

Key findings

Review of barriers to volunteering



1. Class Barriers

Barrier: Woodcraft Folk is perceived as having a 'class barrier'. Middle-class young people and volunteers are overrepresented, while working-class people are underrepresented.

Underlying Causes:

- Community engagement strategies are not fully inclusive of working-class communities.
- Website and communications do not reflect working-class identities or create a sense of belonging.
- Some programmes may feel inaccessible due to cultural assumptions or financial expectations.

Recommended Actions:

- Redesign outreach and engagement to better reflect and include working-class communities.
- Update website content and promotional materials to resonate with broader social backgrounds.
- Review programme accessibility and adapt where necessary (e.g. costs, transport, scheduling).

2. Racial and Ethnic Inclusion

Barrier: People from racialised and ethnically diverse backgrounds are underrepresented. Woodcraft Folk lacks a strong strategy to foster belonging among these groups.

Underlying Causes:

- No clear plan to build inclusive environments for non-white or racially diverse volunteers.
- Limited community engagement in diverse neighbourhoods.
- Programme content and communications do not reflect intercultural competence (e.g. food, faith-based needs).
- Some feel the culture of groups is not welcoming to racialised people.

Recommended Actions:

- Develop a targeted inclusion strategy for racially and ethnically diverse communities.
- Adapt programme content and group practices to reflect intercultural awareness.
- Improve training on inclusive communication and anti-racism.

- Build relationships with local community leaders and organisations in diverse areas.

3. Disability Inclusion

Barrier: People with physical disabilities are underrepresented and may face barriers to full participation.

Underlying Causes:

- Quantitative data lacks clarity on definitions of disability.
- Programmes and group practices may not consistently accommodate physical disabilities.
- External communications do not convey accessibility or inclusion clearly.
- Limited reporting and follow-up on disability-related concerns or discrimination.

Recommended Actions:

- Improve data collection to better understand disability inclusion.
- Ensure venues, activities, and materials are physically accessible.
- Update website and recruitment materials to explicitly address disability inclusion.
- Establish clear and trusted reporting mechanisms for disability-related issues.

4. Outreach, Recruitment, and Induction

Barrier: Woodcraft Folk's visibility is largely dependent on word-of-mouth, which limits reach to new and diverse audiences.

Underlying Causes:

- Many volunteers are recruited from existing parent networks.
- New communities may feel that Woodcraft Folk "isn't for them".
- Induction processes are inconsistent or unclear.

Recommended Actions:

- Proactively promote Woodcraft Folk in new and diverse communities.
- Create inclusive recruitment materials that reflect different identities and experiences.
- Streamline and personalise the induction process to support retention and belonging.

5. Inconsistent Standards and EDI Practice

Barrier: Volunteers are unclear about expectations regarding equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and group operations.

Underlying Causes:

- Lack of training in inclusive facilitation and safe space creation.
- Inconsistent approach to social and political issues in group settings.
- Unclear internal standards about running or opening new groups.
- Volunteers may operate informally, risking safety and inconsistent practice.

Recommended Actions:

- Provide regular, structured training on EDI and group facilitation.
- Set clear guidelines for navigating social issues in line with Woodcraft Folk values.
- Clarify and communicate procedures for running and starting new groups.
- Ensure all volunteers complete formal sign-up and safeguarding checks promptly.

6. Reporting and Accountability

Barrier: There is limited confidence in reporting systems for discrimination or inappropriate conduct. Some issues are not reported or resolved.

Underlying Causes:

- Concerns are often not escalated beyond the local level.
- Volunteers report experiences of racial and disability discrimination not being addressed.
- Lack of transparency and trust in how concerns are handled.

Recommended Actions:

- Strengthen reporting mechanisms to ensure safety, follow-up, and accountability.
- Provide confidential and accessible ways to report issues.
- Foster a culture where feedback is welcomed and acted upon.

7. Communications

Barrier: Communications, both internal and external, do not consistently support inclusion or clarify Woodcraft Folk's identity and mission.

Underlying Causes:

- EDI standards are not clearly communicated to volunteers.
- Mission and activity of the organisation are not always clear to the public.
- This affects spontaneous volunteer sign-ups and limits broader appeal.

Recommended Actions:

- Improve internal comms on standards and expectations, especially around inclusion.
- Refresh external messaging to clearly convey the mission, values, and activities of Woodcraft Folk.

- Showcase stories and voices from diverse volunteers and young people.

Overall Opportunity:

By taking intentional, structured steps to address these barriers, Woodcraft Folk can broaden its reach, deepen its impact, and ensure it reflects the diversity of the communities it aims to serve.

Conclusion: A Call to action for a more Inclusive Woodcraft Folk

This research highlights both **practical** and **cultural barriers** that are limiting the inclusivity of the Woodcraft Folk movement. While the organisation is rooted in values of equality and co-operation, current practices are not consistently aligned with those ideals, particularly when it comes to engaging working-class communities, racially and ethnically diverse people and those living with disabilities.

The movement is currently most accessible to a white, middle-class demographic, and while this may reflect existing networks, it does not reflect the full diversity of the communities Woodcraft Folk seeks to serve. Varied local approaches, varied capacity and understanding together with mixed communications, limited outreach, unclear expectations and underdeveloped reporting mechanisms all contribute to this imbalance. Cultural assumptions about race, class, politics, diet, and disability further reinforce a sense of exclusion for many.

However, this is not a fixed state. The findings clearly show that **there is significant potential for positive change and many existing volunteers and decision makers keen to make change**. With intentional action, Woodcraft Folk can build a more inclusive movement that better represents and supports the diversity of society today.

We call on all parts of the Woodcraft Folk: local groups, volunteers, leadership, and national structures to commit to **meaningful and sustained action**. This includes:

- Embedding inclusion and equity into outreach, recruitment and programme design.
- Developing accessible, representative, and welcoming communications.
- Providing robust training on equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) for all volunteers and staff.
- Creating safer and more responsive reporting and accountability systems.
- Actively building relationships with underrepresented communities and listening to their experiences.

True inclusion is not just about who is present, it's about who feels they belong and are valued. By addressing these barriers head-on, Woodcraft Folk can honour its founding values and ensure it remains a movement for *all* young people and volunteers, not just a few.