



Written by
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Recruiting and equipping volunteers to build relationships with individual care home residents

- Prepare volunteer role descriptions
- Advertise for volunteers
- Ensure stringent vetting procedures
- Train volunteers to prepare them for the care environment
- Provide ongoing support
- Share stories

Background

Research shows that care home residents are twice as likely to feel severely lonely compared to older people living at home. Those who run church services in care homes see this first hand, but may not know how to address it. Volunteers can make a huge difference by coming alongside care home residents in companionship and doing activities together. If you already have a trusted relationship with a care home, and have chatted with them about getting others involved in companionship, there are steps you can take to mobilise volunteers.

1 Prepare volunteer role description

People generally want to know what they are letting themselves in for before they sign up to volunteer. Time is precious and they want to know what the need is and the difference they can make. Include in the role description: what the role involves and how much time is expected of them; the attributes you are looking for in volunteers; what training and support is provided; where they can find more information.

There are so many enjoyable activities volunteers can do with residents. Some residents will enjoy chatting and being listened to, but others prefer building relationship by doing things together. This could

include board games, reading aloud, poetry, looking at photos and pictures, doing a crossword together, going for a walk – the list is endless. We had a resident who loved to go litter picking with her volunteer!

2 Advertise for volunteers

Recruiting volunteers in churches can be challenging – often people are already serving in so many ways. Consider if all your volunteers need to be Christians – there may be people in your wider community who have a heart for older people and would love to volunteer. You don't need to be a Christian to play a game of chess with a resident or read aloud with them. Many areas will have an organisation that helps recruit volunteers who can advertise the role for you. Of course, also advertise within your church community. Think about the times you have volunteered and what inspired you to do it, and include that motivation in your advertising. Stories about the difference a volunteer can make are always compelling.

3 Stringent vetting procedures

Care home residents are considered adults at risk, so stringent vetting and safeguarding practices are crucial. Volunteers should complete application and self-disclosure forms, two references should be taken and a DBS check completed. If you have doubts about the suitability of an individual for this role, it is okay to redirect them elsewhere. Volunteers will often be unsupervised in the care home environment, and this will not be a good fit for some individuals who would flourish better in a more structured volunteering role. Some skills can be learned through training and experience, but some qualities are not taught.

4 Train volunteers to prepare them for the care environment

A care home is a foreign environment for many people, and volunteers are likely to be nervous. They will need training for the role, which includes an understanding of care homes, boundaries, communication, listening, safeguarding, what to expect and what is expected of them. It can also be an opportunity to meet other volunteers and feel part of a team.

5 Provide ongoing support for volunteers

The first few weeks volunteering in a care home can be tough, as most volunteers will be out of their comfort zones, so they'll often need support and reassurance. It's helpful for them to have an induction at the care home where they can meet key staff members, be shown around and introduced to the residents they will be visiting. As they grow in confidence and get to know the residents it can be hugely satisfying. Ongoing support is still needed and it can be good to meet up with other volunteers and share experiences. Volunteers need to be clear who their supervisor is and encouraged to chat with them should they have concerns. Don't forget to thank volunteers regularly – we all like to feel appreciated.

6 Share stories

Stories are a powerful way of engaging your church in this vital ministry. Encourage your church to pray for your care home ministry and share stories of the difference volunteers are making in the lives of residents, maintaining the confidentiality of individuals. This will raise the profile of your work and can help generate interest and a steady flow of potential new volunteers.

Further resources:

Embracing Age is a Christian charity mobilising volunteers to befriend care home residents. Tina is founder and director. Guides and templates can be found here – embracingage.org.uk/for-churches.

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