



Inspired
ACTION

Refusing to ignore people in crisis

About us

The British Red Cross helps people in crisis, wherever and wherever they are. We are part of a global voluntary network, responding to conflicts, natural disasters and individual emergencies. We help vulnerable people in the UK and abroad prepare for, withstand and recover from emergencies in their own communities. redcross.org.uk

About our partners

Spirit of 2012 is a charity funding partners to provide opportunities in sports, physical activity, arts and culture, volunteering and social action. Spirit was founded to continue and recreate the spirit of pride, positivity and social connectedness experienced during the London 2012 Games. They invest to create good outcomes for people and communities. spiritof2012trust.org.uk

Whizz-Kidz provides disabled children and young people across the UK with essential mobility equipment, and life skills services, to help them realise and achieve their true potential. Since 1990, Whizz-Kidz have changed the lives of more than 20,000 disabled children by providing them with the right equipment to fit their young lives, and opportunities to make friends, learn new skills and look forward to a brighter future. whizz-kidz.org.uk





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Welcome to our Inspired Action toolkit.

Welcome to our Inspired Action toolkit. Many organisations are on the same journey as the British Red Cross to engage more young people as volunteers, and make opportunities accessible, inclusive and fun. We are delighted to offer you this toolkit as a means of sharing the lessons we have learned.

This guide is about how to recruit and support young volunteers, based on our own experience of delivering Inspired Action across the UK. It contains top tips and resources that can be adapted to different settings. We are assuming that organisations engaging with young people already have a volunteering policy, and a safeguarding policy, and have given consideration to potential additional vulnerabilities associated with the inclusion of young disabled people.

In sharing these lessons, we hope that we can contribute to the removal of barriers to participation, so that everyone can join in and volunteer to make the world a better place!

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1 Inspired Action

Harnessing the energy of young volunteers

Inspired Action is a UK-wide volunteering project delivered by the British Red Cross. It offers safe, high quality and accessible volunteering opportunities to young people across the UK. Up to 1,000 young people have taken up an Inspired Action volunteering opportunity over the three-year project. Working in partnership with Whizz-Kidz (whizz-kidz.org.uk), **Inspired Action addresses the barriers to participation that too often prevent young disabled people and other under-represented groups from volunteering.**

Inspired Action is funded by the Spirit of 2012 (spiritof2012trust.org.uk) until June 2017. It aims to keep up the wave of enthusiasm towards volunteering that was seen in the UK around the London Olympics. Inspired Action is also part of the Step up to Serve #iwill campaign (iwill.org.uk).

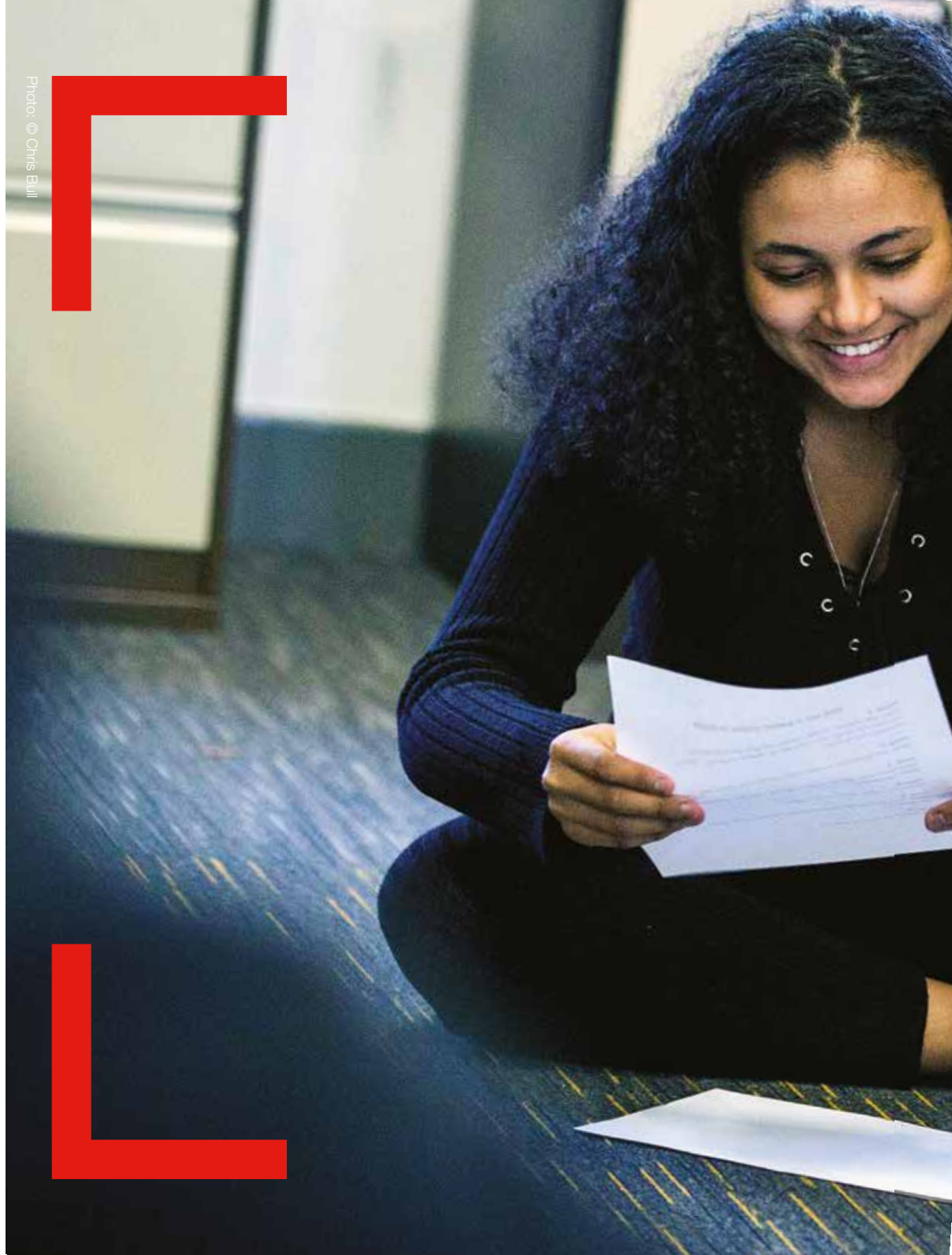
Volunteering with the Red Cross

Around 20,000 volunteers help the British Red Cross reach people in crisis across the UK and 20 per cent of them are aged between 15 and 25. Worldwide, a staggering 17 million people volunteer with the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement.

