

Homeless charity looking for volunteers to support befriending service

Homeless charity Rowan Alba is appealing for local volunteers to support its CARDS befriending service which works with people across the city, providing vital support and social contact to reduce isolation.

The Community Alcohol Related Damages Service (CARDS) was set up by Rowan Alba in 2010. Those who are referred to CARDS by health care specialists, GPs, hospitals and mental health services have, for various reasons, become isolated and developed a problematic relationship with alcohol. CARDS volunteers are there to provide vital social contact and to listen without judgment.







A team of 60 volunteers deliver 1-1 befriending support to 80 clients across the city, usually meeting once a week to provide emotional support, helping clients build their social skills and confidence to engage with their local community. Since getting support from CARDS, 69% of clients have reported improved mental health, 77% have reduced their alcohol intake and 80% said life was less chaotic. 69% said they have spent less time in hospital.

Paul McCay, a CARDS volunteer for seven years said; "The people we work with are socially isolated, many have anxiety and are disconnected from their communities. Just having someone who consistently shows up, without judgment, to listen, have a chat, listen to music, go for a walk or a coffee can't be underestimated. The regular contact that volunteers provide can be both life-changing and life-saving."

As a crucial befriending service for older people with long term alcohol issues and at risk of crisis, CARDS is just one of a number of services delivered by Rowan Alba in supporting some of Edinburgh's most vulnerable, isolated and homeless people. The charity aims to break the cycle of homelessness for people deemed 'un-houseable' by other services.

Rowan Alba pioneered the home for life concept with Thorntree Street in Leith, providing permanent homes for older men with a long-term history of rough sleeping and street drinking. The charity's second home for life property will open in Peffermill in 2022.

Rowan Alba also provides temporary supported accommodation at Stramullion in Pilton, supporting women with complex needs to move out of homelessness and into their own home.

The charity has years of expertise working with older people with alcohol issues; these issues may stem from years of health inequality, trauma, homelessness, family breakdown, mental health issues time spent in prison or abuse. Many have

developed Alcohol Related Brain Damage (ARBD), which has left them physically and emotionally damaged and socially isolated.

Tracey Stewart, Volunteer Service Manager at Rowan Alba said; “We have all faced periods of isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic but for those who are referred to CARDS, social isolation is something many have lived with for years. The 1-1 befriending service provided by our volunteers provides vital emotional support, helping clients to re-learn how to manage a trusting relationship with another person. CARDS urgently needs more volunteers to support our clients across Edinburgh, so we are looking for people who can provide compassionate support for individuals who have had a difficult relationship with alcohol now or in the past. Ideally you will have had experience in a role where managing relationships is key. Being able to listen without judgment and understand the benefit of human contact is vital.

“Our best volunteers are the kind of people whom you end up chatting to at a bus stop and go away being moved by the interaction. It’s as simple as that. We provide all the support, training and guidance that you need. Half of our staff started as volunteers and 85% of people who were looking to get in to social care as a career find themselves within employment within the first year after volunteering. Those who come for the experience hang around for much longer. It’s a community in itself.”

Comprehensive training and support are provided and volunteers are asked to make a time commitment of at least 1 year. Full details of the application process are available [here](#).