

ABSTRACT

One out of every seven people in this country has a disability, 19.1% of our population. Of all people with disabilities 66% are unemployed; 79% of them want to be engaged in meaningful work. It is apparent that there is a huge untapped resource for those seeking volunteers. This article explores barriers to and strategies for incorporating people with physical disabilities into a volunteer pool. It is based on the experience Courage Centers (a rehabilitation facility) has had in working with people with physical disabilities as volunteers and on a presentation made at the Association for Volunteer Administration International Conference in October, 1992.

Disability as a Part of Diversity

Lisa Taylor

INTRODUCTION

Courage Center is a nonprofit rehabilitation facility headquartered in Golden Valley, Minnesota, a suburb of Minneapolis. Founded in 1928 by volunteers concerned about unmet needs of "crippled children," Courage Center today serves 22,000 children and adults annually through more than 70 different programs. Woven into the fabric of these programs is the dedication of 2,400 volunteers who gave over 82,000 hours of direct client and clerical program support in 1993. Our organization's mission is to empower people who have physical disabilities and sensory impairments to achieve their full potential. We carry out this mission through rehabilitation, enrichment, vocational, independent living and educational services, with the vision that one day all persons will work, learn and play together in a community based upon their abilities not their disabilities.

Approximately 20% of Courage Center's 2,400 program volunteers have a physical disability. Many are current or former clients who have received services. These volunteers work in a wide variety of roles, including tour guides, reception volunteers, activity directors and assistants, instructors for arts classes, ski in-

structors, swim buddies, couriers, maintenance workers, disability awareness speakers, Board members, tutors, officials for wheelchair athletic events and general office workers.

In order to include people with physical disabilities as a part of your volunteer resource it may be necessary to make a few adaptations or shifts in thinking, but the investment will reap a multitude of benefits to your clients, your staff and especially to those individuals with physical disabilities who become your volunteers.

HOW TO GET STARTED

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Major life activities include self-care, tasks done with one's hands, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, learning, working and recreation. A disability may be congenital (something one is born with) or it may be acquired through disease or as the result of an accident or injury. In this article we are concerned only with people with physical impairments. In order to successfully incorporate people with physical disabilities into your organization, it is important to lay some ground work.

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Assess the Physical Barriers In Your Facility

First, survey your building or office space to determine its accessibility. The survey should include: parking availability, the entrance, your office or interview space, volunteer work areas, bathroom facilities, break room, cafeteria, width of doorways, door handles, and drinking fountains. As you identify physical barriers, you need to look for adaptations or alternatives such as attaching blocks under a table or desk to elevate it to accommodate a person using a wheelchair, or a telephone device for the deaf (TDD) to accommodate people with hearing impairments. See the appendix for a quick checklist and suggested solutions to barriers you might identify. Resources that may be helpful to you include your State Council on Disabilities, occupational therapists at a local hospital or rehabilitation facility, or staff members of an organization that provides services to people with physical disabilities.

Assess and Address Attitudinal Barriers Within Your Organization

Secondly, it is important to recognize not only the physical barriers in your organization, but to have an accurate sense about how people *feel* about persons with physical disabilities. Some of the conscious, or often unconscious, attitudes that may exist as barriers in your organization include:

Fear: We often fear the unknown. We are afraid of doing or saying the "wrong thing." When we encounter someone with a disability, such as someone who uses a wheelchair, we may not know where to look or what to say to this person. Getting to know individuals with disabilities, learning WHO they are, what their interests are, activities they are involved in, things which are important to them helps alleviate this fear. Disability awareness speakers who can educate staff about what it is like to live with a disability are often available through your state or local Council on Disabilities, or through an organization that serves people with disabilities.

Oversensitivity: When meeting a person with a disability we may be overly sensitive, seeing only the disability and not the person. We focus our attention on the wheelchair, the scarred face, the missing arm, or the service dog. While it is not possible to deny that the disability exists, it is the individual who needs to be "seen." Again, by getting to know a person as an individual: his/her likes and dislikes, their feelings, their goals and opinions it helps you to see the *person*, not just his/her disability.

Condescension: This is a patronizing attitude. An attitude of condescension causes people to treat the person with the disability as if he/she are "less than" an able bodied individual. It is a classic example of focusing on the disability rather than on the individual's abilities.

Spread effect: This means generalizing about a person's abilities, based on your observation of his/her particular disability. This might be demonstrated by making an assumption that because someone uses a wheelchair, he or she cannot hear or understand. In speaking to that person, you may try to over simplify or talk loudly, believing that you are making yourself more easily understood, when, in fact, understanding is not the issue at all.

