



Inclusive Volunteering in Museums:

A Research Guide



Volunteer Centre
Dorset

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Should you have any questions about volunteering, please do not hesitate to contact Volunteer Centre Dorset on 01305 269214 or email info@volunteeringdorset.org.uk

“Act as if what you do makes a difference, it does.” - **William James**

Overview

The Background

There are 30 accredited museums in Dorset who are either volunteer-led or use the services of volunteers.

20% of the population have some form of disability. Only 4% of staff/volunteers from National Portfolio Organisations declare any disability (Arts Council England).

What can be done to bridge this divide? With funding from Spirit of 2012, this project aimed to examine the barriers of why people with disabilities feel excluded from volunteering in the heritage sector.

The Objectives

1. To empower museums across Dorset to welcome and support volunteers of all abilities
2. To review the current support and access for volunteers
3. To provide training on how to support volunteers of all abilities
4. To offer ongoing support and reviews going forward

The Plan

1. Conduct a survey to set a baseline
2. Analyse the results of the survey
3. Conduct access audits with reports for the participating museums
4. Offer training and networking events
5. Provide support and guidance with recruitment

The Benefits

1. Free access audits for participating museums
2. Full report on the findings of the research
3. Highlight disabled volunteers as a valuable asset and create national change
4. Opportunity to increase the number of volunteers
5. Support with volunteer recruitment
6. Support and training on disability awareness

Actions Taken

1. A benchmark needed to be set, so an initial survey was sent to all museums. The questions asked included:
 - Are you aware of how many volunteers have some form of disability, within your museum?
 - If so, what percentage of your volunteers have some form of disability (this could be physical or cognitive)? This also includes any volunteers with sensory impairments and hidden disabilities.
 - Are you aware of any specific barriers in your museum that prevent disabled volunteers engaging with you? This could be in the form of physical barriers that are difficult to alter (such as listed building status) or managerial (this could take the form of bad experiences reported by a visitor, or inaccessible inductions/volunteer recruitment practices?)
 - Do you feel you, and your volunteers/other volunteers in more senior roles, would benefit from additional training about inclusion?
 - Are there any disability groups in your area that you are already in contact with/have worked with in the past?
2. The survey results were collated, and the museums were invited to a presentation to see the results and to set out the next steps, this included free access audits, training, and assistance with volunteer recruitment.
3. Initially only museums who completed the survey were offered a free access audit, this was widened to all museums at a later stage in the project.
4. Museums were sent a form to complete if they wanted a free access audit, the purpose of this form was to gather information ahead of the visit, questions asked included:
 - How far is the nearest bus stop?
 - How many disabled parking spaces do you have (if any)?
 - Do you have accessible toilets on site?
 - Do you have hearing loops installed at your welcome desk/visitor reception/shop?
 - Is there level access into the museum?
 - Do you provide any form of support for visitors who are neurodiverse?
5. Access audits were conducted by the access consultant
6. Disability Confidence training was offered to all museums
7. Museums were invited to join our Volunteer Coordinator Network and attend training and events hosted by Volunteer Centre Dorset, including the monthly drop in for tips on how to use our online recruitment platform
8. Museums were provided with a Volunteer Recruitment Toolkit, which included guidance on rethinking roles to be more inclusive and the different ways to advertise volunteering roles, as well as a guide on Writing a Volunteer Role Description
9. A two-month targeted recruitment campaign was planned in the run up to the new tourist season and to coincide with English Tourism Week, with museums contacted on a weekly basis offering assistance, this included one-to-one meetings, promoting opportunities and asking for stories from existing volunteers which could be used for social media, newsletters etc.
10. Museums who undertook an access audit were provided with a pack, including the audit report and next steps.

The Findings

The Survey

- 19 out of the 30 museums completed the initial survey
- It took from July 2021 until June 2022 to collate the 19 responses
- The surveys were often not completed by the correct person, such as a manager responding instead of a volunteer coordinator

Emerging themes from the survey were:

- Physical barriers
- Additional inclusion training
- Not knowing the volunteers and their disabilities

The Engagement

- A handful of museums engaged with the project, attended presentations and training etc.
- The geographical area of Dorset and the Covid lockdowns meant the engagement was a challenge and was predominantly done virtually or by phone.
- The seasonality of museums, many being closed for months over the winter period, meant there were long gaps between interactions.

The Training

- Disability Confidence training was one of the key outcomes asked for in the survey, yet when the training was offered only six museums attended.

The Audits

- Each of the museums in Dorset were offered a free access audit. This entailed our Access Consultant visiting the museum and providing a report on her findings and recommendations.
- Only five audits have been completed within the timeframe of the project with a further three planned for the near future.

