



## **8 things you need to know about Palliative Care Volunteering**

1. Working in palliative care is one of the most rewarding volunteer choices anyone can make. Not only does it make a huge difference to the person who is dying and their family, but also to the volunteer's own life. Volunteers learn to cherish each day, listen deeply and value life as a precious gift. **But it's not for everyone.** Death and dying, end-of-life and palliative care can be difficult and sometimes confronting subjects for people to discuss. As a volunteer your role will involve supporting people and their families as they grapple with these sensitive subjects. Sensitivity, empathy, life experience, warmth and communication are essential attributes. Volunteers need to be patient, flexible, non-judgmental, understanding and accepting of other people's beliefs and values so they can navigate people through sometimes difficult conversations.
2. Palliative Care volunteers are generally over the age of 18. They have **diverse backgrounds** including trades, transport and sales, nursing, social work, medicine, law, hairdressing, administration, welfare work, training and education. They might be employed, unemployed, students or retirees. There are no formal qualifications or specific experience necessary, and life experiences and compassion are enormously beneficial.
3. As you will work closely with vulnerable people you should expect to be **trained and carefully selected for the role** (including security checks). For example you might have to get a clearance for working with children even in an adult service, because there might be situations where the service will ask you to assist with the care of children as part of your role.
4. You will have the opportunity to work in various settings including a client's home, ACT Hospice (Clare Holland House), Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACF), The Canberra Hospital (TCH), and our Life Story Program. Volunteers may also assist in Admin, fundraising and events. Volunteers who work in Client's homes and our Life Story Program tend to work in the community and act more autonomously. Volunteers who work in CHH, RACF, and TCH have to be skilled at teamwork. With increasing demand for palliative support in Client's homes volunteers who are able to work in our Home Based Palliative Care program are highly sought.

5. You may have recently lost a loved one, and now have a desire to give back into the service to provide support to others. This will be really valuable for enriching your contribution as a volunteer, but make sure you **give yourself time to grieve** your own loss. Most services will ask you to allow at least 12 months after your bereavement before commencing volunteering with clients however there may be opportunities to assist with events, fundraising or administration duties.
  
6. When you have been accepted as a volunteer you should expect to be valued as a member of the team, **be able to work within a team** and provide support & encouragement to your peers. You will also need to understand and accept the philosophy of palliative care. Perhaps one of the most important criteria is that volunteers should be happy to be with people and not feel they have to fix or save people. It's about 'presence'. And sometimes it's about saying 'no, sorry I can't help you with that.'
  
7. Some organisations ask volunteers to sign up for a given time, perhaps a year, because they have made a considerable investment in education, training and resources. Some services will also limit a volunteer's time to, say, four hours per week and one patient. **Volunteer commitment** varies usually governed by the volunteer's availability and the service's needs. Palliative Care ACT asks that volunteers commit to at least 4 hours of volunteering each week for a minimum of 12 months.
  
8. Volunteers **often move in and out of their volunteer role**, this is normal and healthy. Volunteer Coordinators know that taking time out for study, holidays, work or family commitments is important so that the volunteer has a life away from the service. They also know that encouraging volunteers to pursue other interests while still remaining part of the team also helps avoid burnout.