

What is Gig Buddies?

It's a volunteer befriending scheme for adults with learning disabilities and autism, matching them with a volunteer who shares the same interests.

We call our volunteers 'Gig Buddies' and our participants 'Gig Goers'.

What is the youngest age group you work with?

We work with anyone over 16 years old (this is specific to Gig Buddies Calderdale – other schemes could be for other age-groups depending on the organisation running it).

Who is the scheme aimed at?

Anyone can get involved but we're particularly interested in working with those people who get little, or no, funded support as there is a risk that this group of people will be most at risk from social isolation.

Do volunteers get training?

Yes – all of our Gig Buddies will go through our training programme; this includes sessions which cover areas such as an introduction to learning disabilities, communication, safeguarding and 'what to do if' scenarios.

All volunteers also complete DBS checks.

Can you provide a volunteer for a one-off gig?

No. Gig Buddies is all about developing friendships and expanding an individuals' social circles and informal support networks.

We won't be able to provide one-off support to bolster staff hours or cover sickness. That's not what we're about.

Who decides on the buddy?

The Gig Buddies Project Coordinator will meet everyone who gets involved in the scheme which includes participants and volunteers and will conduct an initial

interview. This will enable us to make an informed decision about who to match with who.

The participant and volunteer will then be introduced to each other and we will support their first gig together.

Participants and volunteers are also offered ongoing support and if for whatever reason it's not working out we are happy to find a different volunteer.

Central to our core values though is that we want to change the power balance for people with learning disabilities so we believe they should be firmly in the driving seat when deciding if they like a volunteer or not. After all Gig Buddies is about building friendships.

What if the pairing doesn't work out?

That's totally fine, again we believe it is important to ensure that the 'Gig Goer' with a learning disability is in control of making decisions about who their buddy is. If it doesn't work we'll offer support to see if there's something we can do but if it doesn't work at all that's fine, we'll support someone to find a new buddy.

We'll also support the buddy not to feel bad about themselves - sometimes these things happen and we'll work with them to find a new matching.

How much does it cost?

Gig Buddies is a free service but we would expect a participant or 'Gig Goer' to pay their gig tickets and travel costs. We will reimburse volunteers for their expenses. We can reimburse gig tickets up to £10, but would ask that you make contact with the Project Coordinator if finances are a barrier.

We would reasonably expect that venues where gigs or other events were happening would offer free tickets which would be allocated to the Gig Buddy volunteer.

Is it all about music?

No – we encourage people to tell us what their 'gig' is. That could be playing/watching sport, walking, going to the theatre or church. Whatever someone's interest we'll aim to find a match.

Do you have a waiting list?

Yes – we are restricted due to funding as to the capacity of the scheme. We also pride ourselves in Gig Buddies being a high quality service where we take time to get to know everyone. This means it can take a couple of months before you go out to your first gig.

Are you a user-led organisation?

Yes. All participants will be invited to create an advisory group which will meet regularly and direct the project in terms of what sort of social events might be great and to keep feeding back on the progress of the project.

How do I get involved?

You can contact the Project Coordinator at Square Chapel Arts Centre for more information and to arrange a friendly chat, message via our Facebook and Twitter pages after which you will be sent a short application form.

Do you organise gigs?

No. We do organise occasional fundraisers but we believe that all events should be for people with learning disabilities and Gig Buddies is all about being involved in mainstream community life.

We will however, organise social meet-ups for our Gig Buddies and Gig Goers in pubs so people can share their experiences and meet each other.

Why are you only in Calderdale?

This is presently where we are funded to work but doesn't mean that we cannot facilitate attendance at gigs outside of Calderdale and welcome volunteers from anyone who is interested.

How do buddies arrange gigs?

Buddies are encouraged to meet up for a coffee once a month and look through gig/event listings together. You might want to look over cinema listings or local theatres to see what might be of interest.

How can carers and support workers help somebody with Gig Buddying?

The biggest challenge we find is that it's sometimes difficult to make sure there's good communication between volunteers and buddies. That's where support staff can come in and make sure that dates have been written in the diary and that the staff team are 100% behind enabling the relationship to flourish. It's also important that staff are aware of the best way of communicating with a buddy whether this is by phone, Facebook, email etc.

How do buddies get to the gigs?

This all depends on individuals and what they are comfortable with doing. If they live in a large town, and are confident at using public transport, then they may well meet up at the venue, or a familiar meeting place. If someone lives rurally, or isn't confident at using public transport, the buddies may arrange to meet at the participant's house. Getting home will be the same sort of arrangement and we aim to match people based on a whole range of things, including transport requirements and so will take in to account whether a volunteer drives or not too.

How are volunteers recruited?

We find our volunteers through all sorts of ways, Universities, venues, employees of local companies, word of mouth and us advertising at various events and online. In some cases we'll target specific interest groups if we're looking for a volunteer with specific interests, or in a particular part of the county.

Can companies do 'Gig Buddying' as part of their corporate social responsibility?

We would welcome any companies that want to support our work and encourage their staff to become Gig Buddies on a long-term basis, however, the whole emphasis of Gig Buddies is about establishing relationships with people with learning disabilities and so it isn't suited to one-off pieces of volunteering.

If you're interested in talking about how we might work with your organisation though please get in touch.