

Stories of Active Volunteering

Working one-to-one

Some volunteers work individually with clients. These one-to-one activities may include visiting the person in their home, taking them on outings or just chatting to them 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 engage them in conversation and find out about their interests, strengths and dreams.

Remember to be guided by the person and their willingness to chat when exploring personal information. There may be sensitivities, experiences of trauma or just sad memories or

associations, but people may also appreciate the opportunity to have conversations that are personal and meaningful. Take your lead from the individual and observe their level of comfort in discussing various topics.

Remember the active listening tips – maintain eye contact if you are face-to-face, check in with questions to ensure that you have understood their responses.

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? Do they have regular contact with family? Do they have strong friendships that they identify as their ‘family of choice’?
- > 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?

- > Did they work outside the home? What industry or profession were they involved in? Do they still feel a connection? If they worked in the home, what were the challenges? What did they enjoy?
- > Their interests and aspirations – What do they love? Are they passionate about art or travel? Gardening or woodwork? Music or film? Do they love to read or cook? How do they maintain their interest in this area or how would they like to reconnect?

From the information that the client shares with you:

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

The importance of making decisions

We know how important it is to make decisions in our lives and to have control. This can be difficult for everyone at different times of our lives, but as people age, it may become even more difficult, for example due to physical limitations such as low vision. This makes it more important to support your clients to exercise choice and make their own decisions. When you go out with your client, allow them the time to make decisions and choices – even simple ones, like what to eat, or 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 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 their self-esteem and confidence, especially if they don't receive many of these sorts of positive comments anymore.

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?