

Gracie, 76, Faringdon Home Library Service volunteer

Seeing an ad in her local Parish magazine asking for volunteers for the Home Library Service, it didn't take Gracie long to respond. She put herself in the shoes of those who might be housebound, with limited contact with the outside world and wanted to do something to help.



She explains in her own words what volunteering for the Home Library Service means to her.

How did you find out about volunteering for the Home Library Service?

I have been retired for nearly 17 years and have been widowed 5 years. I have a fair amount of time on my hands and like to connect with people, so I have been doing voluntary work at the senior citizens club and with foreign military wives for some time. I noticed the ad for the Home Library Service volunteers in my local Parish magazine and thought 'yes, I have got more time to spare'.

I read it a few times and then I sat down and imagined how I would feel if I was totally housebound. I know the importance of having literature and company in my life now I'm living alone so I thought it's important to reach out to others who may not have much contact with the outside world.

I contacted the library service and had an interview with the Home Library Service manager at my local library in Faringdon. It was a nice, informal and friendly introduction to go through the procedures and I felt very at ease.

It's a nice way to make contact with people and make new friends.

Who do you help?

I help three ladies who all live in Faringdon. One lady who lives alone has had a couple of falls and a couple of operations on her hip. She's such a friendly lady and has invited me to sit with her for a cup of tea next time I visit, so we're taking another step further which is nice.

The other two ladies live in a home. They're full of bubbly conversation and we exchange light hearted chatter. There are people around them all the time but even so, one can still be lonely with lots of people around and it makes them feel a bit special having someone come to see them.

What does it involve / what's a typical visit like?

I get to the library pretty early and select the ladies' books. I follow their preferences, such as large print and certain authors and genres, get them in the little bags and off I go. They give me back anything that they've read or tried and didn't like, and I go back to the library and put them through the system again.

I've asked them if there's anything special they want me to order for them so that I can make sure they're getting books they really enjoy. It's no good plodding through something you don't particularly like!

There's help on offer if you're struggling to find the authors they've requested. The library has a list which provides suggestions based on what you like, so I've been using that as well.

What does the role mean to you?

It is fulfilling and very rewarding. My clients are keen to chat and talk about the authors and the plots. It's meaningful because I'm reaching out to them but at the same time they're reaching out to me, or whoever does this lovely volunteer job. It is almost a lifeline for the people who use the service.

While I'm there I'm also keen to notice if any of the clients are worried or isolated. It's another pair of eyes and another heart to care for.

I'm a typical bookworm and know the importance of reading. My clients, like everybody, can just lose themselves; imagination can take flight and take you out of the four walls of wherever you're living. It's a wonderful way to escape.

Is it all about books?

It's a very human thing. It's about literature, of course it is, but it's also about our fellow beings and caring for them. It's just nice to reach out and get to know people and let them get to know those who come and visit.

How does volunteering make you feel?

Oh, it makes me feel good! I come home and I feel that I've done just a little bit of good in the community and that can't be a bad thing!

Everyone at the library is really friendly and helpful, so I feel that I'm making friends with them as well as the people who I deliver to. I would urge others to volunteer because it's a very interesting and satisfying post, it really is. To put something nice into the community is very worthwhile and I feel that it's a delightful experience!

What skills do you need to be a volunteer?

I think you need to be a people person and a little bit of an extrovert to take that first step to do something that you've never done before. You need to have a little bit of confidence and a lot of humility.