

# **My** Home **Life**

*The bulletin for care home staff*

## **Volunteers' Week**

**Bringing the community 'home'—  
making use of volunteers to support  
your residents' quality of life**



# My Home Life

**My Home Life** is a UK initiative aimed at improving the quality of life of those who are living, dying, visiting and working in care homes for older people.

**My Home Life** celebrates existing best practice in care homes and promotes care homes as a positive option for older people.

**My Home Life**, led by Help the Aged, the National Care Forum and City University, is a collaborative programme bringing together organisations that reflect the interests of care home providers, health and social care commissioners, regulators, care home residents and relatives and those interested in education, research and practice development.

Material for this bulletin has been collected from care homes on the *My Home Life* network and from reports produced by the Relatives and Residents Association and NAPA, including *Care Homes for Older People – an underused opportunity*, Rose Heatley, R&RA, 2007.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Help the Aged or its affiliates.

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This bulletin was written by Rose Heatley, researcher and author of R&RA report on volunteering.

## My Home Life Volunteers' Week

### Introduction

This bulletin focuses entirely on volunteers – a fitting subject for Volunteers' Week (1–7 June); it offers a wealth of information and ideas on the benefits volunteers can bring to care homes, and tips on how you can recruit, manage, and integrate them into the life of your home.

Most of this material comes from homes that are already using volunteers; their knowledge and experience are shared in the hope that you will find it inspiring and useful in setting up or extending your own volunteer programme.

Your willingness and ability to recognise the role volunteers could play – one complementary to your own as staff, but not replacing it – could have a big and positive impact on the quality of life for everyone in your home.

### What benefits can volunteers bring?

- Volunteers can add value, e.g. time to chat, and provide skills which may not already exist in the home, such as teaching IT.
- Volunteers are new faces and bring fresh perspectives. Residents, their friends and families, staff and volunteers themselves can all benefit from this.
- Residents may get more meaning and enjoyment out of life, and feel less lonely and isolated, when they are engaging with volunteers. Someone coming in specially for them can make them feel more important.
- Volunteers can work one-to-one, or as part of a group, perhaps alongside an activities organiser.
- Volunteers are often well-motivated and dedicated.
- They can often be flexible e.g. coming in at evenings, weekends or on public holidays.
- They build and maintain links with the local community and help improve your reputation.
- Volunteers make a contribution which is not paid, and thus bring economic benefits. At the same time, the cost of managing them and certain expenses, e.g. travel, should not be forgotten.





## What can volunteers do?

If you are thinking about bringing in volunteers, it is important to consider what individual residents would like – this will involve consulting them, their friends and families.

- What activities and interests does each resident wish to pursue?
- What things matter to your residents? Think creatively about the little things that might help improve each resident's quality of life.
- Does the volunteer wish to work with residents one-to-one and/or in a group?
- Are you taking into account that some residents may

not wish to have contact with volunteers (and that this should be respected)?

- Are you being realistic about what residents can cope with? Volunteers and staff may be keen to put on a day trip, but for some residents something more low-key might be more valuable.

It is good practice to recruit and allocate your volunteers on the basis of the needs you have identified.

(1) Themed tea parties: volunteers from the Help the Aged Sunshine Project send invitations (via the manager of the care home) to a maximum of four residents in a home. These parties bring residents closer together, particularly new residents, and provide an opportunity for a

range of topics to be discussed. Inter-home tea parties, with the best china and a variety of teas and biscuits, are also worth considering.

(2) Volunteers are also working to support residents to develop IT skills. One resident who struggled to write because of arthritis has now written his life story for his family on the computer.

(3) Schoolchildren who have been interviewing residents in a care home have been gaining insight into the lives of older people, while the residents are getting to know something about today's teenagers. The project also provides invaluable insight into the lives of residents for care home staff dealing with care plans.



## Other possible activities for volunteers

### Working with groups

- exercise/dance session
- music and singing, arts and crafts, poetry groups
- knitting/bingo/whist
- escort for outings
- current affairs discussion group
- theatrical events or reminiscence
- film and book clubs.

### Working with individuals

- manicures and beauty treatments
- bringing in a pet

- life history work
- reading newspapers/crosswords
- supporting specific interests and hobbies of residents
- gardening
- help with correspondence or to write memoirs
- buying presents for residents' family
- short walks with individuals
- driving or otherwise accompanying people to dentist, hospital, shops, etc.
- acting as advocates (helping people to articulate, defend or exercise their rights)
- supporting people with communication difficulties, socially isolated or requiring psychological support

- activities tailored to people with dementia

### Other ways to support care home residents

- fundraising
- running a drinks trolley
- organising hearing tests for residents
- running stalls at fundraising events
- cutting up food at mealtimes
- running an in-house shop
- serving in the dining room
- sort out the care home library, CD collection etc.



## Recruiting volunteers

How do you find volunteers?

Articles with photographs in free newspapers seem to work well.