There are already many opportunities for young people aged 15 to 25 to get involved in the work of the British Red Cross, from internships to work experience. What's different about Inspired Action is its' focus on encouraging young people who had never thought of volunteering before to get involved.

As an organisation, we are always looking for ways to engage volunteers who more closely reflect the diversity of the people we serve. Currently young disabled people are under-represented among our wonderful volunteers. Inspired Action is a project designed to address this challenge.

Photo: © Chris Bill





1

What's different about volunteering with **Inspired Action**?

Volunteering with Inspired Action offers an improved experience for volunteers. Inspired Action has five engagement workers across the country – dedicated to meeting and mentoring our young volunteers. We offer training, funding and an accreditation scheme designed to enhance young people's skills and confidence.

All this is underpinned by the British Red Cross value to be inclusive. In order to help the organisation live up to this value, Inspired Action has been gathering evidence about the British Red Cross' current practices around engaging young people. We have gathered a wide variety of feedback about where we need to change to be more inclusive to diverse groups of young people generally, and disabled young people in particular.

Inspired Action: how it works

We recruited our Inspired Action volunteers by delivering our fun-filled 'inspiration workshops' right across the country. In total over 4,000 young people attended an inspiration workshop in their schools or youth clubs with 1,000 signing up to volunteer with us.

We targeted groups of young people who might not otherwise think about volunteering, or those with additional barriers to taking part, and told them about the opportunities in their local area.

Those who were interested in volunteering worked with our engagement managers to decide what they wanted to do. The engagement workers also helped them apply if they needed support. This support

might involve the engagement worker speaking with a line manager to get them thinking about what an individual might need in terms of adaptations or support. They might even join the young person for the interview.

Some young people came to Inspired Action via referrals from specialised organisations such as the Royal National Institute of Blind People (rnib.org.uk) and Whizz-Kidz. In these cases, our engagement worker would first meet with the organisation and the young person. They could then support the prospective line manager to think about the individual's specific needs in advance, and answer any questions they might have. Sometimes they would adapt role descriptions to only include tasks matching the young person's skills, motivations and needs. For example, after referring a young person to us, the RNIB offered to visit the office before his start date to deliver a workshop about visual impairment. This increased the understanding and disability confidence of staff.

Of the 1,000 young people who have volunteered through Inspired Action, 200 people delivered a 'Social Action Project'. Social Action Projects are devised by young people themselves to benefit their community in some way. Groups could apply for a grant of up to £150 for these youth-led volunteering opportunities which were conducted over a set period of time.

The projects were varied and innovative (see page 25), and ranged from giving therapeutic massages in school, to supporting elderly people in the community and organising awareness-raising events about mental health issues.

Keeping it fresh: attracting and retaining young volunteers

Recent initiatives such as the Join In campaign (joininuk.org.uk) following the 2012 Olympics, and the introduction of the National Citizen Service (ncsy.es.co.uk), have seen more young people volunteer. It's up to organisations to attract and retain young people in order to harness their energy and enthusiasm.

Charities need a diverse volunteer base for a variety of reasons. Here are just a few reasons why it's important to engage young people as volunteers:



From volunteering to employment

Volunteering often opens the door to paid employment. A young person can really make an application stand out by demonstrating they have developed relevant skills in a volunteering role. Volunteering can be especially important for young disabled people who face additional barriers to employment, such as discrimination or inaccessible environments.

For many people though, volunteering is more than just a stepping stone to a job. Volunteering is the opportunity to give something back and contribute meaningfully to the community, providing a sense of belonging and purpose.

With volunteering having such strong benefits, it is vital that opportunities are open to all. We need to remove barriers so that everyone can take part.



2

Recruiting Volunteers

Inspiration workshops

A key part of our recruitment strategy was getting out and meeting as many young people as we could. Delivered to over 4,000 young people, our inspiration workshops were a fun way to introduce the organisation to young people in an environment where they were comfortable. We encouraged attendees to think about the 'double benefit' of volunteering, exploring what they had to offer in terms of personal qualities and time, and what they had to gain in terms of skills and experience.

The tone was informal and fun. For some young people who lack confidence, responding to an advert is daunting whereas meeting someone from the Red Cross with a friendly face is welcoming, and encourages them to apply to be a volunteer.

The feedback from young people who attended inspiration workshops backs this up. Many said they simply wouldn't have known about volunteering opportunities if we'd not gone and met them. This shows the importance of reaching out and directly targeting groups who are under-represented.

Recruiting volunteers

Throughout the project we have learnt lots about recruiting young people as volunteers. Here are our top tips.

Young people can lack confidence

We met many young people who, for whatever reason, felt that they didn't have anything to offer the organisation. This feeling can be further compounded for young disabled people whose abilities are often underestimated by others.

What works

Be as reassuring as possible and stress that training will be given. It might be helpful to get the young person to consider what attributes they already have, which will be useful as a volunteer. You could also:

- Offer one-month trial periods or taster sessions to see whether they will enjoy the opportunity.
- Arrange for them to speak with a current volunteer about their experience.
- Emphasise that the beauty of volunteering is that it increases skills and contributes to self-development. We find out we are capable of things we previously didn't think were possible!

Photo: © Layton Thompson

The importance of flexibility

Many young people are simply not available during the day because they are in full-time education. Yet traditionally, most volunteering opportunities are during office hours.