Assumption: Too often we assume we understand what is wrong with someone without taking time to investigate. When we see a person with a staggering gait or slurred speech we may assume that he/she are abusing drugs or alcohol, when in fact he/she may be recovering from a stroke or head injury. We may see someone with communication and/or mobility problems due to cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis or Parkinson's Disease, and assume that he/she have some intellectual impairment. Again, learning more about physical disabilities can reduce many of these misconceptions.

Discomfort: Disabilities are an uncomfortable reminder that we are all vulnerable to accidents, illness and aging. We do not like to think about how a disability might change our own lives. Additionally, we

tend to be uncomfortable with physical conditions which are unfamiliar and which we do not understand.

Education and experience are the best approaches in eradicating attitudinal barriers. (See Appendix II.)

Once you have identified and addressed the barriers, you are ready to recruit.

RECRUITMENT

Many volunteer centers include information in their data bases indicating whether placement is appropriate for a person with a disability. Let your volunteer center know that you are interested in recruiting people with disabilities as volunteers. Local organizations that provide services to or advocacy for people with disabilities would be ideal recruitment resources. As you are developing recruitment materials, look at the written and visual messages you are giving about opportunities for people with disabilities to volunteer: are you actively conveying the message that they are welcome?

APPLYING THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

The Interview

When interviewing someone with a disability, people often become overly concerned about their language and with what they should or shouldn't do to be helpful to the person with the disability. Common sense and common courtesy are your best guides. If you think the person may want some help, it is all right to ask. People with disabilities are used to instructing others about ways to help them. If you are concerned about your language, tell the person that if you say something that makes he/she uncomfortable to please let you know, so that you can learn to be more sensitive about language. Saying "see" to a blind person, or "walk" to someone who uses a wheelchair is seldom offensive to them. This is an example of being overly sensitive about everyday language. By the same token, there are words like crippled, lame, or victim that have

negative connotations and should be avoided. Many of these appear on the handout noted in the appendix.

In discussing an individual's skills and interests, Courage Center uses the same application and interview process as with any volunteer. As we begin to focus on a specific volunteer assignment, we show the potential volunteer the job description and ask whether he or she has any concerns about being able to fulfill any of the responsibilities. At that point, the person being interviewed has the opportunity to share any reservations. It would also be appropriate to ask the individual if any adaptations would be needed in order for him/her to fulfill the responsibilities of the position. Use your creativity here. It is important to be direct, clear and respectful. Two way communication during the interview process gives you the opportunity to explore the probability of a fit. If one does not exist, you need to be honest and, if possible, help that individual find a more appropriate volunteer opportunity elsewhere.

Designing the Job/Making the Match

When assessing the appropriateness of a specific placement, it will be helpful to determine the essential functions of the volunteer assignment, the associated tasks and the performance criteria.

Functional analysis: What *functions* need to be accomplished? For example, for a tour guide, the essential functions include speaking clearly, moving around the facility, knowing the organization, meeting a variety of people well. An activity assistant must be able to understand and convey information to the clients, and must be patient and nurturing. If executing the tasks involved is a problem, are there alternative ways to accomplish the tasks other than the way in which they have traditionally been done? Let me give an example of job-sharing as an alternative method. We had a volunteer who used a wheelchair. Although he was licensed to drive, he lacked the hand strength to operate the wheelchair tiedowns in our vans.

We had an able-bodied volunteer who was performing community service but, according to Courage Center policies regarding court referred volunteers, was not allowed to transport clients. We paired them together to drive clients to an activity off site; one drove, and the other operated the tiedowns.

Task analysis: In assessing a job, it helps to separate it into the specific tasks that are involved. See the task/skill analysis section (Appendix IV pg. 23).

Performance criteria to consider: *Timing:* does this need to be done within a specific time frame or at a specific time? Is *mobility* a consideration? Is *strength* a factor? What about *endurance*? Must the tasks be done in a specific *sequence*? How important is *attention to detail*? What kind of *communication skills* are required (verbal, written, telephone)? What level of *math or reading comprehension* is necessary? What kind of *social skills* are important? Is *hygiene/appearance* a consideration? What is the *stress level* of this job? How *independent* does this individual need to be?

The checklist in the appendix may be helpful in addressing these questions and assessing the appropriateness of an individual for a specific job.

