

## **The role of Senior Peer Activity Motivators – what can they do?**

As the role of the volunteer has been developed within health promotion programmes targeting older people (e.g. Age UK - formerly Age Concern Ageing Well, Someone Like Me) new opportunities have emerged for the volunteer to take on a variety of roles within local programmes. The BHF National Centre together with Later Life Training and local stakeholders has produced this summary paper to assist those engaged in the development of national and regional programmes. It outlines a number of different roles that are currently undertaken by volunteers.

These different terms are important as volunteer training needs to be appropriately planned and designed to ensure that volunteers are prepared for the role in which they engage. Clear role descriptions are required so that volunteers and programmes are clear about what volunteers can (and cannot!) do.

### **1. Terms currently being used.**

An analysis of current practice highlights the following descriptors and roles being undertaken by volunteers

**Befriending** - is a process whereby two or more people come together with the aim of establishing and developing an informal and social relationship. Ideally the relationship is non-judgmental, mutual, purposeful and there is commitment over time.

**Buddying** - is the pairing of two or more people together for mutual assistance, e.g. someone to accompany another on a first visit to an activity opportunity, providing re-assurance and encouragement or in some cases safety (especially in assisted walking and/or recreational swimming). Often used as an evidence based support mechanism within health promotion programmes and particularly in working with those experiencing poor mental health.

**Mentoring** - is a one-to-one, non-judgemental relationship in which an individual voluntarily gives time to support and encourage another. This is typically developed at a time of transition in the mentee's life, and lasts for a significant and sustained period of time (Active Community Unit, Home Office). Mentors help people make their own decisions about lifestyle change.

**NB - The difference between Befriending and Mentoring** is usually the emphasis placed on goals. Mentoring tends to have a stronger emphasis on goal-setting and time limited work (e.g. to take up physical activity) and less on the development of a social relationship. Befriending aims to provide a supportive social relationship where none exists and has less emphasis on goal-setting. (Mentoring and Befriending Foundation)

**Ambassador** - may be very similar to a mentor but may often work with groups and take on a specific promotional role e.g. visiting a luncheon club, giving a presentation to a faith group. They may be described as someone who undertakes to be the “visible” face of a local programme. Ambassadors are often described as a “**champion**”.

**Activity organiser** - will be a volunteer who undertakes to organise specific events e.g. a tea dance, visiting speaker/activity, well-being, healthy eating, physical activity workshop, a visit to a leisure centre or park, a daylong excursion. *(NB Not to be confused with an activity co-ordinator, a specific professional role within the residential/care/nursing sector).*

**Exercise Leaders** - include those trained by external providers to lead on a formal, structured and progressive activity, where there is a need for a specific level of training and expertise. (E.g. Keep Fit Association Mature Moves, Extend, Excel 2000 Chair based exercise leaders (e.g. Later Life Training, Vitalise) All Exercise Leaders require some form of public liability provided through their own organisation or the training body. ***Exercise Leadership/Instructor training will almost always be additional training to volunteer mentor training.***

**Well-being Activity Leader** - a person who has undertaken training and has sufficient skills and experience to lead physical activities. The most easily recognised examples is the WHI Walk Leaders Award.

**Well-being workshop leader** – a person with the skills to deliver educational/information workshops on physical activity, healthy eating and well-being which will signpost participants to other activity opportunities and programmes. Some may be trained by trained staff and partner organisations to carry out health checks.

**Activity assistant** - supports groups and activities by undertaking a variety of tasks, e.g. registering participants, collecting money, organising refreshments, making phone calls, organising transport

## **Active Role models**

The key requirement of all these descriptors is that volunteers themselves should be an active role model.

## **Implications for programme planning**

These different terms are important and programme planners should

- Agree with programme partners the tasks required of volunteers within the programme and (if appropriate) set limits to what is required
- Draft appropriate role descriptions and accompanying materials so that volunteers have a clear picture of their roles.
- Ensure that training is designed to prepare volunteers for those roles and activities
- Monitor the progress of volunteers and be aware of additional training required if volunteers feel they want to take on additional responsibilities

## **Key Learning Outcomes for training**

By the end of their training, volunteers should be able to;

- Understand volunteering roles and how they relate to their particular programme.
- Understand the aims and objectives of their local programme.
- Develop their social and communication skills
- Have a basic understanding of diversity and inclusion issues, particularly as they relate to older people
- Develop knowledge and understanding of other volunteers in the group
- Develop new skills, contacts and resources to support their volunteer role
- Show an awareness of health and safety issues that relate to their volunteer role

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