood Houses Victoria
SDAC	Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
UK	United Kingdom
Victoria ALIVE	Abilities. Links. Inclusive. Volunteering. Everyday.

## Introduction

### Victoria ALIVE project

The Victoria ALIVE (Ability-Links-Inclusive-Volunteering-Everyday) project is an activity of the 2018-19 Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Transition Grant Stream, within the community awareness and capacity building activity area.

The purpose of the Victoria ALIVE *Inclusion in the Volunteer Community Sector* project is to implement strategies to improve access for volunteers with disability in the Victorian community sector.

The project is delivered by Volunteering Victoria in partnership with Neighbourhood Houses Victoria and with the support of the Victorian Government.

### Project research focus

Over the course of 2018 – 2019 several project research activities are being undertaken to build an evidence base within the topic focus of inclusion of people with disability as volunteers. The other project research activities are:

- Benchmarking surveys of volunteer-involving organisations
- Focus groups and one-on-one interviews with volunteer managers and volunteers with lived experience with disability
- Case studies on organisations identified as undertaking best practices.

The research conducted aims to ascertain from volunteer-involving organisations what factors they consider to support the inclusion of people with disability as volunteers; what, in their experience, acts as barriers to inclusion and how organisations consider these barriers might be overcome. This evidence base will also inform the delivery of the Victoria ALIVE project.

### Literature Review

This literature review was conducted as part of the Victoria ALIVE research project. This literature review is intended to provide an overview of the current state of volunteering for people with disability primarily from an organisational point of view but also taking into account the experiences of people with disability. Materials reviewed, of which there are many, were filtered and only those which related to volunteering and disability are included in this report. Findings from the review informed the development of the multi-factor research conducted.

## Definitions and Statistics

### Defining disability

The social model of disability promotes the concept of disability as being the barriers which society imposes on people with impairments. This definition has been accepted by most of the Western world, however the term “disability” has been contested for some time. Recent commentators such as Tom Shakespeare (2006), an academic with disability, have re-evaluated the social model of disability. He identifies that overlooking the impact that impairments have on the life and wellbeing of a person can be as problematic as disabling social, organisational and infrastructure barriers (Buckingham & Perry, 2015).

It is important to recognise that people with disability are not a homogenous group. There are considerable differences between one form of impairment and another, and a variety of experiences exist between people living with the same impairment type (Buckingham & Perry, 2005; Gill, 2011).

Within the context of Victoria, Australia the two most pertinent documents for defining disability are the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act, 1992* and the *Victorian Disability, Act 2006*. The former covers all physical, sensory, neurological and cognitive impairments present in a person, either currently or in the past. The Disability Act, however, considers the *impact* of impairment rather than its presence.

The *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC)* conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics defines disability as “any limitation, restriction or impairment which restricts everyday activities and has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months” (Australian Network on Disability, 2018).

By way of illustration, the following statistics demonstrates the prevalence and diversity of disability in Australia (Australian Network on Disability, 2018):

- 45% of Australians aged 16–85 years, experience a mental health condition during their lifetime
- 1 in 6 Australians are affected by hearing loss
- Approximately 357,000 Australians are blind or have low vision.
- 4.4% of people with disability in Australia use a wheelchair
- 14.9% of people with disability use mobility aids.

### Volunteering

The formal definition of volunteering in Australia, is “time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain”. This definition was adopted by Volunteering Australia in July 2015 following extensive sector consultation.

According to Volunteering Australia, the term 'volunteering' covers a wide diversity of activities in Australian society. It includes formal volunteering that takes place within organisations (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way and informal volunteering, acts that take place outside the context of a formal organisation.

Volunteering is often considered as an activity that contributes to community wellbeing. Volunteering activities cover all sectors of society. Forms of volunteering include, but are not limited to:

- Animal care
- Arts, heritage and culture
- Business, professional and union
- Education and training
- Emergency services and environment
- Faith-based
- Health
- International aid and development
- Law, justice and political
- Parenting, children and youth
- Sport and physical recreation
- Welfare and community.

While volunteering provides substantial benefits to society, importantly it also provides significant benefits to the volunteers themselves. The personal benefits of volunteering need to be recognised and fostered. Volunteering should not be exploitative, or be used to replace paid employment (Volunteering Australia, 2015).

The UK publication *Volunteering for All?* (Davis Smith et al; n.d.) discusses how socially excluded people (including people with disability) viewed volunteering as a middle-class white activity. People with disability in particular saw the traditional model of volunteering as perpetuating power differentials whereby they were seen as people to be helped rather than the other way around. This notion is reflected in the *Seeing is Believing* report (Kleeman & Wilson, 2007) which promotes the need for equal power relations for inclusion to be effective.