What works

We created an 'Ambassador' role that enabled young people to volunteer with the British Red Cross in their school or youth club. A series of 'missions' supporting our campaigns during school time got students to deliver assemblies, collect donations for shops, and get their friends to download our First Aid App. The missions were designed to be low key, and be able to fit around a busy student's timetable.



Plan recruitment times carefully

It's important to take account of exam times, school holidays, etc., when recruiting young volunteers.

What works

Recruitment specifically aimed at young people in the summer, when many are free and enquiring about volunteering is a good idea. Note though that university students often move back home during holidays, and so may be available in different locations to their term time base. This is both a positive and negative, so needs to be taken into consideration when planning.

Keep up the communication

Young people generally can't take phone calls during the school day, and may be reluctant to answer a phone call from an unknown number. We've also found that potential volunteers can lose their enthusiasm if they don't receive a prompt response to an enquiry.

What works

It's best to call young people outside school time using a number they recognise, or send them an email or text. Having something written down means that young people can consider their response, instead of becoming flustered by an unexpected phone call. You might also consider getting them to 'missed call' you if they have no credit and you can call them back.

Get life-saving skills at your fingertips with the free Red Cross first aid app.

Make it simple

Completing application forms can be time-consuming and daunting for some young people. Not all young people have access to a computer and online forms are not accessible to everyone.

What works

We worked alongside young people who needed extra support completing application forms, either supporting them to complete it themselves, or completing it on their behalf if the format was completely inaccessible to them.

Where possible:

- > Use simple language and keep the form as brief as possible.
- > Have different ways of applying (for example, online and on paper).
- > Produce information in accessible formats.

Stress free interviews

Young people may have never been to an interview before and may well feel intimidated at the prospect. A disabled young person may be especially anxious about interviews if they have experienced stigma or discrimination in the past.

What works

As far as is possible, we recommend trying to take the stress out of the interview process.

We offered young people the chance to have informal chats in a setting that they felt comfortable in, such as their college. If this led to a more formal interview, we let them know what to expect, and coached them through

some standard questions. If a young person has a learning disability or communication barriers to overcome, it might be a good idea to let them know what questions they will be asked in advance.

We also gave young people the opportunity to be accompanied if that gave them more confidence.



Other tips include:

- > Ask about any access requirements before the meeting. Do they need font in large print? Or coloured overlays for printed materials?
- > Take the opportunity to give the young person a tour of the place they will be volunteering as part of the interview.
- > Give instructions about how to get to the interview. We found including a photo of the building really helped.
- > In cases where public transport is inaccessible, consider paying for a taxi, or moving the interview to a more convenient location.

Managing expectations

Young people have many demands on their time. They need to know how long and how often they will be expected to volunteer.

For some young people, paying expenses is a key factor in deciding whether to take a voluntary role. Similarly, the expectation that volunteering will lead to paid employment has to be managed.

What works

Be clear about you can expect from one another. Give clear role descriptions and use the interview to paint a picture of what volunteering might be like on a typical day. If it is a role that relies heavily on punctuality and commitment, say so. You can also use this time to explain what and how expenses will be paid, whether there are opportunities for training or development, or to move into employment.

Celebrate Diversity

People from under-represented groups may be less likely to volunteer because of the lack of diversity shown in promotional material.

Images in charity promotion can often feature disabled young people as the recipients of help, rather than active volunteers. Such stereotypes are unhelpful and off-putting for disabled applicants.

What works

- > Use images that show a diversity of volunteers.
- > Consult with young people when producing promotion material.
- > Create promotional material in accessible formats.

Be positive about involving disabled people

For a young person to be able to discuss any additional needs they have, they need to trust the person they are talking to, and the organisation as a whole. They need assurance that the information that they give will be treated confidentially, and will not be perceived negatively.

British Red Cross has signed up to the Disability Action Alliance Volunteers Charter, expressing our commitment to supporting disabled volunteers.

For more information, visit disabilityactionalliance.org.uk.

What works

- > Explicitly express that you are positive about including disabled people on promotional material, application forms and role descriptions.
- > Make sure that support needs and adjustments are discussed in the interview stage.
- > Be clear that the equal opportunities form is separate to the application form and is anonymous.

Recruiting disabled volunteers

The Social Model of disability

At the British Red Cross we use the 'social model of disability'. The social model says that the person is not the 'problem' rather that society is the problem because it does not accommodate difference. From this perspective, disability is not something that people 'have' but something 'done' to people by the lack of provision of access to so many aspects of community life.