Adapting the job: Once you have identified job tasks that do not match the person's abilities, you need to allow for some reasonable accommodations. These accommodations will fall into three categories:

1. task modification: changing, simplifying or reordering the steps used to complete the task. Examples: could something done manually be done by computer? Try using different materials to complete the task: calculator, checklist as a reminder of the task sequence, or a paper-holder to enable someone to staple single handedly.
2. task elimination: simply eliminating a task that the person is unable to do.
3. task reassignment: changing the amount of personal assistance to complete a task, or job sharing as in the example given for the transportation volunteer.

A local resource to help you in solving similar challenges might be an occupational therapist at a local hospital, school or rehabilitation facility. Again, the Job Accommodation list in the appendix may be helpful.

Don't be diverted by the existence of barriers. Enlist the potential volunteer to help you address them. Be up front with the volunteer that this is a new experience for your agency, and that you need his or her help in blazing the trail. This will establish the relationship you need as you begin together to address the barriers. Start small in order to set yourselves up for success. Assign the volunteer to a staff member who is willing to be a partner in your pilot efforts; enlist his or her support as you move ahead together.

Training

As with any volunteer, the training you provide for a volunteer with a disability can make or break the situation. There are a number of job aids, such as checklists, flowcharts, troubleshooting guides, a mentor or experienced partner, a manual that can be employed to facilitate the process of learning the assigned job. (See "Job Aids for Volunteers: Tools to Help Them Successfully Complete Their Jobs" by Susan J. Barkman, *Journal of Volunteer Administration*, Summer 1990.) Remember that the best guide for this will probably be the volunteer: Ask him or her for suggestions; how does he/she best learn?

Keep in mind that the complexity of the person's disability may require an extended learning time for the job.

Supervision

In initially placing a person with a disability as a volunteer in your organization, the creativity and flexibility of the staff supervisor is a key point. Someone who is flexible and open will be a far better person than one who appears to be under pressure or is rigid. It will be important for the supervisor to be explicit about his or her expectations of the volunteer. Communication is critical. In giving the volunteer an assignment, it is important to de-

fine the tasks in terms of what is to be accomplished, not just the activities themselves. It is also important for all volunteers to have a sense of the big picture into which their roles fit.

Communicate parameters for decision making and the availability of resources, both material and supervisory. Who is available for clarification and problem solving? What is the desired result of the volunteer's work? Frequent and ongoing feedback to the volunteer will be essential: when will it happen, from whom? All of this is part of good supervision, but as you begin to include people with disabilities as volunteers, you want both their experience and yours to be successful. Extra attention to good supervision is key because many individuals providing supervision to volunteers have had no supervisory experience or training.

Recognition

What kind of ongoing recognition are you providing for volunteers? Socialization may be a primary motivation for someone with a physical disability to volunteer. Is that need being met by interaction with other volunteers and/or with staff? Another motivator may be skill development: are you providing opportunities for growth?

If you typically hold a recognition event, remember to determine whether the site for the event is accessible. Will you need an interpreter for volunteers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing?

This article has addressed persons with disabilities as an untapped resource and

discussed an approach for ensuring their inclusion. However, each person is an individual, and as such, is your best source of information about how to develop a successful volunteer experience. Persons with disabilities now represent over 19% of our population. They are rich in skills and knowledge, a gold mine of abilities waiting to be asked to make their contribution to your programs!

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Appendix I

Quick Look Barriers Checklist

This checklist is designed to give businesses a quick appraisal of potential problem areas for accessibility.

ITEM TO BE PERFORMED	YES	NO
Building Access		
1. Are 96" wide parking spaces designated with a 60" access aisle?	_____	_____
2. Are parking spaces near main building entrance?	_____	_____
3. Is there a "drop off" zone at building entrance?	_____	_____
4. Is the gradient from parking to building entrance 1:12 or less?	_____	_____
5. Is the entrance doorway at least 32 inches wide?	_____	_____
6. Is door handle easy to grasp?	_____	_____
7. Is door easy to open (less than 8 lbs. pressure)?	_____	_____
8. Are other than revolving doors available?	_____	_____
Building Corridors		
1. Is path of travel free of obstruction and wide enough for a wheelchair?	_____	_____
2. Is floor surface hard and not slippery?	_____	_____
3. Do obstacles (phones, fountains) protrude no more than four inches?	_____	_____
4. Are elevator controls low enough (48") to be reached from a wheelchair?	_____	_____
5. Are elevator markings in Braille for the blind?	_____	_____
6. Does elevator provide audible signals for the blind?	_____	_____
7. Does elevator interior provide a turning area of at least 51" for wheelchairs?	_____	_____
Restrooms		
1. Are restrooms near building entrance/personnel office?	_____	_____
2. Do doors have lever handles?	_____	_____
3. Are doors at least 32" wide?	_____	_____
4. Is restroom large enough for wheelchair turnaround (51" minimum)?	_____	_____
5. Are stall doors at least 32" wide?	_____	_____
6. Are grab bars provided in toilet stalls?	_____	_____
7. Are sinks at least 30" high with room for a wheelchair to roll under?	_____	_____
8. Are sink handles easily reached and used?	_____	_____
9. Are soap dispensers, towels, no more than 48" from floor?	_____	_____
Personnel Office		
1. Are doors at least 32" wide?	_____	_____
2. Is the door easy to open?	_____	_____
3. Is the threshold no more than 1/2" high?	_____	_____
4. Is the path of travel between desks/tables wide enough for wheelchairs?	_____	_____

