

Volunteer Case Study

ROSIE STRELLIS

5 words that sum up Rosie's overall experience of the project:

Joy | Valued | Educational
Friendship | Inclusive

About Rosie

Rosie lives in Whitstable. She signed up to become a creative volunteer because she believed this project would provide a positive and enjoyable experience, helping to make it the best experience possible for them. Rosie enjoys arts and crafts but lacks confidence. She believed this project would also build her own confidence, to have a go at more things that she enjoys. Rosie wanted to be a better volunteer and build her skills in supporting projects.



Read Rosie's personal insights on the project:

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➤ My biggest overall personal achievement

- For me this was building the trust of some of the people attending the day centre, to the point where they were happy to come across and participate, even if it was just doing a few hand prints.
- My skills and experiences and social/volunteer networks have been expanded as a natural part of the process. (I have since become a Dementia Friends Champion, participating in Dementia Action Alliance Canterbury & Ashford).
- I have made friends with people that I would not have normally met in my everyday life. This has fulfilled me, in a way I didn't believe possible, since moving here.
- This has encouraged me to take up other activities with volunteers; such as dance and *dancercise* classes, and learning to use a sewing machine to make small items.
- I have gained the confidence creatively to sign up for a seasonal 'course' which has encouraged me to make candles, wax melts and balms, using natural fragrance oils and dyes.
- The experience has encouraged me to get back into cooking and baking too, as I have been feeling so much more positive about myself and my abilities.
- I have even ordered some transportable watercolours to take with me on holiday so I can get back in to drawing and painting.
- I feel the biggest challenges for me on this project were arriving at the training on my own and not knowing anyone. (I am nowhere near as confident as people think I am. With nerves I can be over-enthusiastic at times and annoy people).
- It was then about me finding my place amongst the volunteers at the beginning, until I felt more confident.
- The project leaders and the openness of the other volunteers, whom I discovered had similar fears and challenges to my own, helped me.

➤ My most rewarding highlights

- The most rewarding highlights were always, and every time, seeing the happiness the project brought to all the participants including those that volunteer at COGS [dementia support group] clubs.
- This experience has changed my life in so many more ways rather than just having fun with others to make a lovely piece of art.
- I have made wonderful friends and had an outlet for my skills and experience. It was a total honour of meeting the most wonderful participants and hearing their life stories.
- My general wellbeing improved a lot as I was meeting and mixing with like-minded people. I felt valued and encouraged both by all the organisers and participants and I felt I had a positive outlet for my life/work experiences.
- It was fun to stay connected to the group outside of the actual volunteer sessions and it also gave me the confidence to share my “work” on social media.
- I helped “advertise” for more volunteers and promote the project in a positive light across all social media.
- I learnt that it isn’t always about the activity for participants and there are many ways to achieve results.
- I gained all the wonderful experiences and life stories that participants shared with me and I gained a greater understanding of how the aging process - with or without forms of dementia - affects people’s lives.
- I grew in personal confidence. Since moving here, I left behind a career and a fantastic volunteering project; I was struggling to find my place in my new world which had made me quite insular & lonely.
- Since becoming a creative volunteer, the main differences, I notice in me, are things I am doing now, that I didn’t do before. I

am now confident to have a go at things I have not experienced before; I am less critical of myself if I try things that do not work out or go to plan.

- I have a greater understanding of people living with dementia. And have more patience in general.
- More importantly my husband has noticed that I am happier, calmer and much more positive in general (as well as driving him 'nuts', talking about this project all the time!).

➤ Changes I noticed: impact & outcomes

- The project has increased my creative confidence a lot and encouraged me to try new things, plus re-discover previous activities.
- It has increased my creative capability and skills a lot by giving me an opportunity in a safe environment to have a go at drawing, tracing, painting and producing pottery.
- I have been blessed and honoured to meet such a wide variety of older people and have learnt from my interactions with both participants, volunteers and professionals.
- In supporting the older people in the creative sessions, I noticed over the course of weeks that they enjoyed interacting with a variety of people.
- They valued having people who listened to them, and who encouraged them to talk about their experiences, skills and lives.
- The participants gained in confidence to learn new skills and re-visit skills that had laid dormant.
- They gained creative confidence when they saw they were not "useless" or "rubbish at arts & crafts" and enjoyed seeing the results of their work over the weeks culminating in seeing the finished products.

- They made new friends by sitting with different people rather than the people they always sat next to for instance in the Day Centres.
- They felt valued and amazed at the attention they were receiving from people who did not know them or have to work with them. They started to look forward to seeing the volunteers and to participating.
- Some were frustrated as their physical abilities had deteriorated during the course of the project and they were not necessarily able to complete their work
- They were so proud of what they had produced and looked forward to seeing the progress each week in particular how much the work changed once it was fired.

➤ How the project helped me: the legacy

- I feel the project process and approach has been worthwhile and effective with the training and support.
- The time taken initially to train the volunteers ensured that everyone knew what was expected of them.
- The support from all of the organisers was available at all times. Everyone who volunteered felt valued & their contribution was welcomed and appreciated.
- Catherine was very supportive during every session and outside of it, recognising when I was putting on a positive front for participants when I wasn't feeling at my best.
- She was inspiring to watch, leading each session and encouraging all the participants. (She always gives advice and encourages you in a way that makes you feel that you are growing and improving rather than having done something wrong).

- Fay included and encouraged me in my wider involvement in the project and was also very supportive during some difficult situations I faced during the project. (She is so full of enthusiasm and drives the project forward consistently throughout the duration of it too).
- I knew Gerry was at the end of the phone or by email if I needed her and that she was working on other areas of the project I was not involved in.
- Certainly, in comparison to my experiences volunteering with other organisations this [project] far outweighed my expectations to feel appreciated, competent, trained and supported throughout.
- I would recommend this project experience to other people who are thinking of becoming a creative volunteer.
- I think they would be surprised by the diversity amongst volunteers and participants.
- They would enjoy the development of, or the use of, their creative skills to bring joy to the participants.
- Being involved would give them the wonderful fuzzy feeling inside, seeing how your time well spent and productive, makes others happier and this makes you happy too.