

Friendship Group Volunteer Service – The Story So Far

In 2013 a small group of DCRA members (Richard J. Thomas, Stuart McMillan, Val Caple, Bryan Clements and Derek Butler) got together to explore the possibility of setting up a volunteer service aimed at providing help to DCRA members in need. During their first meeting, the name “Friendship Group” was chosen and it was agreed that the group should aim to develop a charter ready to present to DCRA members at the September AGM together with a list of requirements / implications associated with the setting up of such a service. At the AGM, member support would be sought for the group to move forward and set up the volunteer service.

The group met several times to develop the charter and review research findings that group members had learned between meetings. The charter was developed with the two major parts being “Purpose” and “Scope” which explained our intentions and list of services to be provided. The latest versions are shown below:

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the DCRA Friendship Group would be to provide specific support to worthy (in need) DCRA members, primarily in response to a request direct from a member requiring support, or by someone instructed by a member requiring support. In exceptional cases the Friendship Group may contact a member directly and offer a service. The provision of the DCRA Friendship services is not to substitute or replace the state or local authority service, but it may compliment some state or local authority services.

SCOPE OF FRIENDSHIP PROVISION:

The scope of Friendship provided by the DCRA Friendship Group is primarily “assistance in kind” but not financial assistance. The “Assistance In Kind” may include, but not be limited to:

- Hospital visits
- Home visits
- Running errands
- Short transport journeys (up to 30 miles)
- Point of contact if no other local supporting family or friends available

The decision to provide or not provide support would rest with the group member attending the person in need of support.

There may need to be some restriction on area serviced (30 miles max from impacted member to support worker) in which such support can be effectively administered if a house visit is required. However, if support request/s can be resolved by telephone or e-mail, then the support worker may decide.

As well as completing the charter, the group felt they needed to address two main issues they had identified.

- Car insurance – was additional cover needed to carry out the voluntary tasks identified above?: The answer was yes, some car insurance companies, cover it under “business use”, some under “charity work”. Some charge extra on the premium, some don’t. It was clear that every volunteer driver would have to check with their insurance company and obtain the required cover before undertaking a task requiring the use of their car.
- Criminal Records Checks – Do volunteers need to undergo these? Again, the answer was yes if they are accompanying vulnerable adults on a one on one basis. We researched this and discovered that if we registered with the Wales Council for Volunteering Services (WCVS), we could get the checks done free of charge.

In September 2013, the charter and accompanying information was put to DCRA members at the AGM. Those members present voted in favour of the group continuing with the setting up of the service.

The group made the decision to “go-live” with the service on 1st January 2014, this was communicated (with contact numbers) to members via the AGM minutes, the December meeting minutes and the 2013 Newsletter.

During the time between the AGM and the “go-live” date the necessary tasks, policies and procedures were put in place, i.e.:

The 5 members involved all agreed to be volunteers and checked their car insurance policies and updated them where necessary.

Bryan Clements agreed to be the Volunteer Coordinator, with Richard Thomas as the back-up. Unfortunately, due to ill health, Bryan has had to step down for now and Richard Thomas is acting as the current coordinator.

A call for more volunteers was carried out via the 2014 membership subscription renewal forms which resulted in a healthy response.

We (DCRA) joined the Vale Centre for Voluntary Services (VCVS), a local Organization funded by the Vale Council to support voluntary groups such as ourselves. They have given us advice on insurance and directed us to the WCVS for our criminal records checks.

We (DCRA) registered with the WCVS who now undertake our volunteer criminal records checks. This allows us to obtain the checks free of charge and enables us to perform our own ID checks (two of the members have been registered to perform these checks.). As part of our registration with the WCVS we had to put several policies in place, a Data Security Policy and a Recruitment of Volunteers with Criminal Records Policy. Templates were provided by WCVS and they accepted the policies we put forward.