Appendix II

Job Accommodation Ideas

Job accommodation problems with proposed low-cost solutions from the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

We present these "problems" and "solutions" to start the creative process. They can be used to give a person who is inexperienced in hiring people with disabilities an idea of some accommodations that have actually been achieved. They make it easier to begin the process of working together for change.

Problem: A person had an eye disorder. Glare on the computer screen caused fatigue.

Solution: An antiglare screen was purchased. (\$39.00)

Problem: A person with a learning disability worked in the mail room and had difficulty remembering which streets belonged to which zip codes.

Solution: A rolodex card system was filed by street name alphabetically with the zip code. This helped him to increase his output. (\$150.00)

Problem: An individual with dyslexia who worked as a police officer spent hours filling out forms at the end of each day.

Solution: He was provided with a tape recorder. A secretary typed out his reports from dictation, while she typed the others from handwritten copy. This accommodation allowed him to keep his job. (\$69.00)

Problem: A person who used a wheelchair could not use a desk because it was too low and his knees would not go under it.

Solution: The desk was raised with wood blocks, allowing a proper amount of space for the wheelchair to fit under it. (\$0)

Problem: An employee who used a wheelchair could not use the restroom.

Solution: The toilet facilities were enlarged and a handrail was installed. (\$70.00)

Problem: A person who worked outdoors had a medical condition which caused his hands to be unable to tolerate cold.

Solution: The individual used gloves with pocket hand warmers such as those used by hunters. (\$50.00)

Problem: A person with an unusually soft voice was required to do extensive public speaking.

Solution: A hand-held voice amplifier did the trick. (\$150.00)

Problem: An employer wanted to make the elevator accessible to a new employee who was blind and read Braille.

Solution: Raised dot elevator symbols that were self-adhesive made the elevator accessible. (\$6.00 each)

Problem: A person had a condition which required two-hour rest periods during the day.

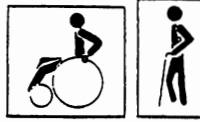
Solution: The company changed her schedule and allowed her longer breaks, although she worked the same number of hours. (\$0)

For specific assistance, call the Job Accommodation Network 1-800-ADA-WORK

It's the "Person First"—Then the Disability

What do you see first?

- *The wheelchair?*
- *The physical problem?*
- *The person?*



If you saw a person in a wheelchair unable to get up the stairs into a building would you say "there is a handicapped person unable to find a ramp"? Or would you say "There is a person with a disability who is handicapped by an inaccessible building"?

What is the proper way to speak to or about someone who has a disability?

Consider how you would introduce someone—Jane Doe—who doesn't have a disability. You would give her name, where she lives, what she does or what she is interested in—she likes swimming, or eating Mexican food, or watching Robert Redford movies.

Why say it differently for a person with disabilities? Every person is made up of many characteristics—mental as well as physical—and few want to be identified only by their ability to play tennis or by their love for fried onions or by the mole that's on a face. Those are just parts of us.

In speaking or writing, remember that children or adults with disabilities are like everyone else—except they happen to have a disability. Therefore, here are a few tips for improving your language related to disabilities and handicaps.

1. Speak of the person first, then the disability.
2. Emphasize abilities, not limitations.
3. Do not label people as part of a disability group—don't say "the disabled"; say "people with disabilities."
4. Don't give excessive praise or attention to a person with a disability; don't patronize them.
5. Choice and independence are important: let the person do or speak for him/herself as much as possible: if addressing an adult, say "Bill" instead of "Billy."
6. A disability is a functional limitation that interferes with a person's ability to walk, hear, talk learn. etc.; use handicap to describe a situation or barrier imposed by society, the environment or oneself.

