

# A few of the many 'faces' of Volunteers in the Church

## Vol-un-teer (n)

- <sup>1</sup> a person who freely offers to do something.
- <sup>2</sup> a person who works for an organisation without being paid.'

Oxford English Dictionary

For many churches it seems that just a very few people do all the work in helping to keep things running. Sometimes it's the person who has retired early, or maybe it's the

young mum who arranges the flowers or looks after the cleaning of the church alongside caring for young ones. But, in our busy world it is often the case that people don't have the

time alongside their working lives to do the many jobs necessary in the church. Nonetheless, the church and related organisations are reliant upon people giving up

their time to take on crucial roles within the life of the church and in the wider community. Nationally more people are volunteering in all sorts of organisations than ever before and

sometimes working in a voluntary capacity can help people to move on into their chosen career. So the Bridge has decided to celebrate all those who do volunteer in one way or another

and hopefully to encourage more to do the same. Let us know other organisations that you work with and your stories that others may serve in the same way too.

Using your spare time as

## a volunteer for Welcare

can allow you to form new friendships which could last a lifetime.

Welcare volunteers share their experiences of working in the Generation Link project at Welcare In Lambeth, and in Contact Centres. The work they do helps to strengthen families, is vital to the services which Welcare provides and is very personally rewarding to the volunteers themselves.

## Being 'some sort of grandparent' ...



I'd been thinking about applying to be a foster parent when I saw Welcare in Lambeth's advert about being some sort of 'grandparent'.

After training and CRB clearance I was allocated a family. Their girl, Cessie, is now six-and-a-half. Her mother is really supportive of how I can help and this makes all the difference.

My strategy has been to introduce Cessie to new environments and people. After over a year we've been to countless places, from living it up in Harrods to children's art classes at Dulwich Picture Gallery.

As well as Welcare's support and feedback, the key to all this has always been checking with her mum first about what I propose to do.

**Pete Griffiths**



## ...and why I'd recommend it

Sonia and Pete are Surrogate Grandparents for Lambeth Welcare Generation Link

## Working with vulnerable families

As a Generation Link volunteer, I visit my link family every week for at least two hours. Each visit is different as it depends on the mood of the family. I assist the children with school work and encourage them to read their books, play with the little one, go to the park, speak with mum and try to help her

access local services and family outings.

My experience has taught me that good communication; listening, confidentiality and empathy skills are essential in a volunteer's life, especially where most of the families are vulnerable, feel low and demoralised.

I feel honoured that they are able to open their door and their minds to a total stranger. At times it is difficult to be accepted into any family, because of past 'betrayal of trust'; but with time and patience, both parties benefit enormously.

**Ndidi Atako**

I organise a group for people suffering with anxiety and depression under the umbrella of Depression Alliance. This is a structured self-help group

## A Contact Centre volunteer

After a friend encouraged me to become secretary of the trustees of Sutton Welcare, I very soon felt that I – and hopefully the Centre as well – would benefit if I actually involved myself 'on the ground'. I therefore became a volunteer. I have never regretted it and I really enjoy our Saturday mornings at the Contact Centre.

No family is ever the same – some children greet their contact parent shyly and chat quietly over a board game or a puzzle and others rush in, hurl themselves at their parent and then play endless boisterous games outside. The end result is the same, however. We get so much pleasure and satisfaction out of seeing parent and children enjoying their experience.

It is often said that it is nice to be needed – and we know we are, as we are always oversubscribed with families who want to come but when, as often happens, family situations improve to the point where they feel they can safely leave us, it is also very rewarding not to be needed any more!

**Judy White**

Welcare in Sutton (Local Advisory Support Group and Contact Volunteer)

## Volunteering for Lay Ministry as a Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary or a Reader

### Omega Jackson is a SPA at HMP Brixton and St Mary the Virgin, Lewisham

My name is Omega. I am married with three grown-up children and one grandchild. I am deputy churchwarden at my parish church. I was commissioned as a SPA in June 2005. As a SPA, I lead a house group which meets every six weeks, look after baptism families and work as a volunteer within the chaplaincy department at a London prison.

My SPA training has opened doors which otherwise might have been difficult to access, namely working as a Volunteer in a prison chaplaincy.

