

Volunteering News from



New Members

Welcome to all the new members who have joined RSVP West during the pandemic. We hope you will be able to enjoy your chosen activity as soon as possible.

We are pleased to welcome **Shirley Ousley** as the new Joint Organiser (with **Lottie Enser**) of the Winscombe Contact Scheme Driving Group.

Please keep telling your friends and family about RSVP – we know that word-of-mouth is still by far the most effective recruitment method.

Impact Assessment

Over the years we have done little to collect information about the benefits that our activities bring for clients, service users and volunteers. This is important because we will increasingly need this information for fundraising and because it will help us to recognise the outstanding efforts of our members internally. Sue Hughes has kindly agreed to become our Impact Assessment Organiser, concentrating on an annual online Questionnaire to be completed by all RSVP West Project Organisers, and the collation of the many testimonials and endorsements that we regularly receive.

Volunteering Matters (VM) RSVP Steering Group

A big thanks to **Sylvia Carpenter** who has been our excellent representative on this important volunteer-led group but has decided that she needs to step down. We are delighted that **Paula Johnson**, our Home Care Lay Assessors Organiser, has kindly agreed to take over.

COVID-19

We expect the RSVP activities curtailed during the pandemic to be restored cautiously after the 19 July 'end-of-lockdown'.

We recognize the heroic efforts of members who have maintained contact with their clients and internally via tele and video-conferencing services and we anticipate that these new methods of communication will continue.

Most of us are optimistic that we will emerge into a better world.
Happy Volunteering!



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RSVP and Playlist for Life

We have been approached by Gill Roberts, from Playlist for Life, to work with their charity by becoming a Help Point to support their aim for everyone with a diagnosis of dementia to have their own personal playlist of all the songs or pieces of music that make up the soundtrack of their life. A personal playlist can be a powerful way of connecting with a person with dementia; this is backed up by research.

There are over 1000 Help Points across the country, which locally include the Alzheimers Society, the Bristol Dementia Group and South Gloucestershire Action Alliance. A Help Point is a

place where people can get information about creating and using a personal playlist to help someone living with dementia.

RSVP is already very active in the support of people with dementia, examples include Surgery Wellbeing Guides and Drivers, Care Home and Home Care Lay Assessors, and our Musical Activity volunteers. Everyone has been very enthusiastic about supporting Playlist for Life which is great and we will receive free Webinar training and materials. However, we need to be back volunteering before we can set up as a Help Point. Our initial role will

be to distribute leaflets and information to surgeries, care homes, Home Care service users, and to relatives caring for people with dementia. Anything we can do to help people with dementia and their carers is very important to RSVP. playlistforlife.org.uk/resources for more information.

Also playlistforlife.org.uk/harry-margarets-story will take you to a short video which says so much more than any article could possibly do.

If you would like to know more, please contact Jan.

Jan Snook
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Care Homes Lay Assessors and Lockdown

Needless to say, our service where our volunteer lay assessors visit care homes to provide support to Bristol City Council, with their work in monitoring the quality of care being provided in care homes, has been on hold during the pandemic.

To try to stay in touch with care home residents over this period, we have attempted to Zoom-meet with relatives, by joining the meetings care homes have with relatives, and talking with them after the manager has left the meeting. This has happened in five care homes, but the numbers attending have been small and relatives themselves have only just started to go back into care homes. We will be trying to develop this further by setting up weekend meetings to include relatives who work.

One important issue which has emerged is the apparently small number of residents in some care homes who have any relatives visiting them. In one care home none of the residents living with dementia had any relatives visiting at all. Bristol's staff agree this is a serious concern. We plan to build this into our lay assessor investigations to see how widespread this is. Then we will work with Bristol and Care Home staff to try to find out how care homes can improve the number of people visiting and therefore compensate for the isolation some care home residents have been enduring.