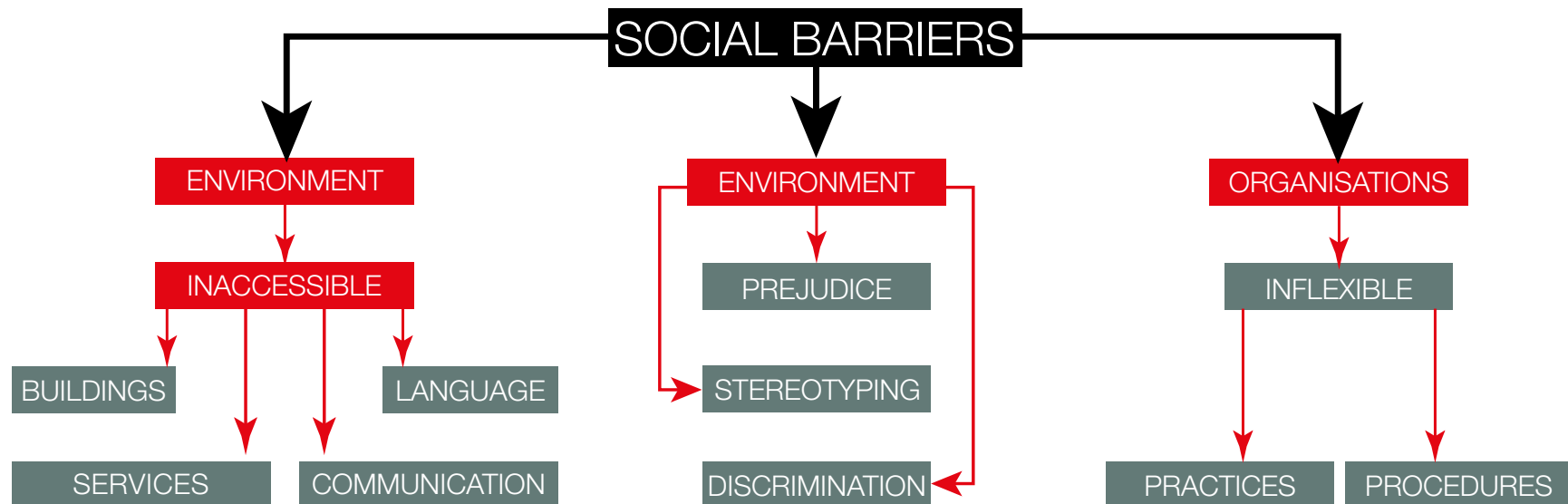
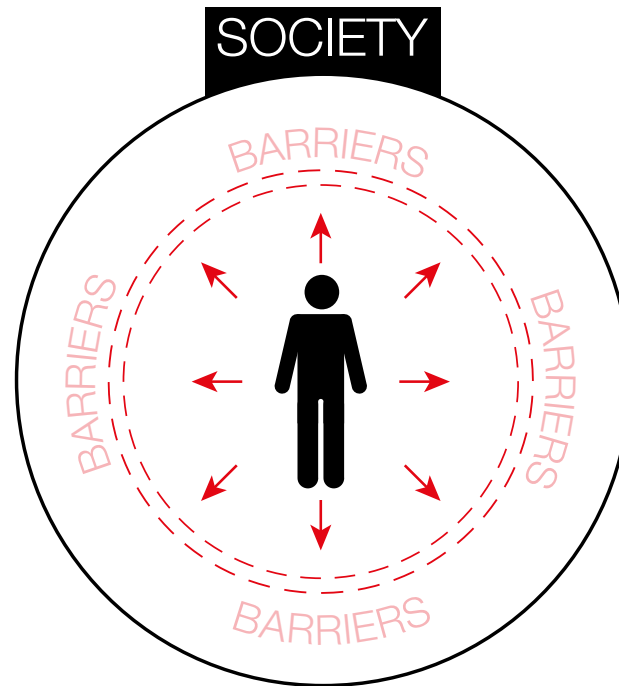




Photo: © Dave McHugh



TALKING ABOUT DISCLOSURE

The project was interested in learning what we needed to change about our usual systems, procedures or environments so that everyone could participate. This relied on getting honest feedback from participants about what wasn't working for them and how we could improve. Also, to be able to give the best experience to a participant, they needed to feel comfortable disclosing their support needs.

Yet, whether someone discloses or not depends on a range of factors. These include: how we ask about their need for additional support, what the information is being used for, and how they perceive it will be received by the organisation. To many the term 'disability' is loaded with negative connotations and this gives rise to a reluctance to disclose on an application. So while recording the number of disabled participants on a project sounds like a simple task, in reality, it requires both thought and sensitivity.

In our experience, more young people disclosed that they considered themselves to be a disabled person through our application process, where the information is gathered anonymously. However, for some, the opposite was true; they were happy to disclose verbally, but didn't want any written record of their disclosure.

We ran a focus group with eight disabled students to explore this topic further. The group was asked what was stopping them from disclosing their additional support needs and what we could do to help them feel able to be open about this. Their answers are illustrated here. Those seen by the young people as the most important are featured on post-it notes.

Why young people say they don't want to disclose support needs

- > Fear of discrimination.
- > Afraid that people won't like you.
- > Worry that people will think you're stupid.
- > Not confident about how to say it.
- > Fear of bullying or harassment.
- > Fear that people may treat you differently.
- > Feeling scared or nervous.
- > Fear of getting laughed at.
- > Don't want to make other people upset or scared.
- > Might make people think you can't do things.
- > Don't trust an organisation.

Fear of
discrimination

Worry that people
will think
you're stupid

Afraid that
people won't
like me

What young people say an organisation can do to encourage them to disclose support needs

- > Make sure people know that they will get the support they need.
- > Be positive with the young person as it makes them feel positive too.
- > Give encouragement, support, and love.
- > Organisations need to put more effort into training and support for young people.
- > Give people a good buddy.
- > Have someone they can trust and to help them.
- > Be a friendly organisation.
- > Be a respectful, patient organisation – show you understand that sometimes it's okay to make mistakes.
- > Give roles that don't highlight your disability – like don't have to spell accurately.
- > Organisation needs to build trust.

Top tips on ways to build trust:

- Sign up to a disability charter for volunteers, and display it in your building.
- Set up a disability network for peer support.
- Emphasise that bullying, harassment and discrimination are not tolerated, and support this in your policies.
- Tell the young person what to do if they experience bullying or discrimination.
- Reassure volunteers that disclosure of support needs is confidential.

- Be clear about why you are asking for the information.
- Have a 'buddy system' for young volunteers.
- Train your staff to be disability confident.
- Be positive and patient.



Recruiting disabled volunteers

It is vital that young people are safe and supported during their time volunteering. In order to give them the best experience, make sure you chat about their support needs before they start.

The disabled person knows their own abilities. They are best placed to identify what they need to participate, so describing the tasks required by a role in detail is helpful to the discussion. It's important not to make assumptions, and instead, to ask open questions. Often the question 'do you have any additional requirements or support needs?' is a good starting point.

However, young people might be hesitant to ask for adaptations. If they have recently become a disabled person or if it is a new situation that they haven't experienced before, they might not know what support they will need. This is where a specific offer of help might be appreciated. Questions such as 'can we provide a taxi for you to attend?' or 'would you like me to send the interview questions in advance?' are helpful in such cases.



