

Diversity Awareness Group Training Exercise

This activity can be used with any group of people as a way of raising diversity issues in an amusing way. The fictional case studies seem quite ridiculous at first and this helps people to relax so that they are more open about their assumptions about diversity. The value of the exercise is that it puts people in the position of being in a group which is oppressed and devalued. For some people this will be a novel experience, for others it will be painfully familiar. The activity raises the issue of self oppression very effectively.

Break your group into sub groups of four or five people. Ask half of the groups to discuss the Martian case study and half to discuss the Tree Lover one. Allow twenty minutes discussion and then bring the whole group together for feedback. A key distinction between the two case studies is that Martians are noticeably different from the dominant group in society whereas tree lovers are not. The experience of being different, and the strategies by which each group manage their divergence from the mainstream, will therefore be very different.

The feedback can be organised so that all groups feedback on each of these headings together:

- Barriers to volunteering
- Attitudes towards volunteering
- Personal strategies for coping with the barriers
- How the organisation could be more inclusive
- How individuals could be more inclusive

As the feedback progresses you will start to find that people spontaneously make the connections between these ridiculous, fictional examples, and real life situations. The discussion is likely to raise many issues about managing specific aspects of diversity. The general point is that, far from being managed and seen as a problem, diversity should be celebrated. Being inclusive is not about politics and conforming to politically correct requirements from funders and government, it's about valuing everyone as a matter of course. Diversity is about respecting self and others.

Allow between sixty and ninety minutes for this activity. If you are successful in creating a supportive and relaxed atmosphere during discussion you will find that people begin to talk about their own experiences quite naturally.

**Exercise designed by Adam May.
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Martian

The year is 2050. You are the earth born daughter of Martian parents. Humans made contact with Martians in 2010 and invited them to Earth in large numbers from 2015 to 2020. Martians were very useful to the nuclear power industry because they are not affected by radiation so they were able to help in decommissioning old nuclear power stations. All the nuclear power stations were decommissioned some 20 years ago. Martians and their children do not have the qualifications or cultural background to fit in easily with human society. Many humans have been calling for the Martians to go back to Mars.

Martians are 10 feet tall, very thin, and have green skin. Genetically they are close cousins to humans. Martians believe in twin gods who bought the universe into being and maintain it by singing constantly in harmony. Martians worship these gods by sitting on their hands every 2 hours for 10 minutes and singing. Imagine you are a Martian who wants to volunteer with an agency with which you are familiar.

What barriers might you encounter in the process of becoming a volunteer? Think about how being in a minority group might affect your attitudes towards yourself and others; what social barriers there might be; and what practical barriers there might be.

How would being a Martian affect you attitudes towards being a volunteer?

What strategies, helpful and unhelpful, might you adopt in an organisation that was predominantly designed by humans for humans?

What could the voluntary organisation do to help you in your voluntary work?

What could individuals do to help you in your voluntary work?

Are there any ways in which being a Martian might be an asset in being a volunteer?

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Tree Lover

You are a lover of trees. You feel drawn to them and want to find a special tree with which to have a lifelong relationship. You have known that you felt this way for a long time although you have never told anyone for fear of being ostracised or laughed at.

Since you live in a flat, you have taken to trespassing in private gardens under cover of darkness to find your ideal tree. When you find trees you are drawn to, you take off your clothes and sit in the tree's branches.

You also have an unrelated medical condition which causes you to give off an offensive odour. This effect is minimised if you drink large quantities of pineapple juice. Unfortunately, pineapple juice in these quantities tends to stain your teeth yellow.

You have read about other tree lovers but never met any of them. You are wary of making contact. This is partly because you wouldn't know how, also, you have read that they are quite strange people. Apart from activities associated with your tree loving, you have normal attitudes and a very conventional lifestyle.

Imagine you are a Tree Lover who wants to volunteer with an agency with which you are familiar.

What barriers might you encounter in the process of becoming a volunteer? Think about how being in a minority group might affect your attitudes towards yourself and others; what social barriers there might be; and what practical barriers there might be.

How would being a Tree Lover affect you attitudes towards being a volunteer?

What strategies, helpful and unhelpful, might you adopt in an organisation which was predominantly designed by non-tree lovers for non-tree lovers?

What could the voluntary organisation do to help you in your voluntary work?

What could individuals do to help you in your voluntary work?

Are there any ways in which being a Tree Lover might be an asset in being a volunteer?

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