



Voluntary Help
in the field of
Mental Handicap

7000 kin

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VOLUNTARY HELP
IN THE FIELD OF MENTAL HANDICAP

"Voluntary work in hospitals is not the prerogative of any one section of the community, but appeals to all sorts of people regardless of age, sex, occupation or social position... Discipline in volunteers is not necessarily in direct proportion to age or social status. Hair and skirt length are no guide to reliability and efficiency either way"

Organisers of Voluntary Services in Hospitals
by Jan Rocha. King Edward's Hospital Fund,
1968. Obtainable from the Hospital Centre.
Price 57p

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24 Nutford Place
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WHY THE MENTALLY HANDICAPPED NEED VOLUNTARY HELP

By David Boorer

They need it because it is their right. It is their right because they are members of society and are entitled to be part of the community. At present too many of the mentally handicapped in hospitals are cut off from any community except that of the institution. Voluntary help is the best method of bringing the mentally handicapped and the community together.

There are other, rather more pragmatic, reasons why volunteers should be involved in the care of the mentally handicapped. The wise use of volunteers can add a dimension to the lives of mentally handicapped men, women and children that hard-pressed staff, for all their skills, simply have not the time to do. Nurses, doctors, teachers, training centre staff, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists are all over-burdened and in short supply. Their skills are needed to cope with the immediate, pressing needs. Volunteers, properly directed and organised, can do many other things. In hospital they can assist in ward activities, bathing, dressing and feeding the handicapped. They can take them for walks, organised parties, concerts, visits and holidays. They can build roads, design toys, help with junior and adult education. They can come in during week-ends when many professional staff are off duty and organise activities to fill hours which are often blank and tiresome for both the staff and the patients. They can do all this and much more if they are encouraged and supported by the staff. Volunteers are not competitors, they are colleagues. If staff are mothers and fathers to the handicapped, then volunteers are aunts and uncles.

But there are some roles which volunteers should not play and some tasks which they should not do. They are not substitutes for paid staff. They do not come into the hospital to help the Government save money, or attempt to take the place of nurses. They are not in hospitals to do things to patients, or for patients, but with patients. They are there to help bring interest and variety to handicapped people who happen, for the time being, to be within the walls of a physical institution.

Like everything else that is worthwhile, a voluntary help scheme requires thought and careful preparation. It needs wholehearted support from top management. It needs planning before introduction or expansion. It needs staff consultation and staff involvement right from the start. This must be more than a formality. The views of all staff, especially of nurses, must be considered and acted upon; and so must the views of the

local trade unions and of any existing voluntary organisations that may already be helping the hospital. Above all, a scheme needs organisation and an organiser. In no other way can a service capable of discovering needs and supplying people to meet those needs be built up. With this support the differing roles of professional and volunteer can be brought together for the benefit of the patient. Without it, the hospital cannot cope with the day-to-day problems which are bound to crop up, even with the best of goodwill.

But there is another, equally important reason, why voluntary help is vital to the mentally handicapped. It can help to end the isolation that these people, and the hospital in which they may live, have suffered under for so long. Volunteers come in all kinds, from very young to the very old. They come from various levels of society. They enter the hospital, they see what happens, they note the hard work of the staff and the problems with which they are faced. They talk about these things to their friends and colleagues; and people gradually come to understand. With understanding comes sympathy and a desire to help. Voluntary help, in this context, is excellent public relations. Community involvement and the understanding it brings can be an important step towards bringing informed public pressure to bear to have matters improved.

Voluntary help schemes should never be introduced lightly or just to keep up with the hospital down the road. They are too important for that. But where they are planned and organised, where they operate so as to give the maximum of freedom to the volunteers within the professional strategy of the hospital, these schemes provide a wonderful chance to make the human needs of the handicapped person the true centre of the whole effort, in or out of hospital.

In the following pages, there are listed a variety of services that are being given by volunteers in the field of mental handicap.

Further details can be obtained from Mrs E M C King, Voluntary Service Information Officer at the Hospital Centre (24 Nutford Place, London W1H 6AN, telephone 01-262 2641). It is realised that these lists are incomplete and the Voluntary Service Information Officer will be glad to have details of any other services that could be added to them. Extra copies of this leaflet can also be obtained, free of charge, from Mrs King.