Tips before meeting a potential disabled volunteer

It is important to remember a few things before meeting with a young disabled person who wants to volunteer. Don't try and establish what the 'condition' is. Questions such as 'what is your condition?' are not appropriate. It's also important to note that:

- **The discussion is not about establishing what the person can or can't do. It is only about finding out what support we need to give to have them on the team. For example, it is not appropriate to ask 'can you read and write?'**
- **Always have the discussion in a place where you have a level of privacy.**
- **Always talk to the person directly, not their carer, their parent or their interpreter.**

You don't need to be an expert to engage a disabled person as a volunteer; it is about asking only relevant questions respectfully and being thoughtful.

Confidentiality

- **You should not disclose the nature of a person's condition or impairment without their consent.**
- **You should only do so when it is strictly necessary for health and safety reasons.**
- **People working alongside the disabled volunteer may need to know some details to make sure they can provide adequate support / adjustments.**
- **Discuss with the disabled volunteer how much and how this information should be passed on.**
- **Reassure them that disclosure is about providing adequate support and not about excluding people.**

Put the person in control of what other people know about them, and make sure they don't feel 'talked about' behind their back.



3

Retaining Volunteers

Happy volunteers stay volunteers for longer. But what do young people in particular need from us to keep them enthusiastic and committed?

We asked young people at our focus groups what they wanted to gain from volunteering and these were their top answers:

- > New skills and experiences
- > Confidence
- > Improving their C.V.
- > Making new friends
- > Helping others.

Friendships

Making new friends is something that our volunteers really appreciated. We found that it is a good idea to encourage young people to attend volunteering activities in pairs to increase their confidence. They also appreciated being told there would be other young people at events and training sessions.

We tried to find every young person a 'buddy' where possible – who doesn't need a buddy when they move to a new place? It was an informal link with someone they could ask questions to, or go to lunch with. For less confident young people, this made a big difference.


I like to volunteer and help people because it motivates me to be a good person and inspires me at the same time.

I am so glad I have joined the Red Cross, it's been amazing so far meeting lots of new people and making new friends. I can't wait to use my new skills.




Rewards and recognition

Young people consistently told us that they value certificates and rewards for their time and effort. For a young person certificates are proof that they have volunteered, and they can be put into their records to show universities or future employers.



Certificates help us feel appreciated, and it's nice to feel appreciated. They make us feel good.



For this reason, we also developed an accreditation scheme to help our young people track their progress in seven key areas:

Communication

Personal skills

Confidence

Leadership


Project management

Employability


Diversity awareness.

This allowed them to see how their employability and personal skills had improved during their time with us.

We found this also acted as a springboard for discussion between the volunteer and their manager to set goals. At the end of their volunteering journey, they also helped the young people articulate the skills they have developed, which is useful for job seekers.



I feel by volunteering I can not only help people who need help but also gain interesting knowledge and experience and skills by undertaking different tasks.



Expenses

Money can be a barrier for young people wishing to participate in volunteering. Giving money for travel upfront can make the difference between someone attending or not.

Claiming expenses should be made as easy as possible and should be paid promptly. Remember that money can be a sensitive issue, and young volunteers find it difficult to ask for expenses, so be the first to bring it up. Be clear about what can and can't be claimed before someone takes part.

Travel and transport

Being travel confident is a life skill that can be developed through volunteering.

Young people are generally reliant on lifts from parents or public transport to get them volunteering. For a young person who wants to increase their independence, public transport might be preferred, but they still might need some help to get the confidence to use it alone.

Think about working out the route with them, or meeting them at their stop to help them find their way. Where young people have accessibility requirements, specific travel plans might be required.

Communication

Keep up the communication. You can use Facebook, Twitter, bulletins and blogs to check in with your volunteers outside of their volunteering hours. This keeps up the young person's motivation and interest, and lets them know that they are not forgotten.

Flexibility is key

Young people are generally freer to explore opportunities than adult volunteers. Their attention might be drawn to a number of causes, meaning that they support multiple charities. You can expect their commitment to peak and trough, as their attention is diverted elsewhere. They may also take time out from volunteering entirely, to go travelling or study, before coming back at a later time.


Nonetheless, engaging a young person as a volunteer can significantly develop their values. It can affect all their future life choices.




My experience with the British Red Cross has allowed me to see the world from a different perspective.



A young person may never truly 'leave' the Red Cross Movement, but continue to be a supporter wherever life takes them, if they have a good experience.



I feel that the organisation makes a huge impact on the country, and I am proud to be a part of it.



This then begs the question: should volunteer retention be the goal, or should we offer more ‘pick up and drop’ opportunities to people? Inspired Action asked young people for a minimum commitment of six months. This was because learning from Spirit-funded projects indicated that this is the amount of time needed to see changes and benefits to themselves and others.

We found that, in practice, the majority of participants stayed on longer than this.

However, for some young people, six months was too overwhelming to commit to, and we were keen to express to hesitant volunteers that they could come for a week, and see how they got on. Our service co-ordinators were supportive of this approach, and we didn’t put young people through to the training stage until they had finished their informal taster, and were keen to commit. For young people who were looking for a shorter term commitment, we were also able to offer them a Social Action Project opportunity.

Understanding why young people leave

An exit interview is an ideal time to ask young people for feedback on their experience. However, we often found it hard to find out when young people had stopped volunteering, as they might just stop turning up or answering the phone. In this scenario, the opportunity to resolve an issue, or to learn from it, is lost.

A young person was volunteering in a retail shop. They were frequently being given the task of sorting out the back room, away from other volunteers. This was a helpful activity, but with no variation, and without interaction with other volunteers, the young person felt dissatisfied. Rather than speaking to her manager about it, she complained to her mum, who in turn contacted her Inspired Action engagement worker. They set up a meeting with the manager, who had no idea that the young person was unhappy. Her manager had presumed that because this young person was quietly getting on with the task that they were fine.

