

Making a difference by volunteering

International Volunteer Day is on 5 December 2019.

The Edinburgh Reporter found out from Robina Brown, a volunteer with Ageing Well, about the impact that volunteering has had on her and those who have been on the programme.

Edinburgh Leisure's Ageing Well project, one of their Active Communities programmes, promotes healthy lifestyles for older adults in Edinburgh, who are inactive. Funded by NHS Lothian, it is part of the UK Ageing Well network, which aims to increase the expectation of good health in later life.

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The Ageing Well Project Edinburgh has made a significant difference to the lives of those who regularly attend the accessible, enjoyable classes, with the emphasis being on meeting new people, making new friends and being physical activity.

Each week, this multi-award-winning project helps over 400+ people in Edinburgh, stay active and healthy. Sessions take place in community venues throughout the city and are led by trained Ageing Well volunteers, who are older adults themselves.

One of these volunteers is Robina Brown, 71, who has been

involved with the project since its conception in 2001. She tells us about how she got involved and why she is still volunteering, 18 years later.

“I first found out about the Ageing Well Project in 2001. I had gone for a swim at Warrender Swim Centre and saw a poster for ‘volunteers required for a new project’. I was recovering from cancer treatment and looking for a new crossroad in my life. Since that day, I have never looked back. Having been well supported, through bereavement, cancer and two broken kneecaps and knee replacements, I realise that by being active and volunteering to help others has helped me stay physically and mentally fit.

“I have watched the Ageing Well Project grow from one chair-based exercise class and one walk a week, to what it is today. There are now 25 activities on offer every weekday. There is something for everyone to come and try.

“Most Ageing Well activities are led by trained older adults volunteers, who through being older adults themselves, have a good understanding of the scenarios of advancing years. We support our participants and in turn, we are supported by the Active Communities team at Edinburgh Leisure.”

Why are you still volunteering after eighteen years?

“I love meeting new people and Ageing Well is a rewarding way to make a difference to others, forming new friendships and encouraging other people to become fit and healthy.

“One of my proudest moments was being presented with the Queens’s Award for Volunteering by the Lord Provost of Edinburgh at the City Chambers in Edinburgh in 2018, with other Ageing Well volunteers. This award is the equivalent of an MBE for volunteering. It has been a privilege to volunteer alongside such a wonderful volunteer team, who have made and are making the project what it is today. Here’s to the next 10

years.

“Over the years we have helped many isolated people. Often, they are living on their own, have lost a loved one or friends or their family has moved away. Ageing Well offers them an opportunity to cross over their house threshold, to meet and speak to new people, to become healthier and make new friends.

“Making a difference to others is very important to me. It is also important for me to be a ‘you’ person, not a ‘me’ person. In other words, you have to see the other person, not yourself, and be aware of ‘their ills’ and understand their needs.”

There are many stories about how our volunteers have changed people’s lives.

Robina continues: “One such story is a participant who is 96+ and still living independently. They joined our new buddy swimming session at the Royal Commonwealth Pool when the venue reopened after refurbishment in 2013. At that time, they were recovering from a stroke. Seven years later, they are still attending our Thursday sessions, having greatly improved their health and continue to love their swimming experience.”

And Robina is keen to encourage others to come along, and to give Ageing Well a try, shadow sessions and see what the volunteers get up to, with a view to joining the team.

“There is much on offer – from joining our allotment gardening group to walking, to singing, to photography, to seated yoga, chair-based exercise, to cycling, to dancing, to buddy swimming and even New Age Kurling.”

www.edinburghleisure.co.uk/activities/be-active/ageing-well



PATHS FOR ALL BOTANIC GARDENS – EDINBURGH Ageing Well Project
Pictured: Audrey McKinven, Robina Brawn, Bryony Ross and Ryan Dignan