While there are some similar barriers for volunteering as for employment (Volunteering Geelong, 2009) and volunteering is often viewed as a pathway to employment, there is a tendency in the literature to overemphasise the similarities in barriers to employment and volunteering for people with disability (for instance Ruhindwa, Randall & Cartmel, 2016). However, it is important to acknowledge the motivating forces for business is not the same as for community groups for whom profitability and business output is less a priority than meeting community needs.

## Key statistics on volunteering and disability

Statistics on volunteering and disability vary depending on the source and collection method. Census and General Social Survey (GSS) data are both collected and available through the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), but each data sources provide different information which has some limitations.

According to ABS Census data (as cited in Volunteering Australia, 2018) in 2016, 21 per cent (3.5 million) of people over 15 years were volunteers and of these, 9.8 per cent (106,485) identified as having a profound disability and needing help. In Victoria 21.2 per cent (894,611) of people over 15 years volunteered in 2016, compared to 9.3 per cent (25,780) with a profound disability and needing help (Volunteering Victoria, Jan 2018).

Note that those with a disability responding to the Census were people identifying with *profound disability* and did not include those who did not need help. A claim by *The Australian* newspaper in 2018, cited that in 2016, 15 per cent of people with a disability, 7 per cent of whom are aged over 75 years, are making a volunteer contribution (The Australian, 2018, May 26). This figure is exceeded by a report from the Ministerial Council for Volunteers in Victoria (2017), citing the 2015 ABS General Social Survey data: “Aside from many volunteers in disability organisations, 29 per cent of Australians with a disability had undertaken voluntary work, compared to the general population at 32 per cent.”

It is also worth noting, in a report by Volunteering Geelong, that the number of potential volunteers with disabilities who contact Volunteering Geelong far exceeds the number of available volunteer placement opportunities (Volunteering Geelong, 2009).



## Literature Review Findings

This literature review on volunteering and disability considered barriers experienced by both organisations and volunteers and identified some of the literature which promotes ways to overcome these barriers. It also refers to theoretical studies which offer further suggestions to overcoming barriers. The relevant findings are summarised in the following sections of volunteering benefits, barriers and strategies for improved inclusion.

Much of the existing research focuses on discrimination and employment issues. There is less research overall on the topic of volunteering with disability, particularly from an organisational perspective. Much of the following review is based on the assumption that considerations for employees with disability hold for volunteers with disability, however this is an area that should receive more attention from academic research and organisational management perspective.

### Benefits of volunteering

The literature maintains that apart from the economic benefit of any volunteering to the community (Chia, n.d.), there are many intrinsic benefits for society, an organisation and the volunteer for engaging volunteers with disability:

There are many reasons for people with disability to volunteer, including:

- To overcome social isolation (Chia, n.d.; Davis Smith et al, n.d.; Middleton, 2010)
- To do something worthwhile (Chia, n.d.; Middleton, 2010)
- To demonstrate and develop skill and capabilities (Chia, n.d.; Despott & Leighton, 2012; Middleton, 2010)
- To develop self-awareness and confidence (Chia, n.d.)
- To gain work experience (Chia, n.d.; Middleton, 2010). It has been noted that experience of work was seen as a key enabler for employers to take on a person with a disability (Buckingham & Perry, 2015; Waterhouse, Kimberley, Jonas & Glover, 2010a)
- To challenge attitudes to disability (Middleton, 2010)
- To have their voice heard (Middleton, 2010)
- To try something new and have fun (Middleton, 2010).

For organisations, reasons to be inclusive of volunteers with disability include:

- Access to the many strengths, skills and expertise that people with a disability have to offer (Chia, n.d.)
- Reflecting the diversity of the community makes the organisation more relevant to that community and thus attracts new community members (Chia, n.d.; Despott & Leighton, 2012; Gill, 2011)

- Staff are able to increase their advocacy and communication skills (Despott & Leighton, 2012).

Volunteering that is inclusive of people with disability benefits society in many various ways:

- Positive interaction helps break down stigma and misconceptions and challenge negative attitudes (Chia, n.d.; Middleton, 2010).
- People with disabilities are often able and willing to contribute towards community development and wider society (Ruhindwa et al, 2016)
- Volunteering contributes to the Australian workforce as a common pathway to employment. Increased workforce participation helps to address labour shortages, as well as reducing economic pressures associated with welfare dependence (Ruhindwa et al, 2016).

As Craig and Bigby (2014) show in their report on the inclusion of people with intellectual disability, participation for those with moderate levels of impairment is a very real possibility as long as community groups are given specialised support, information about (intellectual) disability, and efforts are made to foster a particular set of inclusive conditions such that the volunteer and organisation have equitable power dynamics.

However, community groups have a primary purpose of meeting the needs of their members, and inclusion is a balancing act between opening inclusive spaces for people with (intellectual) disability and respect for the conditions under which this can happen (Craig & Bigby, 2014).

