It is generally accepted that ‘inclusion’ means inviting those that have been historically ‘locked out’ to ‘come in’... [But] this well-intentioned meaning must be strengthened. Who has the authority or right to ‘invite’ others in? And how did the ‘inviters’ get in? Finally, who is doing the excluding? It is time we both recognise and accept that we are all born ‘in’... Inclusion means recognising that we are ‘one’ even though we are not the ‘same’. The act of inclusion means fighting against exclusion and all of the social diseases it gives birth to: racism, sexism, disability discrimination, etc.

Fighting for inclusion also involves assuring that all support systems are available to those who need such support. Providing and maintaining support systems is a civic responsibility, not a favour. We were all born ‘in’. Society will immediately improve at the point when we honour this truth!

Source: Shafik Asante, former leader, New African Voices

---

### Part One: Why Involve People with Mental Health Problems?

**Introduction**

- The carrot approach
- The stick approach

**Chapter One: The Case for Involving People with Mental Health Problems**

- The carrot approach
- The stick approach

**Chapter Two: The Value of Volunteering**

- Volunteering and employment
- Summary of the policy landscape
- A note about supported volunteering

### Part Two: How to Involve Volunteers with Experience of Mental Ill Health

**Introduction**

- “I might not have the skills or confidence to do the job”

**Chapter One: Key Concerns and How to Overcome Them**

- ”I might not have the skills or confidence to do the job”
- ”I’m worried about what other people think of me and my illness”
- ”The drugs I take have some embarrassing side effects”
- ”I really don’t know how my benefits might be affected”
- ”I’m worried I can’t afford to pay for bus fares, lunch etc.”
- ”People over paperwork”
- ”Readying the organisation from the top down”
- ”Laying the foundations for inclusion”
- ”Reviewing your policies”
- ”Managing risk”
- ”Recruitment”
- ”Retention”
- ”Recognition”
- ”What if someone “goes crazy” at work?”
- ”What about someone’s ability to tolerate pressure?”
- ”I’m worried about other staff and volunteers’ responses to strange behaviour”
- ”What can I do about a volunteer who’s a mental health service user who doesn’t seem to want to fit in?”
This publication is the result of a Department of Health project to identify whether people with mental health problems benefit from being volunteers, and, if so, what barriers they encounter.

The answer to the first question turns out to be a resounding “yes” – many people who have had experience of mental ill health feel that volunteering has been a part of their recovery, and has often been one of the most important routes back into ‘normal’ life.

The obstacles that they encounter are often those that also prevent their access to employment, housing, and other forms of social participation: problems caused by a lack of confidence and self-esteem, and by a sense of being excluded. Many feel that concerns about the possible impact of their illness often obscure an understanding of their personal potential as individual citizens.

You Cannot Be Serious! sets out to do two things. Firstly, its intention is to highlight this potential, to show that people with mental health problems can make the same contribution to volunteering as any other volunteer. Secondly, to provide some practical information about aspects of mental ill health, to better enable volunteer managers to support a volunteer should they become less well, without risk to the volunteering activity. It does so at a moment of unprecedented concern within, across and beyond government to address the exclusion of people with mental health problems from accessing mainstream opportunities.

By showing that the skills and expertise of people with mental health problems as volunteers can be accessed with a level of support that is not substantially different from that required by any other volunteer, this publication makes a fresh and important contribution to our thinking on social inclusion in an area of civic life which has received little attention to date.

Its real value, though, is as a guide to action: providing a practical key to enabling citizens with mental health problems to engage in an area of life which itself is vital to the well-being of communities. Volunteering may be no substitute for employment, but it is an equally valuable and serious means by which the right to participate can be fulfilled. This publication offers a contribution to our understanding of the issue by affirming the personal value of volunteering in relation to mental health and by identifying the barriers to be tackled in widening access to its mutual opportunities.

David Morris
Head of Social Inclusion Programme
National Institute for Mental Health in England