Part of my training included a placement of 40 hours with community groups or organisations. I had the opportunity to carry out my placement with the chaplaincy team in a London Prison. The

experience was challenging and gave me an insight into how the team administer pastoral and spiritual guidance to those in prison (inmates and staff). On completion of my placement I applied for and was accepted as a volunteer. Although I am contracted to work two Saturdays a month, I actually work every Saturday between the hours of 9 am and 2 pm. Everyone who goes into prison should see the Chaplain within twenty-four hours. From Monday to Thursday this is done during induction. On Saturdays there is no induction. I visit the wings to see new 'receptions' (those who arrived on Friday) irrespective of their faith, and anyone who wants to see a chaplain.

I inform them of the activities within the chapel and give them a leaflet which must be completed and returned to the chaplaincy in order to participate. I talk with each

person, ascertain how they are, how they coped with their first night (for some being in prison for the first time can be very frightening), were they given the essentials on arrival, i.e. bed linen, toiletries, breakfast pack. I ask if families know they are in prison; if experiencing difficulties phoning I will contact a member of their family. Each person is informed of the procedures for church or prayers attendance which entails entering names on a list on Saturday.

Volunteering at the prison chaplaincy has helped me to network and reach out to the wider community especially to those locked away. I encounter people of all faiths and nationalities who live together amicably.

Through my SPA training I am able to bring pastoral skills which equip me to minister effectively to people who may need a listening ear.

### Norma Schofield is a SPA at St Mary Magdalene with St Martin, Addiscombe. She writes:

My SPA commissioning was in 2005 and I have worked as a volunteer since I began the training course in 2003.

Career-wise my life was spent working as a nurse and later in management positions in two care homes. I also worked with adults who had cerebral palsy and in a psychiatric hospital for four years. All my life I have been interested in caring for people.

Unfortunately I developed breast cancer and spinal problems and needed to retire early (although next January I become an OAP officially!)

I organise a group for people suffering with anxiety and depression under the umbrella of Depression Alliance. This is a structured self-help group

funded by Croydon Council and we provide a programme of self-help and circulate a newsletter. We meet twice a month and we sometimes invite professional speakers to visit; social events are also important. There are 160 people on our mailing list and we are currently helping 29 people.

I also work for Woodside Bereavement, a voluntary organisation, as a volunteer counsellor. This is an excellent organisation providing bereavement care to adults and children; they provide a 3 month training course for volunteers followed by monthly supervision; advice is always available. We are also encouraged to take part in fundraising events. Clients are initially offered three sessions but if more are required these are provided.

I worked for a while one afternoon per week on a ward at

Bethlem Royal Hospital as part of the chaplaincy Team. However at present I am mentor to someone in the community who has recently transferred from a hostel to a flat. This work is supervised by the chaplain, Canon Andrew Wilson.

My SPA work at church involves some visiting and home communions, and I also try to support people with mental health issues.

My work is vocational; "As much as you cared for the least of these my brothers and sisters you have cared for me". I can use my work skills and meet people of all cultures. It's much better than sitting at home!

I feel God's blessing upon me as I work, and I am privileged to pray for those I meet. I can rest if I need to if my aches and pains are too bad.

I am sure I take less pain killers because there is not much time to think.

### Ewan Robinson is a Reader at St Paul's Church, Thamesmead. He was licensed in October of last year.

Some of my family and friends have asked me why I decided to train to be a Reader. I, too, used to ask myself why I took on this role, with all its responsibilities and demands, which is also entirely voluntary. Then I thought about it and prayed about it. I had a revelation... Is it really voluntary; is any role in the church voluntary?

St Paul's has been in a vacancy for just over a year now and our ex-Priest left six months before I was due to be licensed. So rather than having the full support of a clergy team, I found myself licensed to a church with no curates, no deacons or non-stipendiary ministers. Volunteering is one thing, but now my training was about to be put to the test.

I was appointed Worship Leader for the Church, and from that day my life changed. I have to ensure that there is a service every Sunday. I choose and play the hymns, I lead regularly, preach, read, teach, do the Church surgery, serve on the DCC and the Management Committee, answer queries by the score, and...and...AND!

Let's go back to the revelation and my life change, (because the two go hand in hand.) When I called my mum in Jamaica and told her about my situation she said, "This is where God has put you, so go with it."

This is when I prayed, and what was revealed to me was the very reason for my being.

Volunteering has always come naturally to me; ever since I was young I would offer my help to people no matter how hard the work. I am doing the same now but with more understanding.