You can also advertise in the local press and within community centres, libraries and doctors' surgeries, and some supermarkets. Your local volunteer centre or bureau should be able to help, and can advertise your openings online. Language schools and student unions at universities (which often have volunteering co-ordinators) may be interested to hear about your openings, as will local schools and voluntary organisations of all kinds.

Finally, it is possible that volunteers could be found among the relatives and friends of your residents, so don't forget to inform your relatives' group, if you have one: put a notice up, or have leaflets by the front door.

*'We send Christmas cards to families of former residents to encourage them to remain involved with us as volunteers.'*

It is worthwhile being specific about what you wish volunteers to do, right from the start. For example, one care home particularly wanted a volunteer to support a resident in working in the care home garden, so a notice was put up at the local garden centre.

## Tips for managing volunteers

If you decide to develop a volunteer initiative, it is important to decide who will run it, and how much time they will be given. One possibility is to make volunteer management the responsibility of the activity organiser. In a group of homes, it may be that some aspects of the volunteer organiser role can be managed centrally.

Ideally you should draw up a volunteer policy or handbook to outline those elements of your organisation that affect volunteers. It is important to include policies relating to induction, training, support, insurance, expenses, CRB checks (which are free for volunteers), health & safety, risk assessment for the various

activities that volunteers do, timesheets and a volunteer agreement.

**Brendoncare has kindly agreed to share its volunteer toolkit with the My Home Life network which can be adapted to meet the needs of your own care home. For a copy please contact Dorothy Seymour on 01255 477939 or [Dorothy.seymour@helptheaged.org.uk](mailto:Dorothy.seymour@helptheaged.org.uk). The toolkit will also be available on-line at [www.myhomelife.org.uk/Resources.htm](http://www.myhomelife.org.uk/Resources.htm) from August 2008.**

Lastly, don't forget that volunteers come forward for a variety of motives and will not stay if they are not getting something out of it. They will need a proper induction, ongoing support from a named member of staff (a buddy system can be useful here). They may need additional training to help them engage with people with dementia. Overall they need to feel welcome, appreciated and a part of the care home team working to make a difference for residents.

## A volunteer's view

*'Before I became a volunteer I was shown round the care home and then had an interview with the volunteer manager, who asked what skills I had to offer, what I would like to do, why I was volunteering and how much time I'd like to give.'*

*'The home takes volunteering quite seriously. Its mission statement says it "recognises that its staff and volunteers are the most important resources for delivering quality services" and the fact that all volunteers have been invited to meet the new chairman over tea makes me feel they are not just empty words.'*

*'The volunteer manager works three days a week, liaising closely with the activity organisers, matching volunteers to suitable openings and keeping in touch with them: for example, warning them if "their" resident has gone into hospital. I was even sent a birthday card – a nice touch that makes you feel part of the family.'*

*'We wear volunteer name badges so everyone knows who we are, and there is a signing-in book for volunteers only – it helps to keep track of the hours we contribute.'*

*'I come in one day a fortnight and spend 45 minutes helping a particular resident to write his*

*memoirs, then I visit different residents as required, perhaps taking them into the garden for a walk.'*

*'Very poor eyesight and memory must be common among care home residents; volunteers shouldn't necessarily expect to be recognised or remembered by residents, but it can come as a surprise! It's very useful to be prepared for this during the induction process, and I also appreciate being told briefly about a resident's background and being properly introduced.'*

Rose Heatley



## Who can help?



### Volunteering England

Clear, practical help on recruitment and retention is available from Volunteering England's Good Practice Bank: [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk). Information sheets on all aspects of volunteering are available on the same website. For specific problems, call Volunteering England's Information Line: 0800 028 3304. Website: [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)

### National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People (NAPA)

This is an organisation for activity organisers and co-ordinators. It has a useful publication, *You and Your Community*, with numerous ideas on how the community can be linked into the care home. Tel: 020 7078 9375. Website: [www.napa-activities.co.uk](http://www.napa-activities.co.uk)

### Relatives & Residents Association

The R&RA has publications and expertise on how to involve relatives. Tel: 020 7359 8148. Website: [www.relres.org](http://www.relres.org)

### RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme)

RSVP can advise on the ways in which care home residents might be able to volunteer. Depending on the location of the home, it may also be able to provide volunteers. Tel: 020 7643 1385. Website: [www.csv-rsvp.org.uk](http://www.csv-rsvp.org.uk)

### Pets as Therapy

This organisation provides registered volunteers who will visit with their specially trained dogs and cats. Tel: 01844 345445. Website: [www.petsastherapy.org](http://www.petsastherapy.org)

### Volunteer centres and bureaux

People who wish to volunteer often start here (if using the internet, search on 'volunteer centre'). The centres may be able to help if you let them know what kind of volunteers you are looking for.

### My Home Life Programme Volunteer Toolkit

Brendoncare and the My Home Life programme have teamed up to provide you with a toolkit to support a volunteer strategy. Contact the Sunshine Project (details below) for a free copy.

#### The Sunshine Project

Supporting people in residential and sheltered accommodation

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