

ASUME

Volunteering in Dementia



Peer Support

Peer support could be very important for volunteers but the extent to which this took place depended on where volunteers were based and how much contact they had with others.

So I mean we will discuss, and we don't have great meetings about it - have you noticed so-and-so - but then again the people who are in charge are very aware and will either ask you to go and sort something else or we will say, so-and-so wasn't up to much today, or, do you think we should move somebody or other, or, so-and-so needs cheering up, or something like that. So there is a team feeling and we all just do what we see needs doing. It's not, this is my role, that's your role, or, I don't do the teas, you do them; we all just muck in. (CVF10, Cumbria)

There were some key examples of volunteers supporting each other in regards to gender roles. For example, one volunteer noted that when she was out walking with the man she volunteers with who has dementia she would often ask one of the other men to accompany her as she was worried she couldn't keep up or meet any physical challenges if they arose. On a similar note, one volunteer who was a man always made sure a woman was with him when entering the house of another woman for safety and security reasons. In this way, networks of volunteers were able to support each other in quite informal but important ways.

Some organisations had formal meetings for volunteers but these did not take place frequently, in this example, just once a year.

There's a group, everybody that's on the befriending team can go along to once a year and just all get together and, I suppose, discuss any issues you might have and it's nice just to reassure you that there's other people in the same boat, sort of thing. (SVF07, Stirlingshire)

Accessing peer support could be a challenge for volunteers working out in the community who had little contact with other volunteers.

It's difficult because with volunteers it's time, whether they get the time. And it's getting them together. I very rarely meet anybody from Txxx, unless I go into the office we've got with the RVS, I very rarely meet anybody. You operate in your own zone type of thing. Which is good. I know if I need assistance I can go in. But most volunteers hardly meet anybody. We probably meet once at Christmas or something like that. (SVM01, Stirlingshire)

This volunteer in Cumbria suggested some kind of online virtual forum where volunteers could get together to talk about their experiences as she could see a need for this kind of support.

I'm not really into technology too much but some kind of forum or some kind of group that you could talk about your experiences. I think if it was going to be a long term thing for me I think that would be important for volunteers. (CVF02, Cumbria)

So while peer support was seen as valuable by volunteers for many there were limited opportunities to interact with peers and take advantage of this kind of support. Suggestions were made by volunteers for ways to improve this, such as through the use of online forums.



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