

Val's story



My name is Val and I'm in my early seventies. I had various jobs, including working as a lunchtime and teaching assistant at a school for children with learning disabilities.

When I retired and moved to Chelmsford nine years ago, I decided I would like to volunteer with adults with a learning disability. So, I got in touch with City of Chelmsford Mencap. They were setting up the Outreach Academy, which provides lifelong learning to people aged over 18. I was able to choose which day I wanted to volunteer and have been working with them for three hours a week ever since.

I work at the Outreach Academy on Tuesday mornings. My role is to help prepare for the activity and then to support students; some need support to participate in the sessions or to communicate. Being kind, gentle and positive with people can help them so much, and it's important to bring lots of humour to the role too.

Recently, I've been supporting a young man who is new to the Academy. He has severe autism so, at first, he found the new environment daunting and was very quiet. He didn't really join in and couldn't even make eye contact. Over the past few weeks, I have befriended him, encouraging him to join in by guiding him through the sessions. He is now making eye contact with everyone, contributing to the sessions and loves a joke. We have a really good relationship and it's so good to see him blossom.



Volunteering with CCM is one of the best things I've done. The whole job is so rewarding. If I can make a difference and make the students smile, I get a good deal of satisfaction. So many struggle every day so, when I make them laugh, it is the best sound. It gives me the most brilliant feeling in the world; I can't really describe it but it's like my heart's going to burst. The students are the most fantastic people in the world.

To anyone thinking of volunteering I would say don't be afraid, you will meet the most genuine and honest people here and just being kind and valuing people as individuals will make a hugely positive difference to their lives - and yours.



Just try it, you won't regret it. I've been volunteering with CCM nine years and I'm now 73 years old and I'm still there enjoying every moment!