Volunteer Recruitment

- Museums wanted help with volunteer recruitment, but only eleven took the next step of registering with the Volunteer Centre recruitment platform and then, only eight museums created opportunities.

Engagement

- Museums have been invited to be part of Volunteer Centre Dorset's Volunteer Coordinator Network, to date three museums have engaged with the network.

30 Accredited Museums in Dorset

63%

Completed our survey

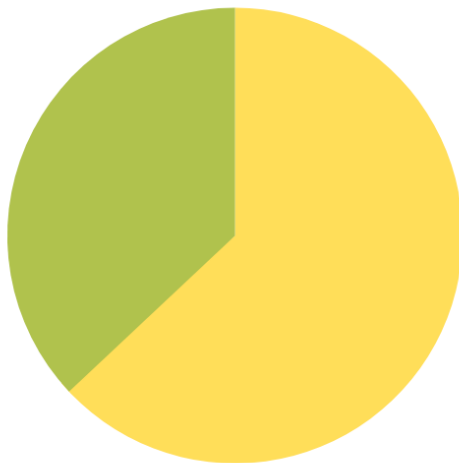
11

Registered on Team Kinetic

14

Active Opportunities

Incomplete
37%



Complete
63%

Out of 30 Accredited Museums across Dorset, 63% (19) completed our Inclusive Volunteering Survey in 2022

In this Survey 43.3% of responses show that you know of specific barriers in your museum that prevent disabled volunteer engagements.

6

Attended disability confidence training

3

Museums have engaged with the Volunteer Coordinator Network

8

Access audits have taken place (or are upcoming)

5

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What Worked Well and Not So Well

What Worked Well

- Building relationships with museums
- Highlighting what volunteer support is available and at no cost
- Museums registering on our free online platform
- Engaging with museums on social media
- Incorporating the learning into our volunteer offer
- Providing a Volunteer Recruitment Toolkit and a Writing a Volunteer Role Description guide
- Planning (and implementing in the future) a disability confident programme for museums and other organisations

What Didn't Work As Well

- Thinking all museums would complete the initial survey and engage with the project
- Expecting all museums to want an access audit
- Finding convenient times to conduct the access audits (museum close dates etc)
- Anticipating more museums would attend training and events
- Museums not creating more diverse opportunities

The Learnings

Museums do want to be inclusive and be able to support volunteers of all abilities.

Museums are often scared by what changes they will be asked to make, both from a time and a financial perspective, be patient and acknowledge any steps taken, no matter how small they are.

Change can be scary, be clear on the benefits of making changes, even small ones, can have for them.

Avoid using generic emails which are found on websites and literature. Get a named contact and ensure it is the right contact.

Be prepared to be lower down on the priority list. Museums either have few or no paid staff, so be mindful of existing workloads and priorities.

Engage with museums on a regular basis, reminding what volunteer help and support is available to them.

Broaden the parameters to consider other heritage settings which face similar challenges, such as stately homes, mills, and other historic sites.

Engage with the Museums Officer at your local council and any museum associations and communicate with them regularly, their support, engagement and understanding of the project is important.

Allow more time for museums to engage, a lot of museums are closed in the winter months and are busy during the tourist season, so factor this into any timelines.

Consider the language you use, the term 'access audit' perhaps wasn't the best choice as it has connotations of checking what museums are doing, rather than offering them guidance and support on things they could consider doing differently.

Be clear that not all changes cost money, it's not all about lifts and handrails, small changes can have just as much of an impact.

Ensure the focus of the project is on all disabilities, both physical and hidden, and the recommendations reflect this.

Do not limit training to one day and time, museums can close on different days and have 'peak' visitor times during the day, so it's important to offer alternative days and times.

Look at recording your training sessions, to enable more museums to benefit from the learning.

A lot of the issues experienced by museums can also be experienced by other heritage venues and organisations, consider how you could use your learning to support more organisations to be inclusive in their volunteering offer.

Next Steps

Although the funding for this project has come to an end, the learning that has arisen from it will continue. Volunteer Centre Dorset is embedding the toolkits, guides, online platforms, training, networking, and support as part of our core offer, working with organisations to be inclusive in their volunteer offer.

Museums who have not been able to engage during the project time frame, will continue to have access to all the volunteer support we have available.

We are also working on creating a Disability Confident programme, which is suitable for groups and organisations including museums, to be able to support volunteers of all abilities.

Appendices

- Volunteer Recruitment Toolkit
- How to write a Volunteer Role Description



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