

## Spread Your Wings

Life's most persistent and urgent question is: what are you doing for others?

-- Martin Luther King Jr

### Touching Lives at Abbeyfield

The Abbeyfield Society is a charity providing housing, support and care for older people who we define as being aged over 55. There are Abbeyfield houses and care homes across the UK, as well as an increasing number of new developments with flats. Our core belief is that older people have an important role to play among their families, friends and communities. We know that overcoming loneliness and insecurity can make all the difference to an older person's well-being and quality of life – our Founder, Richard Carr-Gom, himself a volunteer, recognised this when he opened the first Abbeyfield in 1956 and it remains at the heart of our values. We offer residents a 'home from home' environment with as much or as little contact with people as they want to have. There are 750 Abbeyfield homes across the UK, which are a mix of residential care homes and sheltered houses, and are supported by a network of over 7500 volunteers working with our staff and residents. Volunteers are the lifeblood of our organisation. We have many dedicated volunteers in many different roles, all working towards making sure our residents feel at home and that our homes continue to flourish.

### How Many Ways

You may be surprised to find out how many different volunteering opportunities there are at Abbeyfield. These range from working with us on the marketing, accounting or legal side to helping support residents when they go on outings, health appointments or shopping. Some of our volunteers want to get involved as Trustees with house committees who look after the residents' welfare and some prefer to simply sit and chat with residents from time to time. We really do go welcome all sorts of levels of involvement and we encourage our volunteers to use as much or as little creativity as they want. Some examples of recent events which have been created and implemented by volunteers are seminars, operatic events, cream teas, sponsored walks, wine tastings, fashion shows and open days. Imagine how rewarding it could be to be part of some of these exciting initiatives, not to mention the extra skills that people are honing through some of these activities.

If you would like to try your hand at doing something different, we can offer you the chance to do just that within a supportive environment.

### What's in it for you?

We recognise that being a volunteer requires an investment of time and energy. To show our appreciation of the services of our volunteers, we offer some high quality training and support to carry out the role effectively. There's also the chance to use existing skills to give something back to the community and the opportunity to get involved in some exciting projects to learn new skills. Along with an enhanced CV, all expenses paid and insurance against physical injury and public liability, volunteering at Abbeyfield is also fun and challenging!

Our Good Practice Guide helps volunteers to optimise their volunteer experience, and our Volunteer Co-ordinators work with volunteers to mentor them and align activities. We are very excited about our new initiatives for volunteers which include a bigger and better training plan, a recruitment pack, volunteer agreement and promotional leaflets. All volunteers go through an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check and provide two references - we are committed to best practices in all areas of voluntary work at Abbeyfield.

### **Get the Feel Good Factor**

Care Services Minister, Phil Hope, said in a Department of Health press release (16 March 2010) 'Volunteering benefits patients and service users, and gives volunteers invaluable experience that they might not get in their everyday work and life. Research has shown that there are health and well-being benefits for volunteers too.'

'In our Strategic Vision, we are taking a collaborative approach to encourage and support others to create more volunteering roles. We're encouraging a wider range of people to engage in volunteering in ways that suit them.'

Our volunteers make a huge difference to the quality of life of our residents. They also make an invaluable contribution to our ability to grow, change and contribute to the community. Even just popping in to have coffee with a resident who is unable to get out and about very much can be the highlight of someone's week. "I had never put together anything like a fashion show, especially not one which included two 70+ models" says Anna, a volunteer for an Abbeyfield house in Herts, "but the evening was a big success with a paying audience of over 100 people and best of all, we raised about £2000 for the Abbeyfield house. I'm looking forward to my next 2 events which will range from a wine tasting to a dance event."

Volunteering in this sector is not without its challenges. We ask for reliability, commitment and flexibility from our volunteers along with willingness to learn and accept new ideas. Not all older people are flexible and willing to learn themselves, and indeed not all communities are interested in supporting their older inhabitants. Sometimes volunteering can mean breaking down barriers and building confidence, and a sense of humour is essential!

If you want the chance to grow your experience and you have energy and

passion, volunteering at Abbeyfield can open new doors. We'd love to hear from you – and so would our residents.

Contact

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