

EMBRACING AGE

Later life in all its fullness



Care Home Friends:

Mobilising volunteers to
befriend care home residents

TOOL KIT



“Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone.” Ps 71:9

Introduction

The purpose of this tool kit is to help you adopt your local care home and mobilise volunteers to befriend and come alongside care home residents. We do not want to be too prescriptive, rather we give suggestions and ideas for you to adapt and use as is appropriate in your setting.

We have lots of resources and templates available that you can use and adapt to suit your purposes – please just drop us an email if there are resources mentioned in this toolkit that you would find helpful.

About Embracing Age

Embracing Age was started in 2014 in response to God’s heart of love and compassion towards older people living with frailty, including care home residents. We have grown and developed over the years and now have three main strands: befriending care home residents through our Care Home Friends initiative, supporting informal carers through our weekly Carers Connected zoom gatherings and equipping churches in their ministry amongst older people.



This toolkit focusses on our Care Home Friends initiative. Do contact us if you would like more information about the other two strands, or check out our website embracingage.org.uk

Moving into a care home can be a very stressful experience. It usually happens when people can not cope at home anymore, so they are vulnerable and anxious already as they face a move into a new environment, where they don't know anyone, whilst they are in the process of coming to terms with their deteriorating health and independence.

It can be hard to build meaningful relationships in a new environment at the best of times, but it's even harder as you get older, with issues like hearing loss, visual impairment, etc. adding further challenges to communication. Research shows that

care home residents are twice as likely to feel severely lonely as older people living at home.

The heart of Care Home Friends is to come alongside residents in companionship, spending time with them, doing activities that they enjoy and that build friendship. We want to bring hope, love and joy into their lives and give them connections with the outside world.

The Care Home Friends vision

There are about 12,500 care homes for older people in the UK and over 50,000 churches. We want to see every care home adopted by a local church, with trained volunteers spending time and building friendship with residents.

Jean's Story

At 90 years old, Jean didn't feel ready to move into a care home, but needed to for physical reasons. She didn't see much of her family and felt cut off from the outside world. Jean was full of praise about the care she received from staff but felt there were not many residents she could have a conversation with, and she couldn't get out easily on her own. At one point as Jean was struggling to adjust to life in a care home, she had what she described as a meltdown. She felt she had no-one to talk to and no-one to tell. She channelled her emotional turmoil into art, painting a picture of herself completely alone in a stormy sea.



A Care Home Friend took Jean out for walks and they had lovely chats. "We talk about things we wouldn't normally talk about in here. I feel like I am out in the normal world, talking to a normal person. It's normal and it's lovely! I look forward to his visits all week!" Jean said that she couldn't do without her Care Home Friend volunteer: "He has filled the gap and transformed my life!"

What Care Home Friends do

Volunteers befriend and build relationship with care home residents providing stimulation, companionship and conversation.

It could be reading aloud, or doing a crossword with a resident who has visual impairment.

It could involve helping residents with IT skills, playing a game like Scrabble, doing gardening with a resident or taking them out for a walk.

The list is endless, as each resident will have different interests.

What Care Home Friends don't do

They generally do not run church services in care homes, as often this is already being provided. Many churches run services at care homes, which are so vital, and this means a relationship already exists with the staff, which makes starting a care home friends project very smooth.

If, as a church, you don't have an existing relationship with a care home, occasionally, when you initially approach a care home, they may say that they already have a church connection, but this is usually related to either running a service or specific pastoral visits. It's important to make the distinction about the work we do which is all about companionship.

We have developed a pool of resources to freely download from our website on running services in care homes.

How Embracing Age can help a church adopt their local care home

We have a host of ideas of ways you can build bridges with your local care home and these are available on our website at

<https://www.embracingage.org.uk/adopting-your-local-care-home.html>

We no longer offer an "off the shelf" model for churches to buy into, as we have found that this is not needed and each church develops their own project in their own way. What we can offer is:

- Advice on how to set up a project
- Training for volunteers via zoom webinars
- Access to online training for volunteers to work through in their own time
- Becoming part of a free network of similar projects, connecting with others through a closed facebook group and ideas and inspiration through a quarterly newsletter

The Ethos of your Project

We want to be a practical example to the world of God's unconditional love that is freely given, and display his heart for the frail elderly, who are not overlooked or ignored in His Kingdom.

It's so important to build trust with your local care home staff – they are the gatekeepers and take the safeguarding of their residents very seriously. They may have had bad experiences of volunteers in the past – they need to know that you are going to be a blessing to the residents and the staff, not someone coming in with an inspectors hat on to criticise.

We recommend you develop a charter that reflects your ethos. Below is one that we have developed which you are welcome to use and adapt.

The Care Home Friends Charter

- We treat care home residents with dignity and respect, viewing them as unique individuals with intrinsic value and worth.
- We value the hard work and commitment of care home staff and recognise the unique role relatives play in the life of a loved one living in a care home.
- We recognise and appreciate the dedication of volunteers and support them in their role as a care home friend.
- We understand the importance of safeguarding vulnerable adults and follow stringent safeguarding policies and procedures.
- We are committed to evaluating the effectiveness of our work through regular feedback from residents, volunteers and care home staff.

You may want to come up with a name for your project that reflects your ethos. Sadly, you can't use the name Care Home Friends as your project needs to be distinct to you.

