

# A S U M E

## Volunteering in Dementia



### Integration

The categories between volunteers, carers and staff were often seen as much more flexible from the perceptions of those living with dementia. With regards to those living with dementia, often who was a volunteer, carer or another person living with dementia was fluid and indeed unimportant. They only saw people in their network (some of whom they liked, some of whom they did not like at all) but the categories themselves were redundant in many cases.

*I don't think they even see any of us as working with them. They just see it as they're having a nice time together and they don't recognise any difference between [B] who is [C's] wife and [D] who is a paid person, and me as a volunteer. We're all just there together. (CVF16, Cumbria)*

Interestingly, where this was the case, volunteers often felt more positive about the experiences they were having as they were perceived as unequal:

*So as a volunteer, you know, they offered a good experience I felt, if you were willing to participate. You know, you, kind of, joined in everything. You weren't separate as a volunteer. When you went, you were very much part of what was happening. And I think having talked to some other volunteers, that's not always the case with people. (CVF04, Cumbria)*

Treating everyone as equals was important to people living with dementia as well. For example, one befriender saw the equal relationship as an important part of his relationship with the person he spent time with. As two men, they had an equal relationship talking about football, sports and other 'manly' things. He had noted that his wife, who was his carer, thought this was also an important element to the relationship, where it is a friendship of equals based on shared experiences. Another example from a carer was the importance of a person with dementia having someone to talk to that didn't tend to their personal needs. Volunteers also found themselves to be conduits between families, carers and those with dementia:

The first lady that I was involved with.... and her nearest daughter lived up Inverness. So I very quickly became... a conduit... because I would email her mostly each week when I'd seen her mum and say how she'd been, and her daughter would...or I'd say if I'd noticed in the house that the woman was short of something or other I'd email the daughter and say, I'll go and get her some more toiletries or something and you can leave some money out for me next time you're down. (SVFOZ, Stirlingshire)

However, there were still activities where the lines between relationships were trying to be reinforced:

[group secretary] Occasionally comes to the session and said, you know I don't know who's a volunteer here and I don't know who is a carer and who's a...and we've specifically... We, as volunteers, have a blue name tag so that people know who the volunteers are but the carers and the people living with dementia just have a name tag because we don't want...we'd love everybody just to be equal if you like (CVF10, Cumbria)

Also, some volunteers really appreciated the 'line' which they saw as important in creating a boundary over the activities that they could or would engage in. Therefore, clear boundaries were important but in groups and when interacting volunteers wanted to be acknowledged on an equal footing to other participants. Seeing volunteers as just another person in the network was a default position for those living with dementia.

Often lines were drawn using organisational processes (such as name tags) but volunteers wanted to also establish equal and reciprocal relationships.



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