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Before introducing any form of voluntary help, there must obviously be the closest consultation and co-operation with doctors, nurses and others professionally concerned in the care of the patient, as well as with management and trade unions and with voluntary organisations already providing services.

Some ways in which volunteers can help
in services for the mentally handicapped

RECREATIONAL AND GENERAL

Befriending patients in hospitals	Library trolley
Bingo sessions	Looking after toys and play equipment
Birthday schemes	Model-making
Care of relatives	Musical entertainment
Care of children whose parents are visiting patients	Playing records for patients
Concerts, live or recorded	Play-reading
Dancing and discotheque sessions	Poetry evenings
Discussion groups	Provision of adventure playgrounds
Divertional therapy of all kinds, knitting, painting, etc	Provision of facilities for art exhibitions for patients' work
Evening classes	Quiz sessions
Filmshows	Reading or writing letters
Fund raising	Reading stories or items from newspapers or magazines
Games in wards, i e draughts	Scrapbook-making
Hair styling	Social club for discharged patients
Jazz clubs	Talking with patients
Jigsaw-puzzles	Transport for outings, etc
Laundrette for patients	Visiting discharged patients

SOME SPECIAL SKILLS
(used in taking groups)

Beauty therapy
Bees and bee-keeping
Child-rearing
Choral group
Community singing
Cookery
Current affairs
Dancing
Fishing
Flower arranging
Handicrafts
History
Hostess service
Instrument playing
Keep fit
Laundry
Literacy
Market research
Model railways
Mothercraft
Mountaineering
Pets
Photography
Physical education
Pottery
Racing pigeons
Roller skating
Scriptwriting
Shorthand and typing
Slide shows
Stamp collecting
Wine making
Youth group

PRACTICAL HELP TO STAFF IN HOSPITALS

Gardening
Giving drinks to patients
Going for walks with patients
Helping to feed patients
Helping generally with meals
Helping to make beds
Interpreting for foreign patients
Looking after toys and play equipment
Marking clothes
Mending and altering patients' clothes
Organising team games
Picnics
Playing with children
Preparing tea and laying tables
Sorting and tidying clean clothes
Taking patients to Church services
Taking patients to visit local shops
Wheeling out patients in hospital grounds



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An illustration of voluntary help in one
hospital for mentally handicapped patients

"The volunteers, numbering about 140, regularly visit wards at week-ends and on five-week-day evenings. Some take patients out for walks or drives, whilst a few are able to take their particular friends to their homes for tea. The larger number remains in wards where they play games with those who are chair-cases or unable to get out. I have an enormous collection of suitable games and the young helpers invariably know better than I do what their friends like doing. 'Leggo', 'Playpax' and any constructional games are favourites and the new type plastic Meccano is most popular. Of course, the simple card games and jig-saws appeal, and there is one great favourite which is called 'Animal Lotto' and necessitates putting the right animal picture in the right square. More recently we have discovered hidden talent in the way of painting and drawing and the results have been so interesting that we intend holding competitions between wards. The gambling instinct is not forgotten! We have constructed a race-track with model animals and by the throw of a dice we move the objects forward as in 'Snakes and Ladders'. In one ward we now have a flourishing Model Aircraft Club, run by two young volunteers. The models are used to decorate ward ceilings. In another female ward we have a Floral Art Club which is run by a lady, knowledgeable on the subject, and this is popular with patients and staff. A team of lads organise football and cricket and we have recently installed a billiard table in our boys' hostel. Volunteers also assist with music and mime. A recent Pets' Corner project has attracted much attention from patients and staff and in due course the running of it will be done by selected patients under supervision. We have a Tea-canteen on Sunday afternoons in the village and take chair-cases in the coach. This is very popular with visitors and patients. Outings to football matches, the zoo, etc, are regular and we have recently taken a small group of selected patients to museums and theatres. I have been fortunate in finding two excellent lads to look after two cot cases and they are able to take these boys out in cots in the grounds.

An appeal for toys, etc at Christmas produced marvellous response and I had well over 1000 presents. Now I am trying to say 'thank you' to everyone."

King's Fund



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