This story is not untypical and is revealing of a few truths:

- > It is important for managers to check in regularly with volunteers and ask them how they are getting on.
- > Some volunteers like a variety of tasks and want to feel they are progressing by trying new things.
- > Some volunteers like to do tasks in a social environment.

Most revealing of all is that young people might find it harder than an adult to say how they feel or ask for what they need. We wanted to help young people to feel confident to share their feelings, and encourage managers to ask them how they feel.

Confidence and leadership training

With that in mind, we created our confidence and leadership training for young people. The training was designed to:

- > Practise skills such as confident communication, team work and decision making in a supportive environment.
- > Recognise the difference between communicating passively, aggressively and assertively.
- > Rehearse ways to be assertive in everyday situations.

Using fun activities, young people learned about what assertiveness looks like. They explored why young people might not feel confident in certain situations, and through role play, explored situations they experience where they don't feel confident to speak out. With the young people suggesting the scenarios themselves, the sessions were always revealing, and became a form of feedback to us about situations in the organisation and outside of it, where they wanted to feel more assertive and confident.

Such situations included:

- > Asking for a reference.
- > Being assertive in an emergency situation.
- > Contributing ideas or giving your opinion at a volunteer meeting night.
- > Delivering a group project.
- > Saying no when you feel pressured to cover a duty.

The training also included a tower building task which was useful for young people to practise a number of skills including leadership, time management, problem solving and team work.

Mainly the groups of young people didn't know each other beforehand, and their confidence grew over time through facilitators setting up a supportive environment and encouraging lots of interaction.



For a free copy of the *Confidence and leadership training session*, please email information@redcross.org.uk.



Top tips for keeping young volunteers engaged

- Offer a variety of tasks and challenges so that they can keep learning new skills.
- Make them aware of training opportunities internally and externally.
- Help them set goals and reflect on how they are improving.
- Celebrate their achievements with certificates or thank you cards.
- Build their confidence through encouragement and positivity.
- Emphasise the connection between the task they are doing, and how it is helping others.
- Pay expenses promptly and ideally upfront.
- Create situations where they can meet and make friends with other volunteers their own age.

Photo: © Patrick Harrison





Social Action Projects

As part of Inspired Action, we offered bespoke volunteering opportunities to young people who were unable to commit to a regular voluntary role.

Social Action Projects were devised by young people to benefit their community in some way. Groups could apply for a grant of up to £150 to take part. We kept the application form simple, and the criteria broad, to allow for maximum creativity.

Our team met with groups of young people to help them formulate their ideas. They used a series of activities as part of a workshop, before completing the application form together.

A panel of young people would then review the application, checking that it matched the following criteria:

- Be about helping people and responding to a need.
- Be neutral (not promoting religious or political ideologies).
- Support the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross movement and our mission.
- Be within budget (£150).
- Be completed within 12 weeks.
- Be safe for everyone.

The panel then gave feedback on aspects the group may have overlooked. We set out not to say 'no' to any group, but rather to say 'please tweak your idea, and try again'.

Over 12 weeks, groups of young people would then implement their projects with support from their Inspired Action engagement worker, and teacher or youth worker. We were flexible with this model for groups that required additional support, such as allowing more time, or increasing the budget to cover access requirements.

POSITIVE CHANGE

Are you aged 13-25?
Want to try something new?
Or know someone who does?
Volunteering could be just
what you need.



Benefits of Social Action Projects

- > Shorter commitment.
- > Can be done in their own setting.
- > Flexible and can be offered without training.
- > Allows for creativity.
- > Participants take ownership of their projects.
- > People can still volunteer when there are no regular services recruiting.

Inspired Action Social Action Projects

The projects that young people delivered surprised us. They were both creative and diverse, as these examples show.

Therapeutic Massage

Exam time can be stressful. But there was one school bucking the trend thanks to a project run by four year 12 students.

The students had already been volunteering with the British Red Cross, giving hand, arm and shoulder massages in a local care home. Running a project for their peers within their school timetable allowed them to continue volunteering without being released from school.

They advertised and encouraged people to come along and experience their stress-relieving treatments. Year 12 student Brad Critchett, was one of the lucky recipients of a massage, “it was very relaxing and helped me to feel less stressed at a very stressful time,” he said.

One thing the students learnt was that providing therapeutic support is as much about the conversation and listening skills as it is about the massage itself. Feeling awkward or uncomfortable speaking with people you don't know is part of growing up, but is particularly challenging when you're massaging someone you don't know. Their teacher is looking at how to incorporate developing these 'softer' skills into their learning.

Good Hygiene in Prison

The power of Social Action Projects to give flexible volunteering opportunities to young people who might otherwise struggle to take part in is demonstrated by Parc Matters.

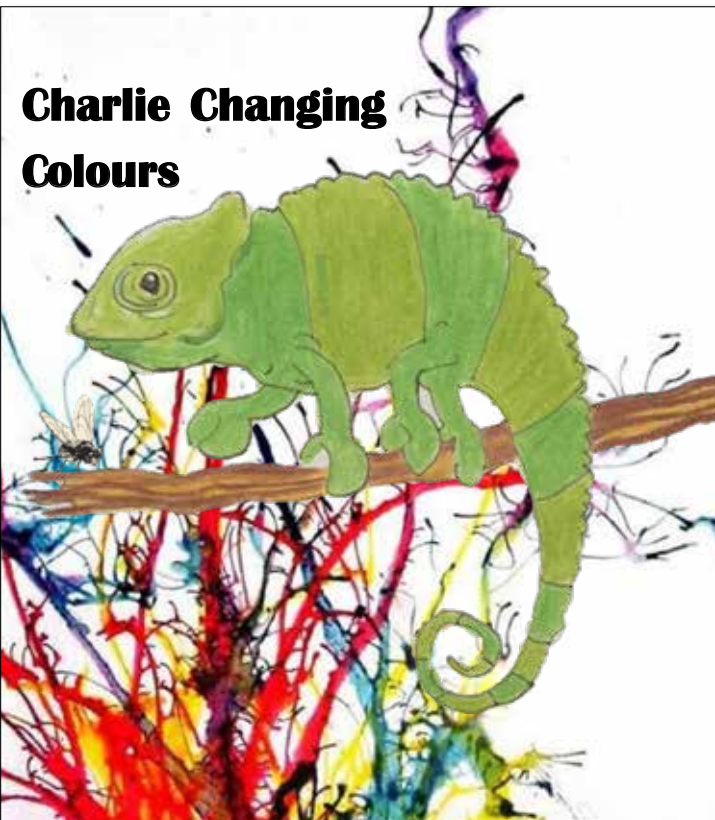
Set in Parc Prison, Wales, Parc Matters is a collaboration between the British Red Cross, Public Health Wales and Parc Prison.

