

# Stories of Active Volunteering

## Working one-to-one

Some volunteers work individually with clients. These one-to-one activities include visiting someone in their home, taking someone on outings or just chatting to someone on the phone at a regular time.

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

Volunteers who work individually with clients have the chance to develop a special relationship. The extra time spent together lets you both get to know each other well.



### Some topics for discussion

In getting to know your client, think about how to draw them out in conversation. Some good areas to explore include:

- Their early years – Where were they born? Where did they grow up and go to school? How many siblings in their family?
- Their early adulthood – Did they work? Did they study? Did they travel? How do they think their early adulthood compares to young people today?
- Their family life – Did they have a long-term partnership? Do they have children? Do they have grandchildren?
- Their skills and hobbies – What were they good at doing? What did they do to relax? Do they still pursue these activities? If not, why not? Would they like to?
- Their interests and aspirations – What do they love? How important is family to them? Are they passionate about art or travel? Gardening or antiques? How do they maintain their interest in this area these days?

Remember, when exploring personal information, be guided by the person and their willingness to chat. There may be sensitivities or just sad memories or associations. But – people may also appreciate the opportunity to have conversations that are sensitive and meaningful. Take your lead from the individual.

From the information that the person shares with you:

- Open up discussion topics that are of interest to them.
- Talk about books, newspaper articles or films that connect to the person's interests or life stories. This may prompt the person to read or view something new.
- Link the person's interests to topical events – exhibitions, festivals or shows.
- If you are taking the person on outings, let this information inform the things you do. Rather than just going to a shopping centre, if your client loves gardening – can you take them to local gardens? Or even for a walk locally, especially in spring? Or to a local nursery?

## **The importance of making decisions**

We know how important it is for people to make decisions in their own life – to be autonomous.

As people age or become frail, some areas for decision-making may be more difficult. Therefore, it is so important that the support they get on a social level provides them with opportunities to make their own decisions. When you go out with your client, make sure to allow them the time to make decisions and choices – even simple ones, like what to eat when you have a cup of tea, and bigger choices, like where you will go or what you talk about.

Building a relationship with someone over time also puts you in an important position to observe how 'they are travelling' and to give them some feedback. Remember, they may be quite socially isolated. Having someone tell them that they look well, or noticing something about their appearance is a simple thing that can really help someone's self esteem and confidence, especially if they don't receive these sorts of compliments much any more.

### **For further discussion**

- What are some of the interesting things you've discussed with clients?
- What are some of the most interesting things a client has shared with you? (Not personal information)
- What have you learnt from these discussions?