Say . . .

person with a disability

person with cerebral palsy

person who is deaf or hard of hearing

person with retardation

person with epilepsy or person with seizure disorder

person who has . . .

without speech, nonverbal

developmental delay

emotional disorder, or mental illness

uses a wheelchair

with Down Syndrome

has a learning disability

nondisabled

has a physical disability

congenital disability

condition

seizures

cleft lip

mobility impaired

medically involved, or has chronic illness

paralyzed

has hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of the body)

has quadriplegia (paralysis of both arms and legs)

has paraplegia (loss of function in lower body only)

of short stature

accessible parking

Instead of . . .

disabled or handicapped person

palsied, or C.P., or spastic

deaf and dumb

retarded

epileptic

afflicted, suffers from, victim

mute, or dumb

slow

crazy or insane

confined to a wheelchair

mongoloid

is learning disabled

normal, healthy

crippled

birth defect

disease (unless it is a disease)

fits

hare lip

lame

sickly

invalid or paralytic

hemiplegic

quadriplegic

paraplegic

dwarf or midget

handicapped parking

Appendix IV

Courage Center Volunteer Department

Job Analysis

I. Physical Analysis

Strength/lifting

_____ lift less than 5 lbs.
_____ less than 20

_____ less than 40
_____ less than 50

Endurance

Work Speed Required

_____ High _____ Low

Frequency of breaks

_____ High _____ Low

Stress Level

_____ High _____ Low

Deadlines

_____ High _____ Low

Mobility

_____ Walking required Now continuously _____ Distance _____

Endurance

_____ Push _____ Climb _____ Crouch _____ See _____ Smell
_____ Pull _____ Balance _____ Crawl _____ Color Vision _____ Taste
_____ Reach _____ Stoop _____ Sit _____ Depth Perception _____ Touch
_____ Run _____ Kneel _____ Turn _____ Hear _____ Finger Dexterity
_____ Other (specify) _____

II. Space/Equipment Needs (list)

III. Task/Skill Analysis

A. Problem Solving/Reasoning Tasks

- | | |
|--|--|
| _____ Determine own work activities | _____ Devise new ideas, better work |
| _____ Conduct work activities in appropriate sequence | _____ Recognize and use appropriate procedures |
| _____ Recognize the effects of changing quantity or quality of materials | _____ Obtain resources needed to carry out work (e.g., equipment, materials, personnel, funds) |
| _____ Analyze and synthesize info | _____ Collect and organize information |
| _____ Review progress quickly | _____ Identify alternative approaches/solutions |
| _____ Correct deficiencies | |

A. Problem Solving/Reasoning Tasks *(continued)*

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate for accuracy and completeness | <input type="checkbox"/> Summarize, draw conclusions |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____ |

B. Computer Tasks

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enter data into computers | <input type="checkbox"/> Access data from computers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Perform word processing | <input type="checkbox"/> Write programs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Perform systems analysis | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____ |

C. Mathematical Tasks

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Count | <input type="checkbox"/> Estimate quantities needed to do job |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understand concepts of greater than and less than | <input type="checkbox"/> Use numerical values from charts, diagrams, tables |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calculate costs (e.g., interest, discounts, depreciation, prices, taxes) | <input type="checkbox"/> Construct diagrams, charts, records using numerical calculations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make and use measurements (standard, metric) | <input type="checkbox"/> Formulas (translating, substituting values) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare budgets | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understand order (e.g., first, second, last) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handle basic calculations (+, -, ×, %) | |

D. Communication Tasks

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listen | <input type="checkbox"/> Speak clearly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talk | <input type="checkbox"/> Stay on topic of related conversations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use appropriate vocabulary, grammar | <input type="checkbox"/> Report accurately what other has said |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Give clear oral instructions | <input type="checkbox"/> Explain activities and ideas clearly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Presents information effectively to group | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Follow intent of oral directions | |

E. Writing Tasks

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Copy accurately | <input type="checkbox"/> Write sentences in standard English (e.g., spelling, word choice) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complete forms accurately (e.g., invoices, sales slips, requisitions) | <input type="checkbox"/> Organize, select and relate ideas in writing (e.g., correspondence) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Produce intelligible written documents (e.g., research reports) | <input type="checkbox"/> Identify and correct errors in writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write legibly | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____ |

F. Reading Tasks

- ☐ Identify work-related symbol/sign
- ☐ Read technical information

- ☐ Read simple directions
- ☐ Other (specify) _____

IV. Personal Characteristics/Social Skills (check if important)

- ☐ General appearance (hygiene)
 - ☐ Ability to interact with others
 - ☐ Appropriateness of behavior
 - ☐ Flexibility; able to accept change
 - ☐ Attention span of _____ minutes needed
-