Ten inmates were interviewed and selected to be volunteers. They were given a tailored training package that included information about how viruses spread quickly in small communities.

The group used their Inspired Action funding to buy 12 torches and two bottles of anti-bacterial gel. They put the anti-bacterial gel on their hands and touched objects in the gym. They then turned the lights out and shone the torch over the equipment to show how easily germs spread.

In total 53 inmates took part in the 30-minute session.





Charlie Changing Colours

A Dyslexic Chameleon

Rianna's Social Action Project raised awareness about dyslexia - something both she and her friends had experience of.

One of her friends found out they had dyslexia a few months after starting her GCSEs. Rianna felt it was important to make younger children aware of the day-to-day learning difficulties some of their peers may experience.

So she created a book featuring the dyslexic chameleon Charlie.

Charlie didn't believe in himself and couldn't camouflage like the other chameleons.

"By the end of the book Charlie believes in himself and overcomes his dyslexia with the support of his teacher."

"I read my book at a nursery and at my local library, and the kids responded well. They loved the pictures," she said.

Accessible parking in Scotland

A group of young disabled people in Cumbernauld, Scotland like to meet up in town to shop, go to the cinema, get something to eat and socialise.

They need to use the accessible parking spaces in town in order to access these activities. The trouble they found was that this was increasingly difficult due to the misuse of accessible parking spaces.

The group felt that there was a lack of understanding with the general public as to the stress and disturbance that the lack of vacant accessible parking spaces causes to their everyday life.

With that in mind, they set up an awareness raising campaign called 'Blue Badge Friendly'.



The campaign included the following to help spread the word about the campaign:

- > A Facebook page.
- > A video-blog.
- > A window sticker with a pledge to use the correct parking spaces.
- > A #BBF hashtag.

Winter warmer hampers

Attendees of the Ledley Hall youth centre got together to deliver a social action project for vulnerable elderly people in their community. They decided to include items such as hot water bottles, blankets, thermal hats, as well as some non-perishable food items.

With a little help from their youth workers and parents the group gathered donations from the local community and businesses. The group also obtained some information leaflets from British Red Cross and Age NI to place inside the hamper, including leaflets on winter safety and benefit advice for older people.

The group received two thank you cards in response. One lady described how she was 'lost for words' and 'overwhelmed' by the kindness of the young people.

Challenging ideas about disability

Alternatives Restorative Justice in Northern Ireland supports young offenders to make positive changes in their lives. A group of young people from this organisation were interested in putting on a community event to combat stigma towards disabled people. Working with other young people from Hammer Youth Centre, and with help from Leonard Cheshire, and Shop Mobility, the

group invited a speaker to come and talk about her own experience of disability hate crime. They also talked about everyday barriers for wheelchair users. At the end of the evening, the group were coached in blind football, which introduced them to an accessible sport.

The evening was intended to increase empathy and understanding. It was a very successful night, with 50 young people attending from the two communities in Belfast. These were young people who wouldn't ordinarily meet, and in this way, the project helped to strengthen the community.

Refugees welcome

Four groups of Girl Guides got together to deliver an event in Liverpool for refugee families at a youth club. Three refugee families from Belarus, Palestine and Kazakhstan attended, along with 15 members of Toxteth Firefit Hub Youth Centre. The day was a great success. Positive stories from the day include a young Belarusian girl that couldn't speak much English, who at first was very shy and wouldn't talk to anyone, and by the end wouldn't leave because she was having so much fun. Similarly, the father of Palestinian family got to play football, something he hadn't done in a long time.

The family fun day was part of a wider initiative at the Liverpool-based Live It Up event. The event saw a total of 500 girl guides engage in social action with a number of partners including the British Red Cross.



Resources



Asking the right question

This activity shows the positive and important difference that using the social model makes to the way we think and talk about disability.

The activity is based on one from the excellent 'What is Disability?' e-learning session available free from Disability Matters. For more useful and practical activities go to disabilitymatters.org.uk and select 'Explore E-learning'.

In this table, the first column shows questions adapted from a UK disability survey carried out in 1986. These questions are worded to reflect the idea that disability is about an individual's personal limitations. (Medical model)

In the second column, the question has been rephrased so that it locates the problem of disability with society, not with the individual. (Social model)

What is the overall effect of using the original questions compared to the effect of the rephrased questions?

Medical Model	Social Model
Can you tell me what is wrong with you?	Can you tell me what is wrong with society?
What is it that causes you to have trouble holding certain objects?	What is the problem with the design of certain objects that makes them difficult to hold?
Are your difficulties understanding people mainly due to your hearing problem?	Are your difficulties in understanding people mainly due to people's inability to communicate with you? How would you like us to communicate with you?
Do you have a physical problem that limits your everyday activities?	Do other people's reactions to you or the environment limit your everyday activities?
How difficult is it for you to get to your volunteering duty on your own?	What are the environmental constraints that make it difficult for you to get to your volunteering duty on your own? What can we do to help?
Does your health problem or disability prevent you from taking part in volunteering activities as much as you would like?	Is there anything which may prevent you taking part in volunteering activities as much as you would like?
Does your health problem make it difficult for you to travel by bus?	Do poorly designed buses make it difficult for someone with your health problem to travel on them?
Does your health problem affect your ability to volunteer in any way?	Do you have difficulties when you are volunteering due to the environment or other people's attitudes?

