

ASUME

Volunteering in Dementia



Meaning & purpose

The insights from the altruism theme indicate that although volunteers relate to 'giving' as an important part of their identity, they still described a two way process. First and foremost they noted that they volunteer because they enjoy it.

... but when you are dancing with a group of people I think you do get a lot of...I don't know what the word for it is, but you do get something out of it. I think it connects you more to the group and you leave feeling a lot happier. (CVF09 Cumbria)

The impacts described were for the majority of volunteers extremely positive. The enjoyability elements were very focused around the impact of the interaction they had with people with dementia, their carers, other volunteers and also the organisations they volunteered for. The most positive impacts were discussed in relation to where groups had formed strong bonds. The foundation to this and an overriding theme within thoughts expressed about enjoyment was the feeling of being needed. That the feeling of being needed gave a certain purpose to volunteers activities and overall life.

I think...definitely the first thing...from a purely needs-based thing is that I knew the minute I walked in the door that I was, kind of, needed. You know, that there would something for me to do. I would have a purpose. Something that I enjoyed.... Ninety-nine per cent of the time they were happy for you to be there. And they wanted you. So there must have been something for me personally that was about that. About being wanted and being needed. And being appreciated. Yeah. That was important. That's quite emotional for me. I'm feeling that. (CVF04, Cumbria)

For those volunteering with people living with dementia and carers there was an overlapping sense of purpose, the chance to make a real impact on people's lives.

The enjoyability element, therefore, was central to what volunteers 'got out' of volunteering activities with those with dementia. Those that reported 'feeling needed' related this to being able to develop a sense of purpose that connected to different parts of their lives and could transcend the volunteering activity.

However, it was also a point of contention in regards to the above theme of altruism. As discussed, the motivation of many volunteers was tied up to their own self-image and self-belief in their own altruism. Therefore to 'get something out' of volunteer contradicted this image of altruism. This was something that volunteers could judge other volunteers on as well.

... someone said to her I'm not in it for what I get out of and I said, well, I couldn't be in it unless I got something out of it because my halo would fall down if I told you anything different. (SVF09, Stirlingshire)

This indicated that not all volunteers can negotiate the feelings of giving and receiving through the process of volunteering. This has implications for volunteering agencies in regards to empowering volunteers.



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