## **Barriers to volunteering for people with disability**

### *As viewed by people with disability*

The experience of volunteers with disability in Craig and Bigby's (2014) research was of limited participation and social isolation. Similarly, the broader literature highlights the challenges faced by people with disability and identifies the following issues as impacting participation:

- Difficulty in finding out about volunteer opportunities (Davis Smith et al, n.d.; Ruhindwa et al, 2016)
- Overly formal and inaccessible recruitment processes (Davis Smith et al, n.d.)
- Stigma and misconceptions about disability, negative attitudes of both other participants and leadership (Chia, n.d.; Craig & Bigby, 2014; Davis Smith et al. n.d.)
- Unequal power dynamics (Davis Smith et al, n.d.; Kleeman & Wilson, 2007)
- Financial cost to individual including transport (Chia, n.d.; Davis Smith et al, n.d.; Middleton, 2010)
- Organisational unwillingness to adapt roles to meet volunteer needs/abilities (Chia, n.d.)

- Physical or environmental access issues (Chia, n.d.; Davis Smith et al, n.d.; Middleton, 2010)
- Volunteer agencies and support services under resourced to match or support people with disability to undertake appropriate roles (Chia, n.d.)
- Lack of adequate disability awareness training (Chia, n.d.).
- Some impairments, such as cognitive and psychiatric disability, may have a greater negative impact on acceptance as employees (Waterhouse et al, 2010a), or as volunteers (Dixon, 1981).

### ***Barriers to inclusive volunteering from an organisational perspective***

*“One of the main challenges that (volunteers with disability) face is the erroneous belief that it will be too difficult to incorporate disabled people (sic) into the work of our organisations”* (Gil, 2011).

*“There’s no limit to the scope of voluntary involvement of people with a disability as long as there are no barriers, real as in inaccessible work places, or artificial as in attitudes”* (Simpson, 2001, p71).

As cited in the literature, community organisations perceive the following barriers as working against the inclusion of volunteers with disability:

- Lack of systems and appropriate personnel in place to support volunteers with disability (Middleton, 2010; Ruyter, 2018)
- Lack of confidence: fear by organisation of doing or saying something wrong (Ruyter, 2018); fear of not being able to handle incidents – especially in regard to people with mental illness (Waterhouse et al, 2010a)
- Inability to re-imagine and design roles for volunteers; inability to match the strengths and abilities of volunteers with disability, to meaningful tasks (Middleton, 2010; Ruyter, 2018)
- Lack of knowledge and experience in how to educate volunteers without disability or staff on disability inclusion, and how to deal with negative attitudes (Middleton, 2010; Ruyter, 2018)
- Lack of time and resources to put strategies in place (Davis Smith et al, n.d.).

## **Strategies for inclusion of people with disability**

### ***Overcoming barriers***

Broadly, the identified barriers can be grouped into two categories:

- Attracting and recruiting people with disability (although it should be noted from an earlier claim that there are more people with disability wanting to volunteer than there are roles available for them),
- Inclusion once they arrive, which can be subdivided into:

- Administration issues (resource management, including time; role design; networking, policy development etc)
- Managing attitude change

There are a number of practical “How-To” articles and reports for including people with disability into volunteering offering advice on recruitment and management of volunteers with disability, covering role development , networking and capacity building, linkages with disability service organisations , policy and procedures, and training suggestions (Ashworth & Fell, 2003; Buckingham & Tzanoudakis, 2011; Davis Smith et al., n.d.; Despott & Leighton, 2012; Gill, 2011; Gooding, Anderson & McVilly, n.d.; UNITE, 2001).

Commonly cited suggestions for overcoming challenges and barriers include:

- Disability awareness training for staff and volunteers
- Good policies and procedures in place before engaging a volunteer
- Building and equipment accessible to volunteers with disability
- Volunteer roles which are meaningful and utilise the volunteer’s skills
- Available mentoring and/or a contact for a support person
- Regular consultation with volunteers around what is and isn’t working well and engagement in discussion and decision making.
- Assistance from relevant volunteer/disability organisations.

### ***Changing attitudes***

Two studies in particular address the issue of attitudinal change, with commonalities between their two theoretical approaches, which might suggest a path forward.

Craig and Bigby (2014) cite “Contact Theory” as having the potential to facilitate inclusion for people with intellectual disability. Contact Theory was developed in the mid-1950s in response to the political need to find ways of changing attitudes toward minority and racial religious groups. It posits that the continuing social exclusion of minority groups may be due to the lack of opportunity for interaction or prejudicial attitudes, and that casual contact alone between members of an “in-group” and an “out-group” is insufficient.

