

## **Glasgow Women's Library**

Glasgow Women's Library (GWL) is a vibrant information hub open to all. It's an accredited museum and home to a lending library and archive, and also offers exciting events, activities, exhibitions and courses.

GWL's volunteering programme is for women-only, to ensure that women who do not feel safe or confident in mixed spaces are not excluded from volunteering. The programme, like all our activities, strives to be accessible to and inclusive of all women and is inclusive of Trans, Intersex women, non-binary and gender fluid people.

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These Top Tips were produced by Glasgow Women's Library

1. Monitor the diversity of your volunteers:  
Our volunteers are asked annually to complete an anonymous online survey which asks them about their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, disability and age. We also ask them for the first part of their postcode as a way of determining their socio-economic background (this can be a blunt tool but the best we could think of). All questions are optional and have "Prefer not to say" option. This information helps to identify underrepresented groups in our volunteer cohort, consider what barriers might be preventing some women from getting involved, and target our recruitment.
2. Understand the barriers to volunteering experienced by women:  
In addition to the barriers which people of all genders might be facing (see Top Tips from other Inclusion Group Members) these are some barriers which women are more likely to experience.
  - 2a. Caring responsibilities:  
More women than men are the main carer for their children and they may care for other dependent relatives too which can affect emotional health, physical health, social activities and finances. It also means that if a child is unwell and off school, women might have to step in to look after them or respond to another emergency if someone needs to attend a GP or hospital appointment.  
Suggestions:
    - Be flexible and supportive of women who have caring responsibilities.
    - Provide volunteering roles which fit around dropping off and picking up children at school
    - Schedule training and meetings within school hours and avoid school holidays
  - 2b. English as a Second Language:  
It can be more difficult for women to access English classes due to a lack of childcare and a shortage of English classes. However, volunteering can be very beneficial for women wanting to improve their English.  
Suggestions:
    - We have successfully buddied native English speakers with women learning English to volunteer alongside each other.
    - We also run Conversation Café sessions when volunteers come together with the aim of chatting while carrying out their volunteering role.
  - 2c. A perception that the roles with your group or organisation are not for women:  
If the majority of your volunteers are currently men, women might assume that the roles are not for them. However welcoming and friendly your male volunteers, a male dominated space can feel daunting for some women. Women tell us that they feel more able to contribute and express themselves in women-only groups.  
Suggestions:

Put a call out inviting women to apply and run a women-only induction and training

2d. Mental Health:

There has been a steady increase in the proportion of women with symptoms of common mental health problems, which comprise of different types of depression and anxiety (Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) 2016). While mental health problems affect women and men equally, various social factors put women at greater risk of poor mental health than men. Depression, self-harm, anxiety, dementia, eating disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder all affect women significantly more than men.

Suggestions:

- Encourage all volunteers to be open about what might be a barrier to them volunteering. For example include a question on the application form which asks: “What can we do to make it easier to volunteer with us?” or “Are there any medical conditions or special needs you feel we should know about in order to make volunteering easier for you?”
- Touch upon the answers to these questions when you first meet the volunteer as a way of opening up the discussion about how best you can support them to get involved.

3. Work in partnership:

One of our priority groups is women of colour or Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women. We have made links with the local college ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) course and regularly attend the Scottish Refugee Council’s volunteering information sessions to promote our volunteering opportunities. As a result around 10% of our volunteers identify as women of colour or as BME.

4. Know who the equalities experts in your field are:

It’s not always possible to have an in-house expert on equalities in your group or organisation but there are groups or organisations out there whose remit is to share good-practice in accessibility and inclusion.

For example LEAP Sports Scotland (Leadership, Equality and Active Participation in Sports for LGBTI people in Scotland) works for greater inclusion for LGBTI people in sport and against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in a sports context.

Or the Scottish Women’s Autism Network (SWAN) which “aims to raise awareness of how autism affects females, challenging entrenched misconceptions such as autism being a male-only condition and any perceptions of autism as having one-shape-or-size.

Suggestions:

- Don’t be afraid to ask for help regarding good practice in equality, diversity and inclusion
- Use social media to call out for advice
- Ask Volunteer Scotland to put you in touch with relevant groups or organisations

5. Make inclusion a priority for the whole group or organisation:  
Groups or organisations must have a holistic approach to inclusion and diversity where there is an “group or organisation-wide responsibility for the equalities agenda. It is not an 'engagement' or 'education' or 'outreach' strand. Equality is everyone's responsibility. Messages are communicated publicly (intentionally or not) by every facet of the institution to people with Protected Characteristics, answering the question 'Am I included, represented and visible?'; and ultimately, this determines whether or not people will choose to engage with the group or organisation as audiences, workforce, volunteers and Board.” (GWL, *Equality in Progress report, June 2018*)

For more information please see:

- **National Inclusive Group page**
- **Glasgow Women's Library**
- **Helpful diagram: <https://ccrweb.ca/en/anti-oppression>**