



Volunteering S.A. Inc.

# **Volunteering with the Frail Aged**



**Government of South Australia**  
Office for Volunteers

© 2006



# VOLUNTEERING WITH THE FRAIL AGED

## Objectives:

Once you have completed this training you should be able to:

- Examine attitudes to ageing and the effect on older people
- Understand the positive effects of ageing
- Identify the obvious signs of ageing
- Discuss why people's mental and physical abilities change
- Develop skills to enhance communication and respect
- Consider issues of diversity, privacy and confidentiality
- Identify further sources of information

## Pathways to a formal qualification

This workshop has been developed to align with aspects of the following nationally recognised units of competence (subjects):

CHCAC3C Orientation to work in the aged care sector

CHCAC1C Provide support to an older person

CHCCOM1B Communicate with people accessing the services of the organisation

As evidence of your participation in the Volunteering with the Frail Aged, workshop, you will receive a Certificate of Attendance with a statement outlining what has been covered.

## Disclaimer

Volunteering SA Inc and the Government of South Australia accepts no responsibility or liability for any inaccuracies contained in any material in this presentation.

This presentation is intended to provide general useful information and should not be relied upon as constituting any advice.

Attendees should, before acting on any matters arising out of or otherwise in relation to this presentation, seek their own specific independent legal or other advice about their situation.

# Activity 1

What are your attitudes to ageing?

In the space provided respond to the following questions:

What do aged people look like?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What do they do?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What are the stereotypes?

---

---

---

---

---

## Activity 2

Group Exercise: When I'm Eighty

**Aim:** To identify issues of ageing

Spend three minutes drawing yourself as an 80 year old.

You could include in the background where you might be living at that age.

This does not need to be a work of art..... a simple line-drawing is all that is needed.

Once you have finished your drawing get into a group of three and share your pictures with one another and discuss the thoughts and feelings you had while drawing your image.

Following are some further questions for discussion:

- How do the images we have of our 'aged' selves compare with the general expectations our society has of aged people?
- What do these drawings tell us about our own ideas of ageing?
- What feelings did you experience during this exercise?

## Activity 3

The type of question asked will largely depend on who you are talking to and the sort of information you are looking for.

To get some practice at structuring your questions as either open or closed write three examples of each in the space below:

Open questions:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Closed questions:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Activity 4 - Listening to older people's stories

Listening to the stories older people have to tell can be very interesting and quite beneficial not only for the story teller but for the listener as well.

What are the benefits to the worker?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What are the benefits for the older person?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Following is some additional information on listening to the stories of older people – see if you recorded all or most of what is listed below in your responses to the questions.

# Listening to older people's stories

## Benefits for the worker

### **Increased understanding of:**

- Their life history
- Social and political changes they have experienced

*Many of them will have been affected by massive social upheaval, such as war or the Depression, and will have personalised accounts which can make these types of historical events much more meaningful and interesting to you.*

- The person themselves
  - What sort of lives they have lived
  - Their interests
  - Their family background
  - Their work history
  - Where they have lived

*Information like this can help you understand a little better what the person's life has been like and why they have become the person you now know.*

### **Assistance with future communication provides you with:**

- Points of interest and contact for future conversations and discussions.  
*If you have taken the time to listen to some of their stories, you will know what interests them and be better able to make your future communication relevant.*

## Benefits for the person

### **Overcoming loneliness**

- Spouse and many of their friends may have died
- Living a long way from their familiar home town
- Limited family contact

*Having someone sit down, spend some time with them and listen to their stories may help, in some part, to overcome this loneliness and give them a sense that someone is still interested in them.*

### **Keeping memories alive**

- May feel their memories are all they have left
- Significant people in their lives have died or no longer keep in contact  
*Sharing these memories with someone else may help to keep them alive.*

### **Feeling in control**

- May have better memory for past events than more recent ones.

*Telling stories incorporating past events and recollections may help to give the person a sense of control and comfort which may be no longer available to them in their day to day lives.*

**Gaining respect**

- Knowing someone has taken the time to sit and listen
- Helps the person feel worthwhile and important
- Helps them feel that the worker respects them and understands how much their memories mean to them
- Helps to maintain confidence and a positive self-image

Following are 5 handouts that go with this training session.

