



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM NORTH, MANCHESTER

Case study: visitor attraction

Welcome All training makes an impact in many different ways at one of the most successful visitor attractions opened in Britain in recent years, Imperial War Museum North (IWMN) in Trafford, Manchester.

With some 239,000 visitors to IWMN in 2008, a large team of around 60 enthusiastic and skilled volunteers - with up to six working daily - looks after customers and enhances their experience.

Visitors with a wide range of access needs are well catered for through physical facilities and special services, but equally important is the quality of welcome and customer service they receive.

Volunteers' customer service role includes answering questions, helping visitors use online resources, presenting museum artefacts, such as a baby's gas mask, to visitors and providing a general source of support to visitors in the gallery.



"We offer Welcome All training to all volunteers. It allows them an insight into the issues facing visitors with disabilities, often for the first time," said IWMN Volunteer Programme Assistant Andrea Tuck.

"It gives them an awareness of different types of access needs, such as hearing and visual impairments, practical skills and the confidence to help out all visitors."

A structured Volunteer Development Programme helps give people new skills and often provides a route back into full-time employment. Volunteers can undertake further accessibility training, and develop transferable customer service skills, plus the experience of using these skills in a busy workplace. Some 130 volunteers have completed Welcome All and Welcome Host (core customer service skills) courses.

Andrea added: "Our volunteers are a diverse group, from retired people to those looking to return to full-time employment. Welcome All is an excellent course in helping set customer service standards, and for participants it involves lots of practical and useful learning that they can put into practice immediately."



Volunteer Brian said: "The training was absolutely wonderful - it opened your eyes to disability. What you don't realise until you do the training what disabled people have to deal with on a daily basis."

Opened in 2002, the IWMN offers exceptional built-in accessibility. Facilities and services include hearing loops, wheelchairs, lifts, some Braille, a 'Big Picture' film show, which is subtitled and signed on screen, and signed tours.

High quality customer care is equally important. Quarterly corporate marketing research to measure customer satisfaction has found 97% of visitors rated their visit 'excellent' or 'good' with an equally high number likely to recommend the museum. Some 5% of visitors said they had a disability.

Andrea added: "Volunteers are on the frontline of looking after customers, and it is essential that they understand the issues and challenges facing all our visitors. Providing proactive, understanding customer service can transform a visit into a truly memorable experience."