

Practical ideas for volunteers

How can volunteers best assist clients to stay active and independent?

Volunteers play a very important role by providing assistance to programs which actively support the wellbeing of clients and promotes independence. With a focus on active ageing, the role of volunteers in Support at Home programs has shifted from a focus of 'doing for' to 'working together'. This promotes a wellness approach and encourages people to do as much as possible for themselves with individualised support as needed.

What roles can volunteers take on?

While there is now less need to 'do for' clients, volunteers will always be an essential part of the service. With direction from your supervisor and in keeping with the client's goals, there are many important roles for volunteers.



Encouraging and empowering

With a wellness approach in community care services that says '*We want clients to do as much as they possibly can for themselves...*', there is lots of room for volunteers to be there as the person who empowers people to 'do for' themselves. It's about understanding what motivates them and supporting them to get back to doing what they can and want to do. Staff are as available as possible, but they will always have less time than they would like. Having a volunteer who can spend one-on-one time encouraging people to have a go is a great resource for organisations.

Facilitating

Volunteers have an important role to play in facilitating or supporting clients and working with their identified strengths. They can be there as additional support and be guided by the individual as to how much support they provide. Be open to observing and listening to the person and their needs and working with them.

Observing

Volunteers can be the 'eyes and ears' for a service. A vital part of their role is observing what is going on with clients. Volunteers delivering meals, for example, may be the only person from the organisation who regularly sees the person at home. Whether volunteers are part of a group service, or working with clients individually, they can be great observers.

Things to note may be changes in a person that makes you think they may be struggling a little. Or listening out for client comments - *'I was able to join in with the dance group today'* – something that makes you realise they have made a significant achievement. With volunteers' observations, staff have a lot more information at their fingertips to plan the right services for individuals. It's important that you provide regular feedback using the organisation's feedback loop.

The intergenerational connection

Volunteers of different ages can play a great role in Support at Home services. Mixing people of different ages and generations together can provide a great opportunity to stimulate conversations, share information and insights. Talking about life across the generations is a great way to understand each other's similarities, differences and build social connections. Intergenerational programs involving activities with older adults and schoolchildren and pre-school children have

shown mutual benefits.* Older adults' health, wellbeing and mood improved through these important social connections, and younger participants' attitudes to ageing improved. All participants learnt new things and their respect for the other generation increased.

*See: [intergenerational-program-boosts-dementia-friendly-communities/](#)

Guiding

Some people may not be as active as they once were, either mentally or physically. Often, just having a volunteer there to talk a client through an activity can make the difference between them taking part, or not. Having you – the volunteer – there can give the person receiving services the confidence of knowing that they have support when needed.

For further discussion

- > What approaches or roles do you see yourself taking on as a volunteer?
- > Does this vary much for volunteers - depending on whether working with individual clients or in group settings?
- > How do you think your approaches help the people you work with? Remember, people receiving services each have their own goals, recorded in their care plans.
- > Has anyone seen the *Old People's Home For 4 Year Olds* program? What did you think of the impact the generations had on each other?