The understanding is that God has a role for each of us to play and I know that mine was destined to be in the Church, where I could freely volunteer my services to people in the knowledge that I am doing God's work, because the role that I am playing (even though incredibly tiring) is particularly satisfying and uplifting. Why would God lead me to a task that I could not perform?

When you come to the realisation that God has chosen you, your life has to change. Everything you do has a new significance. What I took for granted before, I now understand! So I had to change in order to let my natural tendencies flourish: the very tendencies that God created in me. I am God's creation, so naturally I answer to his Will - Amen

## Volunteers even bring The Bridge to your church

A bridge usually links two patches of firm ground. However, "The Bridge" links 24 churches in Merton Deanery, and, the Diocese, and, the World!

When George Lewis retired as Lay Chair of the deanery (and gave up distribution of The Bridge) Canon Nicholas Turner asked me to volunteer and the then Rural Dean, Rev. Nigel Worn signed me on as



The family (l-r): Alison, Joan, Janet, Louise, Tim and John

## It's all in the family in Old Malden

The Eggett family - part of the congregation at St John the Baptist, Malden - have been involved in the parish-sponsored Scout Group and other local Scouting activities for many years. Seven members of the family have committed themselves to this form of outreach for youth in the community.

In 1972, when Tim Eggett became a Cub Scout at the age of 8, little did the Eggetts know that within a year dad would be back in Scouting as Scout Leader, mum would become a Cub Scout Leader and sister would become a Cub Scout mascot! Over the following 30+ years all the family has remained involved in the Group in some way or another.

Janet and John's daughter Louise, having been to many a Scout camp with mum and dad, couldn't wait to become a "proper" Scout and her time came when she became old enough to become a Venture Scout in the Group. Now, she is a member of one of the Group's sub-committees and her son

Group's camping store. Being an ex-Fleet Street photographer, he keeps the Group's exploits profiled in the local papers - and the rest of the Scout district too.

John's wife Janet has been Group Treasurer for over 20 years and helps with fund raising, organising a monthly second hand bookstall in the local high street. She is also Free Will Offering Secretary for the parish.

Both have been awarded the Scout Movement's Silver Acorn, for "specially distinguished service to Scouting".

Son Tim rose through the ranks of the Group since joining as a Cub Scout 35 years ago. For 11 years, he was a Cub Scout Leader but in 2001, the parish agreed a lease with the Group so that it could build an entirely new Scout headquarters building with the aid of a "Big Lottery Fund" grant.

Tim took on the organisation of the Group's Development Project team and saw the fruits of everyone's labours when the Chief Scout officially opened the brand new "Old Malden Scout Centre" in 2002. Tim then became Group Scout Leader.

Janet and John's daughter Louise, having been to many a Scout camp with mum and dad, couldn't wait to become a "proper" Scout and her time came when she became old enough to become a Venture Scout in the Group. Now, she is a member of one of the Group's sub-committees and her son

Sean is a Scout. She's also a churchwarden.

While a leader with the Cub Scouts, Tim met his future wife Alison when she joined as a new leader. When they married at St John's, their Cubs made a "guard of honour" and, being an instructor with the Kingston and Malden Scout and Guide Band, her colleagues played a fanfare. Alison is now its Bandmaster and led the band to the highest level - playing at Windsor Castle, in the Lord Mayor's Show and this year at the Scouts' World Jamboree. While the band is a district based activity, many of 1st Old Malden's youngsters (including Sean) have been members.

Finally, Alison's mum Joan is an ardent fundraiser for the Group and a member of its management committee. Along with everyone else, she's a regular worshipper at St John's.

In recent years, 1st Old Malden has been awarded the County Commissioner's Standard, recognising the quality of Scouting delivered. Its youngsters have taken part in national competitions and at district level. The Group currently boasts around 100 members in two Beaver Scout Colonies, two Cub Scout Packs and a Scout Troop.

If you talk to any of the Eggetts and about why they spend so much time scouting, they'll tell you it's their way of putting their personal faith into action and getting more from their faith.

**Saturday** - stay at home, no sense trying to fight the traffic round Wimbledon and Mitcham.

**Sunday** - early start, zoom round the almost traffic-free borough and catch some early services or sheltered porches before returning to St Saviour's for 9.30am mass.

**John Dinsdale - volunteer**

(and my arm seems to be recovering nicely)

If you would like to become a volunteer for Welcare please contact one of the Welcare central team on 020 7939 9400, or visit our website at [www.welcare.org](http://www.welcare.org).