

ASUME

Volunteering in Dementia



Social Interaction

'Volunteers engaged in volunteering because they enjoyed it. It was an element that was intrinsic to the 'feel-good' factor of 'giving something back' but was also linked to the process and impact of social interaction'. So much so, that this volunteer described the happy feeling as a 'fix'.

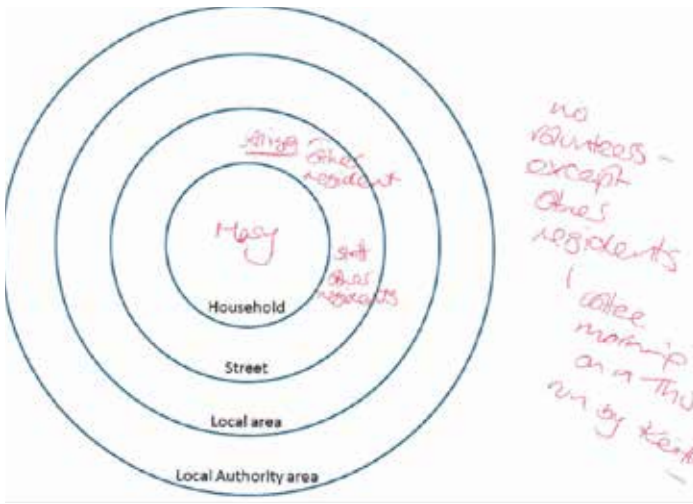
Even though they don't know who I am, it's just nice to say hello, they're glad to see me, is rewarding in itself, just wants to make you go back and get another fix.

The importance of social interaction for volunteers was heightened in regards to the connection with dementia. Some of the volunteers framed this as an activity they are fulfilling as those living with dementia and their carers had lost social connections – or “making a connection where others have given up” (Volunteer, CV15, Cumbria).

Volunteers saw a major part of their role as standing in for lost friendships, building upon normal routines (such as taking them to café's and shops). This was sometimes framed as a 'privilege' (CVF09) to be able to interact with people with so much experience. In this way, volunteers themselves felt they had gained friendship circles and enjoyed the social interactions connected to their volunteering activities.

It's a social life you see as well as giving to people you are getting something in return. (CVF12, Cumbria)

We also saw when talking to those living with dementia about their networks, the influence of events and the role of facilitating social interaction was clear, even if the role of the volunteer was not clearly visible from their perspective (for those living with dementia, staff and volunteers were often simply interchangeable).



Events, such as coffee mornings, dancing, art groups and singing, brought together volunteers, those living with dementia and carers. These were where the networks they discussed with us mainly overlapped. It was a shared space that was perceived to be a large part of the motivation to volunteer.

...it's become more than just a volunteers group, really, it's just become a social event. (CCF04, Cumbria)

These connections were so strong they were often described as 'like family', where their volunteering commitments had become an integral part of their own social calendars.

You get to know people. We're like an extended family. I used to say that when I worked. I said, you're like a family to them and you become part of them, really. (CVF06, Cumbria)

The basis of most of the social interaction with those living with dementia was through talking, tea and biscuits. Many volunteers felt comfortable and natural engaging at this level of interaction as it had some of the most visible impact (or immediate impact).

What volunteers did and the activities they engaged in did matter in regards to the shaping and positivity of the social interaction they were engaged in. Motivation was connected to the interactions they were having.

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)

In regards to carers perspectives, some of them noted that social interaction was important in sharing their caring skills. The skills and knowledge they had accumulated could be shared through the interaction with others when volunteering with dementia and different groups of people because "I got used to sort of dealing and speaking and knowing the sort of things that people would like" (CVF13).



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