

VOLUNTEERING MATTERS

FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

Successful volunteering and work experience placements for young people with life limiting conditions

The Futures Midlands project, led by Volunteering Matters, supported 12 young people with complex and life-limiting illnesses in the West Midlands to recognise their skills and shape their future through mentor support. The project aimed to engage them in developing their skills and volunteering and participate in work placements.

As part of this project, factors affecting successful volunteer and work experience placements, family support and successful support roles were identified. Recommendations were then made.

Planning volunteering and work experience placements for young disabled people

1. It is getting more difficult to find volunteering and work experience placements for young people under the age of 18 due to organisation policies and insurance.
To find opportunities for young people under the age of 18, include consideration of other options such as work preparation activities. Volunteering opportunities may be an easier option, although some organisations instil similar restrictions.
2. Involve the young person's family from the start as their views and opinions may differ from their child's. Resolve any issues prior to the placement starting and keep in touch with families throughout to keep them involved and reassured.
3. Be realistic with young people about what opportunities could be provided, so you meet their expectations and don't make promises that you cannot keep.
4. Tailor each opportunity to the individual. Don't assume that something that worked for one person, at one organisation, in one location will work somewhere else.
5. Pay careful consideration to the location of the opportunity and the proximity to public transport hubs and/or disability parking.
6. If recruiting Mentors to support young people, ensure they have sufficient opportunity to get to know each other before any formal intervention begins.

7. When engaging with potential volunteering and work experience placement providers, face to face contact proves more effective than emails or phone calls.
8. Quality placements are those that are beneficial to both the young person and the host organisation.
9. Ensure that the young person is given a meaningful role or task. These should be kept simple and achievable.
10. Ensure that the opportunity is thoroughly risk assessed - including the working environment, role and tasks.
11. Ensure that the host organisation and mentor understand that their role is to empower the young person to experience work. Where needed, provide host organisations with training to develop awareness on how they can best support the young person.

Work experience or placement opportunities – factors to consider

12. Be flexible. Consider setting up opportunities that are shorter than a full working day. Work around the individual's personal care needs.
13. Review any work experience opportunity on a regular basis.
14. Ensure both the young person and organisation have details of a contact person so that any issues that arise can be dealt with swiftly.
15. Consider appointing the young person with a buddy in the organisation that they could go to for more informal support.

A checklist for a successful volunteering or work experience placement:

- An accessible building
- An appropriate and accessible working environment, which should be risk assessed
- Access to accessible toilets
- Access to personal care (where needed and through care packages)
- Induction and training for the young person
- A contact person that the young person can go to at any time
- Provision of a buddy
- A clear but simple role for the young person

- Structured and achievable activities
- Opportunities for the young person to suggest their own ideas, within reason
- Opportunities for the young person to co-produce their own project, where possible
- Flexibility in case a first option does not go to plan