Ken Dolbear
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Home Care Lay Assessors and Lockdown

Home care lay assessors typically visit over 100 people receiving care commissioned by Bristol City Council each year. The visits give voice to service users to say what they really think about their care package and how it is delivered. Our visit reports are shared with Bristol City Council and provide a real insight into a service that is otherwise often unobserved. This information forms a key part of the councils quality and monitoring process.

Our visits came to a grinding halt early last year as the first lockdown loomed. It was inevitable that COVID 19 would take its toll and news

continues to emerge as to how the care sector has been and continues to be impacted by the pandemic. Some service users and families decided they would manage without formal care rather than risk infection. Care providers faced many challenges, including providing suitable PPE and training, to minimise infection risks to service users and their own staff.

Late last summer we discussed with the city council whether we could contact service users by phone. Phone calls are a second best option but we agreed it was better than nothing at all. Establishing

a rapport and gaining the trust of a service user is often more difficult, especially if we do not know if service users may have hearing or other communication difficulties. A phone call cannot pick up on non-verbal clues that might otherwise prompt further probing or raise concerns, and nor can we look at care plans to see how comprehensive and up to date they are.

In December last year we started phoning service users and lay assessors are delighted to be back in action!

Paula Johnson
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Regional Surgery Development and North Somerset Driving Groups

I am pleased to report that some of the North Somerset Driving Groups have slowly re-started to offer transport to their clients again – all under the careful conditions of double vaccinations of the drivers and Risk Assessments of the driving task and of the individual drivers.

Soon we will send out the Risk Assessments for Befrienders as well but please be aware that visiting somebody in an enclosed space, such as their home can carry a risk – even if you and your client are doubly vaccinated already.

The recent increase in infection rates means that we must not

forget that this pandemic is far from over and that we, at RSVP, have a duty of care to our volunteer drivers and volunteer befrienders. Although the government might be relaxing their restrictions, this is not a guarantee of safety but just a shift of responsibilities from the government to us as individuals. Therefore, make sure to discuss with your Surgery Organiser or your North Somerset Driving Group Organiser if you have any questions or

anxieties with regards to your volunteering.

Don't ever forget:
Volunteering should be fun!

With my very best wishes to all of you.

Sylvia Carpenter
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Supporting schools during the pandemic

As our volunteers were unable to go into schools during the pandemic, we developed some other ways of supporting pupils and teachers.

We secured a small grant from the John James Foundation to donate book tokens to schools that host our volunteers. These were targeted at schools with a high percentage of disadvantaged pupils since there is evidence that they have been particularly badly affected by the pandemic. Feedback from schools was very positive, for example:

“What a lovely surprise! We are going to use the tokens to purchase books for our most disadvantaged children and those most affected by the lockdown”.

“We bought some lovely reading books for the children and are really grateful for your kindness”.

“The vouchers are greatly appreciated, and we will enjoy choosing a selection of inspiring books for our children”.

News of the donations was often circulated to parents via school newsletters, and schools frequently mentioned how they had been missing

our ‘wonderful volunteers’ and how keen they were to welcome them back once it was safe to do so.

We also produced a short booklet that schools could distribute to parents/carers who might benefit from seeing how reading with their children can be fun. A number of local families were sent copies – a comment from one school: **“We are very interested in this and wish to send it out to all our parents.”**

Some of us also created story-telling videos in a password-controlled section of the RSVP website, which teachers could access during ‘reading for pleasure’ sessions.

However, these initiatives don’t replicate the benefits of face-to-face support, and a few of our volunteers have

recently resumed their school visits according to careful risk management guidance provided by the host school and by RSVP in discussion with our parent charity, Volunteering Matters.

The pandemic environment is likely to evolve for the foreseeable future and we will continue to review and update our approach to risk management in discussion with schools and our volunteers, whose safety is of the utmost importance. We will of course keep all our school volunteers updated through their School Organiser as the situation evolves, and we are keen for volunteers to keep us updated with their thoughts, questions or anxieties before returning to school.

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