Volunteers Week 2018

A ‘Good News’ Story.

In NHS Grampian we have a number of volunteers who give their time freely to support staff and patients. Within the Chaplaincy department we have two roles: volunteer visitors who are trained and deployed to a ward in a particular hospital and visit weekly for around an hour. They are particularly welcomed by those who have few visitors or whose home is some distance from Aberdeen; the other role is for Sunday Escorts who assist in getting patients to and from a short time of worship, supporting them during this too.

One volunteer does both roles and Lead Chaplain (Mental Health) Gillian Douglas met with him recently to ask him about his volunteering. Allan has been volunteering at Royal Cornhill Hospital (the main Mental Health facility in the NHS Grampian area) in Aberdeen for around ten years.

GD: How long have you been volunteering at Cornhill?

AJ: I have been volunteering as a Sunday Escort for almost 10 years and as a Ward Visitor for 5 years.

GD: How often do you volunteer at Cornhill?

AJ: I visit every week for around 2 hours and I do one Sunday a month, sometimes two if there are five Sundays in the month.

GD: What attracted you to this type of volunteering?

AJ: I was already volunteering at Aberdeen City Mission and knew that many of the people I came across there were or had been patients at Cornhill. I saw the opportunity to volunteer there as a way of getting to know them and getting a better understanding of their illnesses. A plea went out for Sunday Escorts at the church I was attending at that time and I felt called to respond. I particularly enjoy going to the ward I visit weekly as the patients are usually there for a long time and this enables relationships to be built up.

GD: What are the best bits about volunteering in the hospital?

AJ: Seeing a smile on people’s face and seeing them being discharged. Journeying with them and seeing them make progress to be able to move on is very rewarding.

GD: Do you volunteer in any other organisations?

AJ: Yes, a few! I am an Elder in my local church and also a member of The Guild (it’s no longer ‘The Women’s Guild!’). We recently had the Elders lead the Sunday service and I did the sermon. Using the story of Daniel who was thrown to the lions I spoke about how God gives us confidence to act and speak in situations we might feel afraid of. At The Guild I help serve tea, lead prayer or uplift the collection. The church is raising funds to buy a ‘tri-shaw’ for the local care home which will enable residents to be taken out in the fresh air, chatting to the ‘driver’ too. I am chairman of ‘Better Balmedie’ and through my work with this group we aim to make our community a better, cleaner place to live by clearing paths and ensuring planters are filled with colourful plants. We have a hut which was refurbished and we can serve teas, ice cream etc from and we also have an exhibition inside about the beach with shells, fossils, information about the local wildlife and much more. I am also a trustee of Belhelvie Community Trust and we have recently embarked on raising funds to purchase two wheelchairs with large tyres which can go on the beach. They each cost around £3500 but they would enable people to access the beach who otherwise...
would not. Finally, I drive a van for CLAN, a local cancer support charity. I go round picking up and dropping off donations for their two shops in Aberdeen.

GD: How important is your faith to you in relation to how you volunteer?

AJ: My faith plays a big part in what I do and I believe that I am called to offer my time to people, that I can empathise with them and somehow find the right words to say to them at what can often be difficult times in their lives.

Thanks to people like Allan, the work of the chaplains is enhanced and the lives of many are made better. In the year of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, I was working for a Scottish charity and our volunteers were described as being ‘as precious as diamonds’. Allan is one of those diamonds that we are very thankful and blessed to have in our organisation.