

26 business reasons for engaging with disabled volunteers

Since April 2009, Attend has been supporting clients with an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI). The programme was initially set up as part of a 'Work Prep' programme funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, with a focus on developing the employability and brokering employment for people with an ABI. This contract came to an end in February 2011 and Attend now engage with local Prime Providers as part of the 'Work Choice' programme.

However, the current employment market together with the nature of the clients' needs, has made it difficult to facilitate employment outcomes for many of the clients. Therefore, Attend has sought to develop volunteering and other vocational placements to provide both a stepping stone to employment, and meaningful activity for those who would otherwise 'fall through the support net'. This involves arranging for volunteering placements within the organisations, and also liaising with other voluntary and community organisations to set up placements with them.

The development of volunteering placements has had a significant impact on the working environment within the organisation, and this has also required a considerable investment of resources and energy from the whole staff group. Therefore this review seeks to establish the business benefits for engaging with disabled volunteers, so that a clear case can be made for both the continuation and direction of the work.

The framework used for this review (adapted from Kaplan and Norton, 1996) is the [balanced scorecard](#) for engaging with disabled volunteers, which was developed as part of the European Year of Volunteering 2011, 'Opening Doors to Volunteering' programme.

The balanced scorecard considers four key areas of organisational life, and seeks to provide a picture on which to make informed business decisions on any given issue. The four areas are:

- A. Finance
How engaging disabled volunteers can increase the organisation's income, or reduce its costs.
- B. Customers and services
How engaging disabled volunteers can enhance its services, developing working links and enhance its reputation.
- C. People
How engaging disabled volunteers can impact positively on staff, trustees and other volunteers.
- D. Systems and processes
How engaging disabled volunteers can impact positively on the development of systems and processes, which in turn have additional benefits elsewhere in the organisation.

Overview

The ABI client group represent an un-met need within the community as well as a gap in the market. Attend's ABI programme involves direct contact with clients and represents an emotional cause. It provides those involved in the programme with the opportunity and knowledge that they can make a difference.

As a result, Attend has the opportunity to market their work with a range of stakeholders. However, the concept of an ABI may be alien to many, and the related work Attend has subsequently commenced with Stroke Survivors helps to present the wider work with ABI clients with more relevance, as people can generally make the connection here.

Finance

1. Zero business rates are allocated by Westminster Council, as Attend has clients who live in Westminster and use the service.
2. The programme can be developed into a Social Enterprise, and attract new forms of income from different stakeholders.
3. The involvement in the ABI programme has developed an understanding and capacity within the organisation to market services directly to individual clients and customers, rather than liaising with one sole funder. This has applicability to other funding streams that are moving towards 'Individual Budgets'.
4. ABI clients and former clients have been involved in the design of the services, and their involvement in the Friend Group has made the services more relevant, relating these more closely to individual budget-holders. NB volunteering can then be presented to budget-holders as part of the wider care pathway.
5. Attend are able broaden its (fee-paying) membership service and also enhance the quality of information and advice to its member groups, based on the first-hand experience engagement with clients.

Customers and services

Enhanced services

6. Services have been improved from the input of the Friend Group, which involves former ABI clients, who see things from a different perspective.
7. Former ABI clients are able to support with the delivery or workshops as guest speakers, and become mentors to clients, offering a different perspective and understanding. Staff also benefit by this involvement by developing their own understanding and approaches accordingly.

8. The ABI programme has helped to present Attend's work as relevant to the wider community, For example member groups, other volunteering organisations and informal contacts can relate to real stories where real people seeking to make a difference.

Working links

9. Engaging with ABI clients has developed stronger links with other voluntary and community organisations. For example Mind staff who also support Attend's clients, undertaking a mapping exercise of services for ABIL (Acquired Brain Injury Forum for London).
10. The benefits for ABI clients often impacts positively on the lives of carers, who get respite, encouragement and some long-term issues moved on.

Reputation

11. Involving disabled people can help to present a more welcoming face to the potential stakeholders. For example, when potential trustees have engaged with ABI clients and volunteers, this has helped to communicate the potential that ABI clients and volunteers have, and encouraged them to become involved in their journey.
12. Attend is able to demonstrate Corporate Social Responsibility by providing volunteering opportunities and mentoring support that is unfunded.
13. Members can relate to Attend's work with older people and promote this around their networks, strengthening Attend's reputation and level of community support.
14. The concept of providing volunteering experiences for ABI clients has inspired Enfield Commissioners to make volunteering part of the Stroke Survivors care pathway.
15. Attend has been profiled with Westminster Council as an organisation that represents the community.

People

Impact on skills

16. Recruiting volunteers with an ABI has increased the skills available to Attend. For example a photography service at the AGM, and some added resources for writing fundraising bids. Also, a trustee with an ABI has also been recruited to the Board and is able to provide much insight into the development of the programme.
17. ABI volunteers and former clients frequently propose initiatives no-one else would think of, as they don't see the barriers. For example, Attend are now exploring the possibility of developing a brain injury friendly 'Kite-mark' for organisations to use.

Impact on organisational capability

18. Volunteers with an ABI are very committed to their role, and when the working relationship is productive, these volunteers are loyal and committed to the success of the organisation.
19. A trustee with an ABI has significantly developed Attend's wider contacts and networks.

Impact on others

20. Office services and administrative staff have welcomed the opportunity to engage with clients and volunteers with an ABI. The knowledge that people are benefiting from their involvement has enhanced their own job satisfaction.
21. Working in a person-centred way enhances the volunteering experience for the many young volunteers that also offer their services with Attend. The initial interview has more of a holistic focus, and these volunteers now have a more bespoke experience.
22. In and between trustee and regional meetings, there is a tendency to be more lenient with individual personality and foibles, which has the effect of creating more dialogue.
23. There is a development of a culture where staff are happier to engage in informal discussions to ask for help with work and tasks that are challenging to them. NB in the past these tasks would be moved to the bottom of the in-tray, which would in turn undermine organisational capacity.

Systems and processes

24. Involving volunteers with an ABI has developed Attend's collective knowledge of disability. This has enabled one department to support a member of staff with an issue around disability and access funding to support them. The outcome was an efficient and positive experience for all.
25. Involving volunteers with an ABI has meant less desk space per person, and processes have been put into place to support this. As a result, a culture of flexibility, with less emphasis on personal ownership of space and more focus on project outcomes has developed.
26. The contribution of a trustee with an ABI has developed a culture that it is OK not to be perfect as a trustee. This has resulted in meetings that adopt processes that allow for more honest questioning of issues and agenda items.