



Tales from the TSI Network

Supporting Volunteering For All

All across Scotland

mental health recovery – Volunteer Midlothian



Kirsty first got involved with Volunteer Midlothian eight months ago. She was referred from the Joint Mental Health Team – Midlothian, who support people with moderate to severe mental ill health and are in the ideal position to recommend those at a stage more ready to commit to volunteering. Kirsty had worked full time but had to stop due to mental ill health.

While mental health can be concealed, often signs of depression show through. Kirsty was different. She was very well presented, articulate and, on the surface, appeared confident. Inside, she felt as if she was living a lie. She also felt quite judged. As her mental health was not apparent, it was far harder for her to get the help that she really needed. Her referral to Karen Downie at Volunteer Midlothian, would be the starting point for Kirsty's volunteering odyssey.

How Volunteer Midlothian has helped Kirsty

An eight-week Get Ready for Volunteering course has been designed by Volunteer Midlothian to help people with mental health into volunteering. Predominantly delivered by Karen with input from occupational therapists, it focuses on breaking down barriers and ensuring ample information and time for people who often face spells of being unwell.

Volunteer Midlothian is continually developing a network of local organisations keen to provide placements, who will be welcomed in to talk about opportunities. The group hear from volunteers about their experiences and impact on their mental health, ability to commit and confidence. Kirsty attended the course every week, which includes a taster session at a community garden project run by Volunteer Midlothian, particularly for people with mental health issues or support needs and an opportunity to make friends and connections. While Kirsty was not interested in gardening, she did like painting, so with some extra encouragement, suitable tasks were set up for her around the garden. She was hooked and back the very next day, continuing for a couple of hours once a week.



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She didn't stop there. Through the course she heard about CAPS, an independent advocacy organisation for people who use or have used mental health services. Kirsty met up with them, was given an opportunity and now supports CAPS when they need her. Kirsty has also become an adult volunteer offering extra support to Volunteer Midlothian's Transform Project for young people who face challenges in life. She also helps with the team's Intergenerational Befriending Project, where small groups of young people visit the local sheltered housing to run activities with the older residents. The aim is to reduce isolation in the residents, as well as allowing young people to build social skills and confidence. Kirsty can relate to them and, again, provides that essential extra support.

Karen knows that their volunteering projects are vital - they encourage people to take the next step in their lives. They really do make a difference. She feels rewarded by seeing the transformation to the wellbeing of people like Kirsty. By embracing volunteering and being able to relate to others facing their own challenges she has achieved a great deal, regaining structure and routine at a level that is comfortable to her. This determined lady with growing confidence is so grateful for all the support she has been given by Karen and the Volunteer Midlothian team, and now feels more honest in herself. As Kirsty provided such a tremendous support and inspiration, Karen has nominated her for the Midlothian Volunteers' Week Awards in the Befriender/Mentor of the Year category. She believes Kirsty is an amazing, committed lady, loved by the people she supports.



Volunteer Midlothian
volunteermidlothian.org.uk

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network of Third Sector Interfaces
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