# Handout 1 - Confidentiality - Case Study 1

Don volunteers with the Community Home Visiting Program. This is a vital service which assists older people in the community to be able to continue living in their own homes. The services available through the Program are handyman help, gardening, visiting and assistance with shopping.

Don has been visiting Mrs Clinton for 12 months and has developed a trusting relationship which they both enjoy. Mrs Clinton is a well respected member of the community, has supportive neighbours and a daughter who lives in the next town. She wishes to remain independent and has made her wishes clear in the event of a health or other crisis.

Don's assistance with shopping and the odd household task has given Mrs Clinton confidence to stay at home in spite of some ongoing health problems.

## Discussion:

Don has been rung by Mrs Clinton's daughter who has asked how she is **really** doing. She said that her mother always says she is fine, but she wants to know the actual picture from Don.

What is the dilemma for Don re this phone call?

---

---

---

---

How should he handle it?

---

---

---

---

Who should Don go to for advice?

---

---

---

---

## Handout 2 - Confidentiality – Case Study 2

1. Mr Smith is able to continue living at home as he is part of a concerned community and in particular, is visited twice a week by Jane who volunteers with the local Community Program.

Mrs Jones lives next door and is a good neighbour. Recently Mr Smith underwent some tests at the local hospital. When Jane was leaving Mr Smith last week, Mrs Jones stopped her and asked after Mr Smith's health. Jane explained that the test results were negative as she wanted to share the good news. Later that evening Jane reflected on this interaction.

What would have caused Jane to doubt the wisdom in providing this information?

---

---

---

How might she have handled the concerned neighbour's question?

---

---

---

2. Mrs Green lives on the other side of Mr Smith. She is a brilliant housekeeper and while she likes Mr Smith, she has never thought much of his housekeeping skills. Recently she suggested to Jane that she could bring her Hoover over and tidy up a bit. Jane also has concerns about the state of the house although Mr Smith is clearly unconcerned. Jane thinks it's a very good offer and says she'll get back to Mrs Green.

What factors should influence Jane as she decides what she should do?

---

---

---

What should she do?

---

---

---

---

# Handout 3 - Good Practice Communication

Action	Example
<b>Spoken Communication</b>	
Identify yourself by now	Hi Mary, it's me Tom
Use direct eye contact	Sit or squat with person so you are at there eye level. Don't shout from another room
Use a calm voice	Speak slowly. This makes you sound calm
Eliminate background noise	Turn off radio or TV to avoid confusion
Use short simple sentences	Short, simple sentences are easy to understand
Use one step commands	Demonstrate task and discuss each step
Ask "yes" or "no" questions	Ask Do? Did? Can? Questions. Avoid Why? When? How? Questions
Use word cues	Anticipate what the person wants by observing. Ask questions such as: Are you looking for milk

---

## Written Communication

First decide if the person can read or comprehend notes	
Use written labels	Place signs on drawers, label items etc
Use written schedules	Write schedules for each day
Use notes as reminders	A card in the pocket, a note on the fridge

---

## **Non Verbal Communication**

Body language	Be aware of the messages your behaviour sends. What we do is as important as what we say
Approach from the front	A gentle touch can gain attention. Be careful about putting your arm around them
Hold out or show items	Hand clothes to assist with dressing
Wave goodbye	This shows you are leaving. It can be reassuring
Use facial expressions to show concern or interest	Nod the head, frown or smile

## Handout 4 - Communication skills for Volunteering with the Frail Aged

- Be sure the person hears you and is paying attention to you
- Lower the pitch of your voice – use a suitable tone of voice
- Eliminate distracting noises and activities
- Use short words and simple sentences
- Give information one piece at a time and wait for it to be understood
- Simple questions with yes or no answers
- Avoid open ended questions – may confuse the person
- Ask the person to do only one task at a time
- Remain calm, pleasant and supportive
- Smile and encourage
- Direct eye contact
- Point, touch, show the person an object that gives clue
- Provide information “My name is” Yesterday you told me how much you like chicken. We are having it again tonight”
- Watch for signs of restlessness
- Reassure the person
- Use positive instructions rather than saying “don’t do it that way”
- Avoid using expressions like “run along” Person may take you literally or be offended that you are possibly patronizing them (sounds like a child)
- Remember the person may be able to read or repeat something but not necessarily act on it
- Signs will help some people but not others – experiment!
- Observe and interpret body language and facial expressions
- Repeat the last few words if the person gets lost in the middle of what is being said
- If the person keeps repeating something, try a distraction
- If you cannot guess what the person is meaning, ask for a description