Inspired Action Ambassadors

Ambassadors represent the British Red Cross in their school or youth club, working alone or in a group.

It is a flexible role that lasts for six months, and can fit around personal commitments.

Each month, ambassadors choose an activity from a given list. These are fun and simple activities related to promoting the work of the British Red Cross, fundraising, advocacy or research.

For more activity ideas and a free copy of our Inspired Action Ambassador handbook, please email:

information@redcross.org.uk

Being an ambassador gave me an opportunity to give back to my community without having to put things aside – I didn't feel like I had to give something up in order to volunteer. Taking part has helped me with my team working and communication skills. Also, time management because as a team we set ourselves deadlines. What was also rewarding was the fact that I got to meet and work with new people. People that you see around college but you don't really speak to and being part of this connected us in a way.

Alisha Bryden, St Francis Xavier, London

Ambassadors will need support and permission from a teacher or youth club worker so must speak to them before planning the activities.



Social Action Project Handbook

Our Social Action Project handbook guides groups through each phase of taking social action, helping them think about practical considerations, and reflect on their skills development at the end of the journey. For a free copy of this resource please email: information@redcross.org.uk

PHASE 1

WEEK 1-2
Your idea and vision

PHASE 2

WEEK 3-6
Planning

PHASE 3

WEEK 6-10
Action

PHASE 4

WEEK 10-12
Evaluation and reflection





FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

The language we use about disability is an important way of influencing society's attitudes, and respecting disabled people. The list below is intended as a helpful guide, and reflects the views of disabled people themselves - and in particular young wheelchair users.

As you will see, the words on the left are passive, "victim" words (handicapped, for example, has its roots in the idea of asking for charity, "cap in hand"), whereas the words on the right respect disabled people as active individuals with control over their own lives.

Avoid using	Use Instead
General	
Handicapped person/child	Disabled person/child
The disabled	Disabled people/children
Afflicted by, suffers from, a victim of, has a disease	Has the condition, has an impairment, has cerebral palsy/spina bifida
Cripple, invalid, sufferer	Disabled person/child
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound	A wheelchair-user
Spastic	Has Cerebral Palsy
Special needs	Specific needs
Integration, integrate	Inclusion, include i.e. inclusion in mainstream school
Disabled toilets	Accessible toilets
Whizz-Kidz specific	
Whizz-kids, WhizzKidz, Whiz-Kidz	Whizz-Kidz
Children with disabilities	Disabled children
Mobility aid/s	Customised wheelchairs and tricycles or mobility equipment
Chair	Wheelchair
Electric wheelchair	Powered wheelchair

Disabled children or children with disabilities?

"Disabled children" (or people) is preferred because it acknowledges that the biggest difficulty for disabled people lies in society's attitudes i.e. that it is society that is disabling the person or child, whereas "children with disabilities" can be seen to place the problem with the individual.

Specific Needs or Special Needs

We all have the same needs - to eat, to drink etc. Disabled people are disadvantaged if their needs are not met, the same as you would be. There is nothing 'special' about using Braille, or needing to use a wheelchair to get around. "Special needs" is still widely used and considered acceptable. However, an alternative is "specific needs" (or more formally "access requirements").

What is 'disability' anyway?

Disability is the loss or limitation of opportunity to take part on an equal level with others due to barriers such as other people's attitudes and the surrounding environment.

Young people tell us:

- > Ask us first.
- > Don't assume.
- > Give me time.
- > Don't patronise me.
- > I know best!
- > Don't touch my wheelchair if I haven't asked you to!

Basic etiquette

- > See the person: address them directly.
- > Don't mention the person's condition or impairment, unless he or she talks about it or it is relevant to the conversation.
- > Do not push, lean on, or hold onto a person's mobility aid unless the person asks you to.
- > When giving directions consider distance, weather conditions, noise, street furniture and physical obstacles (stairs, steep hills etc.) that they may come across.

When working with someone with a hearing impairment:

- > Let the person take the lead in establishing their preferred communication mode. If you are still unsure, ask.
- > Communicate directly to the person, even when a sign language interpreter is present.
- > If the person lip-reads, face her or him directly, speak clearly and with a moderate pace.

When working with someone with a visual impairment:

- > Identify yourself and introduce others who may be present.
- > Speak clearly and approach the person from the front.
- > Don't leave the person without excusing yourself first.
- > When asked to guide someone with a visual impairment, allow them to take your arm, walk slightly ahead of them, identifying doors, stairs, street furniture etc. as you approach.
- > As you enter a room, describe the layout and location of furniture etc. so that they are more aware of what is going on around them.
- > Don't pet or distract a guide dog: the dog is always working, it is not a pet.

When working with someone who has a disability:

- > Take your time.
- > Don't assume anything.
- > Ask open questions.
- > Be aware that some people find it easier to use real objects to communicate but symbols, MAKATON, photos and pictures can help too.
- > Pay attention to the person's body language and facial expression.

When working with someone who has a condition or impairment that affects their speech:

- > Pay attention, be patient and don't panic.
- > Wait for the person to complete a word or thought, do not finish it for them.
- > Ask the person to repeat what is said if you do not understand. Tell them what you heard – they will let you know if you have it wrong!
- > Be prepared for various devices or techniques used to enhance or augment speech. Don't be afraid to communicate with someone who uses symbols, pictures or a computer with synthesised speech to communicate.

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versions
available

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Inspired Action will finish, as a discrete project, in June 2017. But the British Red Cross will continue to engage more young people as volunteers, and apply the lessons we have learned to make opportunities as accessible as possible.

Among the many lessons over the last three years, there are some that have been consistent:

- > An organisation that is accessible to disabled people is accessible to everyone – inclusive working benefits everyone.
- > Young people are our present and future, and we need them inspired and engaged!
- > Never underestimate young people – they will surprise you.

We would like to thank everyone who has been a part of this project.

Spirit of 2012

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