

Disability is no barrier



Organisations:

Peel Volunteer Resource Centre

Website: www.peelvolunteer.org.au

Food Bank WA

Website: www.foodbankwa.org.au

Focus: People With Disability



With goals of becoming more inclusive, Foodbank's Peel branch connected with Peel Volunteer Resource Centre (PVRC) to engage people with disabilities through their Socialability program. They knew that their existing team would also benefit from working with volunteers of different abilities, recognising that a diverse volunteer team is a great strength.

APPROACH

PVRC took responsibility for recruiting and onboarding volunteers with disabilities. They helped with interviews, paperwork, and supporting new volunteers in their first shifts.

Foodbank Peel were faced with several challenges throughout the process. They had to consider space and access in the branch, ensuring that work areas were clear and accessible. Creating more space meant less volunteers could attend at any one time. Physical limitations to some roles, such as heavy lifting or standing for long periods of time, needed to be considered as well.

OUTCOME

After substantial effort, Foodbank Peel gained four new long-term volunteers and many positive outcomes. While the new recruits were underestimated at first, they showed enthusiasm, were fast paced, and completed a large amount of work. Workspaces were re-designed to be more productive and user friendly, ultimately benefiting everyone.

Recognising that role descriptions needed to be adapted for people with disabilities, PVRC and Foodbank Peel worked together to update them with clear and fair expectations. Flexible work arrangements were also adopted to cater for individual needs.

"I have met new people and the staff are very welcoming. I look forward to my Thursday when I get out of the house and speak with other people. I have also gained financially as a benefit to volunteering, as you get to purchase cheaper fruit & veggies after your shift. I have gained confidence and am trying out other roles at Foodbank. I will try more tasks without feeling that I can't do it. I feel valued. Thank you for making me feel more confident." – Caroline (volunteer)

LEARNINGS

- Disability is not a barrier to volunteering, a diverse volunteer team is a great strength.
- The project had a positive impact on Peel Foodbank's team and culture. Everyone benefited from new perspectives and lived experiences.
- Adapting for people, as opposed to expecting them to fit the organisation, is more likely to lead to success.
- Time spent inducting and mentoring volunteers with disabilities is not a waste but an investment in the future team.
- Using 'social stories' – storytelling documents that deliberately use simple text and images so that anyone can comprehend them – can be useful tools to explain new environments or situations.