## Handout 5 - Some characteristics of a person experiencing memory loss

- Memory loss occurs gradually
- Reduced ability to make sense of their environment. This may leave the person feeling and acting in a vague and confused manner.
- Reduced capacity to use and understand words. This can cause difficulty in carrying on a conversation and in understanding instructions.
- Impaired sense of direction, location and time. The person may mix up people, time, places and objects.
- Impaired ability to differentiate appropriate behaviour.
- The person may forget lifelong habits of bathing, dressing, eating and social conduct.
- Walking and pacing excessively. The person may wander and become lost.
- Become increasingly suspicious. Losing or hiding things. Accusing others of stealing.
- Becoming angry, emotional, agitated, uncooperative withdrawn or listless.
- Becoming frightened by imaginary things or incidents.

## Volunteering with people who are frail, aged or have memory loss

You may unintentionally aggravate a situation by:

- Acting in a way which is seen as patronising or condescending
- Presenting too much information at once eg: questions, instructions
- Showing impatience or being hurried
- Assisting the person without talking to them about what you are doing
- Not acknowledging or allowing the persons choices
- Not respecting the person's "personal space"

**The underlying cause for aggression or difficult behaviour may be any number of things, but it helps if you are aware of what makes the situation worse.**

Karen Fox in her video "**Communicating with Compassion**" suggests that there are four key elements to consider when working with people who are frail, aged, ill or experiencing dementia:

**A**ttention

**A**cknowledgement

**A**ffection

**A**cceptance

# Checklist – Volunteering with the Frail Aged

To assess your understanding of Volunteering with the Frail Aged after having attended the training workshop, work through the checklist below.

This checklist is designed to assist you to assess your level of understanding of the issues surrounding Volunteering with the Frail Aged and whether you need to follow up on any point/s or not.

I feel confident that I can:

- Examine your attitudes to ageing and their effect on older people
- Understand the positive effects of ageing
- Identify the obvious signs of ageing
- Discuss why your mental and physical abilities change
- Develop skills to enhance communication and respect
- Consider issues of diversity, privacy and Confidentiality
- Identify further sources of information

## Volunteering with the Frail Aged

*See below how this topic relates to the National Standards for Volunteer Management*

1. Policies and Procedures	2. Management Responsibilities	3. Recruitment	4. Work and the Workplace	5. Training and Development	6. Service Delivery	7. Documentation and Records	8. Continuous Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Management System</i> (1.4 and 1.5)</li> <li>✓ <i>Operating Procedures</i> (1.8)</li> <li>✓ <i>Policy and Procedures</i> (1.12 and 1.13)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Management Systems</i> (2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8)</li> <li>✓ <i>Social Responsibilities</i> (2.13, 2.14)</li> <li>✓ <i>Management Review</i> (2.16, 2.17, 2.18, 2.19, 2.23)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Policy and Planning</i> (3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.8)</li> <li>✓ <i>Selection Procedures</i> (3.9, 3.10, 3.11)</li> <li>✓ <i>Volunteer Orientation</i> (3.14, 3.15, 3.17)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Volunteer Roles</i> (4.1, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6)</li> <li>✓ <i>Work Satisfaction</i> (4.7, 4.8, 4.11)</li> <li>✓ <i>Health and Safety</i> (4.14, 4.15, 4.16, 4.17, 4.18, 4.19)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Training and Development</i> (5.1, 5.8, 5.11)</li> <li>✓ <i>Work Appraisal</i> (5.15)</li> <li>✓ <i>Volunteer Recognition</i> (5.18)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Management Responsibility</i> (6.1, 6.2, 6.3)</li> <li>✓ <i>Services Review</i> (6.7, 6.10, 6.11, 6.14)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Personnel Records</i> (7.1)</li> <li>✓ <i>System documentation and Control</i> (7.8, 7.10, 7.11)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Policy &amp; resources</i> (8.3)</li> <li>✓ <i>Data collection &amp; analysis</i> (8.4, 8.7)</li> <li>✓ <i>Quality Improvement</i> (8.11., 8.14,8.15)</li> </ul>