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the **VOLUNTEER** in the nursing home



Cooperative Extension Service, University of Nebraska
College of Agriculture and Home Economics,
and U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating
E. F. Frolik, Dean J. L. Adams, Director

No man is an island, entire of itself.

John Donne

"The Volunteer in the Nursing Home" offers suggestions designed to help the volunteer plan programs which will enrich the lives of the nursing home residents and also provide a meaningful experience for the volunteer.

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the VOLUNTEER in the nursing home...

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"Behold, I do not give lectures or a little charity When I give myself."

--Walt Whitman

Volunteer service may be defined as participation without pay in the program of a nursing home or other agency.

The volunteer supplements activities of the professional staff but does not replace the staff or perform duties normally considered a part of the staff's responsibility.

The volunteer represents the concern and interest of the community for its older citizens no longer living in their familiar setting and serves as a link between the community and the home.

The role of the volunteer is unique in that he brings to the nursing home resident that which the paid staff cannot bring—friendship, companionship and concern.

Volunteer activities for the aged may fall into the following areas:

- Friendly visiting
- Recreational activities, crafts, etc.
- Group activities
- Indirect services

The aim of all volunteer activities should be to "do with" and not to "do for" or "put on" activities. The volunteer can bring happiness and enjoyment to the nursing home resident:

By the warm, unprofessional interest which his presence provides.

By the reawakening of old skills and interests.

By creating new friendships and interests.

The volunteer can help stimulate physical and mental health and prevent regression by helping the resident to:

- Learn new skills.
- Make new personal contacts and friendships.
- Develop an appreciation of one's self.
- Learn one's needs and resources to meet those needs.
- Feel useful.
- Have an opportunity to be of service to others.
- Attain a feeling of achievement no matter how small.
- Achieve a sense of individual importance.
- Develop individual potentialities and experience to the fullest.

Maintain as much independence as possible through doing things for himself and for others.

Establish sound relationships and adjust to the problems of congregate living.

Enjoy the benefits derived from group existence.

Re-establish roots in the community.

The Visiting Friend in the Nursing Home

The volunteer should learn the nursing home resident's interests, background and needs before visiting him (or her) and build a friendship on something of special interest to the person.

As a visiting friend, the volunteer brings friendship and serves as a link between the nursing home resident and the outside world by:

Visiting residents in their rooms.

Reading to residents (individuals or groups).

Writing letters for residents who may be unable to write due to physical disability.

Taking residents for walks, rides, shopping, to church, etc. (with approval of staff and physician).

Helping to keep the resident aware of the outside world.

Striving to create a warm, natural relationship as suggested by the term "visiting friend."

Talking of ordinary, everyday topics.

Being a good listener.

Considering interests, likes and needs of person visited.

Giving full attention to the person visited while in his or her presence.

Refraining from discussion of subjects which may be controversial or depressing.

Clipping magazine or newspaper articles for discussion during visits (the highly controversial or depressing should be avoided).

Suggesting and discussing radio and television programs.

Avoiding criticism and offering constructive suggestions when opinions are sought.

Admiring and giving importance to the possessions of the person visited.

Remembering that even a short visit means much to persons who have few outside contacts.

Keeping commitments unless unavoidably detained and then to telephone or send a note to the person expecting the call.

Observing confidences concerning all matters pertaining to the resident's personal life, past experiences, etc.

Letting residents look back into their lives and talk about the days when they felt less dependent.

Showing respect for their experiences.

Not belittling their efforts.

Not talking down to them.

Treating them as intelligent persons capable of making their own decisions.

Remembering that the room, even though it may be shared with another, is the resident's home and source of privacy. Always knock and wait for an invitation before entering. Let the residents be your hosts or hostesses in the nursing home. It is their home.

Encouraging interest in appearance.

Encouraging the older person's interest in doing for others.

Putting personal curiosity and pity into the background.

The use of any titles the person may possess and his last name to ensure a sense of dignity.

Always remembering that nursing home residents are mature adults, not children.

Sending cards for special occasions—birthdays, holidays.

Showing flexibility by following the resident's interests.

If a resident shows an initial lack of confidence in the volunteer, respect his (or her) reticence and accept the challenge to win his confidence.

Group Activities

Group activities may include group singing, arm chair travel, showing of films, slides, etc., discussion groups, games, crafts and other recreational activities. They may be directed by one or more persons.

Indirect Services

Services which do not require direct contact with residents include donation and solicitation of craft materials, collecting magazines and books, making favors for special occasions, arranging flowers, planning for activities held outside the home, recruitment of volunteers, and public relations.

Responsibilities of the Volunteer

The volunteer should:

Keep all commitments made to staff and residents.

Follow a regular schedule of services.

Attend orientation sessions when requested to do so for further understanding of the needs of the aged and the development and use of resources for meeting such needs.

Recognize that he (or she) is not replacing members of the staff.

Accept supervision and follow instructions.

Avoid discussing the nursing home's policies with residents and refer any questions concerning policy to the staff.

Handle all matters in a confidential manner.

Respect the religion, faith and customs of the residents.

Give full attention to nursing home residents when visiting them.

Consider the needs of the residents.

The volunteer should keep in mind the basic characteristics of the older person, including age, and remember that:

Each is an individual and has developed traits of personality that have special significance to him or her.

Lifelong habits are not easily discarded.

An everyday occurrence such as a greeting, sharing silent thoughts, an unrushed five-minute conversation, the indication that someone is interested, has a meaning for the elderly that the younger person cannot appreciate.

There are fewer demands on one's ability to socialize, to use initiative, make decisions or carry responsibility after he enters a nursing home.

Frequently the person entering the nursing home is facing a radical change in his way of life—the decision to enter a home may mean anxiety, conflict and loss of self-esteem.

Many have defects in vision, hearing and memory although these defects may not always be stated or even admitted.

Physical problems may be complicated by feelings of boredom, loneliness, rejection and despair.

Increased dependence and withdrawal may lead to mental and physical deterioration.

Each person is an individual.

The older person needs someone to listen to troubles, past achievements, triumphs and losses; To be considered a part of the community; Spiritual satisfaction; Stimulation of interest in the outside world and other persons; Companionship with others.

Other needs include Recognition as an individual; Self-expression; Reassurance because of loss of spouse, changed economic circumstances, fear of changes, etc.; Affection, respect and appreciation; Status in a group and a community; Self-reorientation; Knowledge and factual information; Play and recreation.

Essentially the older persons' needs are the same as those of any individual and include good health, material and emotional security, companionship, spiritual development, social and recreational activities, opportunities for self-expression in work and creative activity and a need for approval and acceptance.

An older person can be as creative as a younger one. Older persons are people with many of the same needs as younger persons.

Volunteers are helping to create a "whole life" for the person, whether that life is confined to a home, one room or a bed.

In planning recreational programs for the aged, the volunteer should keep in mind that:

Activities or entertainment should not contribute to a feeling of dependency.

Active participation should be encouraged.

The introduction of familiar crafts and hobbies may tend to minimize failure.

The program must frequently be adapted to meet physical disabilities.

Interest, pleasure and rehabilitation of the individual are basic goals of the program.