They cite other research over the last 50 years (Allport, 1954; Brewer & Brown 1998; Novak & Rogan, 2010; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) which consistently found that contact between a dominant in-group and marginalised out-group leads to favourable outcomes when it occurs under certain conditions. That is, where contact:

- a) allows opportunities for a meaningful level of communication that is personal in nature, frequent, and of reasonable duration
- b) promotes equal status
- c) fosters cooperation in working toward shared goals, and
- d) takes place within an environment where there is authority support.

Kleeman and Wilson's review (2007) draws on the work of Kevin Murfitt (2006) to discuss the Theory of Planned Behaviour which identifies the links between attitude and behaviour change. Murfitt's study concludes that positive attitudes towards people with disability would more likely develop from awareness programs when three key factors were addressed:

- a) Interactions between people with disability and people without disability must be based on experience as much as possible
- b) There must be equal status in the relationship between people with and without disability
- c) Each person must be working towards a common goal.

Kleeman and Wilson (2007) promote the essential need for disability awareness training for relevant personnel in organisations to maximise the likelihood of a successful experience. However, to increase effectiveness the following conditions must be present:

- a) Direct contact between program participants and people with a disability. Features of direct contact should include:
  - longevity of contact (over a sustained period of time)
  - the ability/time to get to know each other
  - equal status of people with and without a disability
  - a focus on the person with a disability as connected with and representative of other people with a disability
  - mutual work on shared goal
  - positive shared experiences.
- b) Programs that are longer in duration rather than short, one-off activities to allow time for attitude change to build incrementally.
- c) Programs focused on behaviours in contexts that the participant has control over, that is the ability, resources, skills, authority to enact. That is, a focus on actions the participant can do in their everyday context.
- d) Programs personally involving and experiential, or at least, complement the traditional persuasive message approach with elements of this.

### ***Changing culture***

What seems to be required is a change of culture ("the way we do things here"), but any one culture does not live in isolation. We live, for instance, in a culture which values speed, business, and intellect, all of which may be antithetical to a culture of inclusiveness (Buckingham, 2004).

In 1996, in the UK a nationwide review was undertaken into inclusiveness of people with disability into further education. The resulting report created cultural change within institutions across the country (Buckingham, 1999).

The report concluded that there was a world of difference between offering additional human or physical aids to people with disability and redesigning the actual processes (of learning), assessment and organisation to meet the needs of students, and that only this second approach could be called inclusive (Tomlinson, 1996). This assessment was made in respect of learning but might also be widened to include other aspects of life such as volunteering.

### ***Organisational leadership***

Much of the literature examining the role of leadership in driving change and establishing inclusive cultures focuses on the corporate or government sectors but has implications for any organisations seeking to improve inclusiveness (Australian Network on Disability, 2013; DHHS, 2018; Kalargyrou, 2014; O’Leary, Russell & Tilly, 2015; Disability Equality Index, n.d.). Gooding et al., (n.d.) and Waterhouse et al., (2010b), in their reviews of existing literature, highlighted the importance of leadership in promoting inclusion in community and employment settings respectively.

The literature suggests that despite good intentions, there is significant room for improvement in business leadership (O’Leary et al, 2015) and fear, including fear of doing the wrong thing, contributes to leadership inertia (Australian Network on Disability, 2013; The Valuable 500, n.d.; Unite, 2011; Waterhouse et al., 2010b).

Leaders drive change through championing inclusion, driving processes for example through inclusion access plans, building disability confidence, and bringing the existing paid and/or volunteer workforce on board (Australian Network on Disability, 2013; The Valuable 500, n.d.).

Case studies illustrate that positive leadership can create inclusive work places (Kalargyrou, 2014; The Valuable 500, n.d.). This in turn may extend to inclusive volunteering, as creating an inclusive culture removes barriers in both domains.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review has identified a number of barriers faced by people with disability which are preventing organisations from engaging these people with effective and meaningful volunteering opportunities. The review also identified a number of strategies to mitigate these issues, through leadership and improved practices.

Contact Theory informs the ways in which volunteering can be more inclusive. It also suggests at the macro level that improved volunteering, in terms of inclusiveness and accessibility, should be seen by organisations and governments as a means of addressing

historic injustice and reducing existing discrimination and marginalisation of people with disability. Meaningful, effective volunteering experiences that are well managed and mutually beneficial, offer the opportunity for prolonged engagement of people with disability through cooperative activities towards shared goals. There is therefore a strong case to dedicate resources to improving inclusive volunteer opportunities for people with disability, at a community, regional and state level.

Leadership to champion change where required is a critical first step in achieving organisational change for inclusion. Driving culture and processes from the top down maximise chances of success. Developing disability confidence at the leadership level is an enabler of effective leadership for inclusion.

As mentioned at the start of this report, findings from this literature review has informed the development of the multi-factor research. A summary of the research will be published in the Victoria ALIVE website, found here: [www.victoriaalive.org.au](http://www.victoriaalive.org.au).

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