The criminal records checks for the original 5 volunteers were carried out and certificates obtained. The 1st January 2014 “go-live” date came and went and whilst the organization set up was progressing well with additional volunteers getting involved with meetings and undergoing their criminal records checks, the requests for help was muted, i.e. zero. With help from DCRA members via the quarterly meetings and a general members satisfaction survey carried out following the June quarterly meeting, the lack of requests for help was put down to two main reasons:

Lack of Awareness: From the feedback we received, it was clear that member awareness of the service or the relevant contact details needed to be improved. To improve the situation an action plan was put in place:

- Contact details will be added to new membership cards.
- Services provided and contact details will be included with all, Get Well, Sympathy and Christmas cards. A Friendship Group article will be included in the 2014 DCRA Newsletter.
- The Pension Trustees will be approached to include an article to make all DC Pensioners aware of DCRA and will include details of the Friendship Group Volunteer Service – This was done and an article was included.

Members do not like to ask for help: The service was set up so that members could help fellow members in need. We are not a charity and we would hate to have members miss out on the help they need due to a misguided sense of pride. We also need all DCRA members to be ambassadors for the Friendship Group so that when they are aware of a fellow member needing help, they should encourage them to contact the group. If necessary, with the member’s permission, they could contact the group on their behalf.

This brings us up to date and all that remains to be said is:

If you are a DCRA member and in genuine need of the services provided by the Friendship Group Volunteer Service, please contact us.

The group’s coordinator (Richard Thomas), can be contacted on 01446 737218.

Reasons why Walking can change your Life and the World

Extract from *Walking Works*, a new report from the Ramblers and Macmillan Cancer Support, is persuading key decision makers of the wonders of walking and its benefits to health, the economy and the environment.

- It could improve your memory
Studies on the brains of older people have shown that keeping physically active can improve your cognitive function, memory, attention and processing speed, and reduce the risk of cognitive decline and dementia.
- You’ll stay independent for longer
Physically active older people are up to 68% less likely to fracture a hip, 30 to 50% less likely to develop other functional limitations, and far less prone to falls because of the stronger bones and better motor co-ordination you’ll have developed as a result. And if you are active when older, you’re 38% less likely to suffer cognitive decline and dementia, too.
- It could save the UK economy billions
Physical inactivity is estimated to cost the UK economy as much as £10 billion a year in healthcare, premature deaths and sickness absence. An inactive person spends 37% more days in hospital and visits the doctor 5.5% more often. But walking intervention schemes can make a real difference. A study commissioned by Natural England concluded that for every £1 spent on a health walk scheme saved the local NHS £7, as well as bringing additional social and environmental benefits.

Stuart Macmillan

Nordic Walking

This is a sponsored programme between the Welsh Government, Age Concern Cymru and British Nordic Walking. Nordic Walking is one of Europe’s fastest growing forms of physical activity and is particularly suited for people aged 50+. You walk using a pair of lightweight, specially designed poles that provide great support while also increasing the effectiveness of the exercise.

With Nordic Walking you can burn up to 400 calories per hour and it uses lots of different muscle groups. It is great fun and social activity, and being out in the fresh air is good for you too. Five one hour training sessions are provided costing just £10:00. The poles are on loan whilst you complete the training sessions. From recent experience the charge for what you get out of it regarding fitness is well worth it.

Geoff Hollett, An Age Concern Nordic Walking Instructor, is looking at forming the Barry Nordic Walking group. Geoff said “There are so many wonderful places to base walks on around Barry, such as Cosmeston Lakes and Porthkerry Park.”

Contact Geoff 07813075449 geoffhollett@hotmail.com or Margot 02920 431555 ageingwell@agecymru.org.uk

I would suggest members wanting to take the programme up might want to do it as a small group together so maybe rather than contacting one of the two numbers above they could contact one of the committee. I don’t mind volunteering to be the contact if everyone is happy with that.

Robert Wardle 07762-126533 or robert.n.wardle@tesco.net