Suggested process for setting up a Care Home Friends

Phase 1: Prepare the church

Get buy in and support from your church leaders
Encourage the church to pray
Get a team of people together who are interested

Phase 2: Build trust with the care home

Identify a potential care home
Meet the care home manager and build trust
You can start with some easy wins to develop the relationship with the care home

Phase 3: Recruit & Train Volunteers

Recruit Volunteers
Organise volunteer training session
Vet volunteers – DBS, references, etc
Set launch date

Phase 4: Launch

Launch project!
Introduce volunteers to care home manager / staff
Volunteers start visiting residents

Phase 5: Support & Review

Support volunteers and get regular feedback
Keep a log of volunteer visits
Arrange regular volunteer get togethers
Keep in regular touch with care home manager

What does a good Care Home Friends project look like?

A good care home friends project starts with a committed and enthusiastic project leader who has the backing and support of their church leadership and who is able to recruit 2 or 3 (or more) volunteers willing to spend at least an hour each week visiting care home residents. Volunteers see this as a longer term involvement and have committed for at least a year (obviously unexpected circumstances happen in all our lives from time to time which might prevent this, but a good project will have committed volunteers).

The volunteers will have a clear DBS check and two references, and have undergone some training to prepare them for a care home environment. They are supported by the project leader, have quarterly volunteer get-togethers and enjoy the time they spend with residents. Volunteers record their visits (maybe on a log in sheet at the care home, or via a google form), and the champion collects these on a regular basis and provides new log in sheets to the care home.

In a good project the leader develops a good relationship with the care home manager and the volunteers are trusted and appreciated by care home staff. They are always on the lookout for new volunteers and feedback regularly to the church about the difference they are making in the lives of the care home residents, so that momentum and interest is maintained within the church.

The Role of the Project Leader

We recommend that every church starting a care home friends project identifies a project leader who will:

1. Identify a local care home and build a relationship with the care home manager
2. Encourage the church to pray: We suggest gathering a prayer support team so that your project is saturated in prayer, both at the start and going forward.
3. Recruit suitable volunteers to befriend residents: You only need 2 or 3 to start with, though you can, of course, have more!
4. Organise a training session for volunteers to prepare them for a care home environment. Embracing Age can provide this training on zoom if needed.
5. Support volunteers by organising regular volunteer meetings and responding to individual needs of volunteers.
6. Monitor & evaluate your project:

Phase 1: Prepare the church

Here are some of the practical questions that may arise:

Prayer – we encourage you to ask your church leaders for prayer support, as you plan, prepare and launch. It's wonderful to commission your volunteers and pray for them at a church service.

Cost – There will be a cost in time for the project leader and also for the volunteers. We encourage volunteers to commit to one hour a week, but some do more and some do once a fortnight.

We can provide training via zoom for volunteers. This is a three hour session (with a break mid way) and costs £150. If this cost is a barrier we are happy to accept a smaller donation. We also have this training as an online course that volunteers can work through in their own time. This costs £10 per volunteer. All funds given go towards supporting the charity. We can also run a separate one hour webinar on dementia that is geared up to volunteers visiting care home residents. This costs £50, with the same proviso as above.

Safeguarding – the care home will likely insist that all volunteers are DBS checked. This can either be done by your church, or by the care home, following discussions with them. We also recommend taking up two references for each volunteer.

A further legal requirement post pandemic is that all volunteers going into care homes are double vaccinated. However, the government is currently discussing whether to continue with this legislation, so watch this space.

Office support – there are some administrative tasks which could potentially be done by the church office staff. This includes the DBS safeguarding checks, referencing and creating ID badges (which we recommend, but are not essential). It may be worth discussing with your church leader whether there is any capacity for the church staff to help with this.

Insurance – You will need to check that your church insurance covers the work volunteers will be doing.

Sharing with the church – If you are going to recruit volunteers you need to show the church that there is a need. We have videos and stats that can help with this.

Once your volunteers are trained and ready to go into the care home, your church may like to have a moment during a meeting to pray for them and 'commission' them for their new role.

Phase 2: Build trust with the care home

Identify a potential care home

Consider the links you may already have links with a local care home:

- A church member in a care home
- A relative of a church member in a care home
- Church members who work in a care home
- You, or a group in your church, already visit the care home (e.g. for communion or Christmas Carols)

Sometimes, when you initially approach a care home they may say that they already have a church connection, but this is usually related to running a service or specific pastoral visits. It's important to make the distinction about the work we do which is all about *companionship and befriending*.

Ideas to build the relationship with the care home

In some places visiting is still restricted due to the pandemic, but there we have developed some ideas that still enable relationships to be built. Ideas include:

- Cards to residents
- Thank you gift bags to staff
- Sensory plants for the care home
- Knitted aquariums
- Knitted bed capes and shawls
- Alexa devices
- Pictures of joy – laminated joyful photos to spark conversations

More information about all these initiatives can be found on our website at <https://www.embracingage.org.uk/adopting-your-local-care-home.html>

Get to know the care home manager.

Care home managers tend to be very busy and difficult to get hold of, so you may need to persevere with this.

If you, or someone in your church, already has links with the care home we recommend using those links to arrange a meeting with the care home manager.

Otherwise, we recommend an initial phone call to the home, asking to speak to the manager. Explain briefly who you are and about the project, and arrange a face to face meeting to chat more.

Things to clarify with the Care Home Manager

The most important thing on the initial meeting is to build relationship and trust.

At the first meeting:

- Reassure the manager that volunteers are there to support the staff, not to criticise. We understand that staff are busy, but volunteers can sit and chat, have a game of chess or do other activities with residents.
- If you have developed a charter, give them a copy so that they understand your ethos

You may need to reassure the manager that volunteers will all undergo training, which covers:

- active listening
- boundaries & confidentiality
- dementia & communication challenges
- safeguarding

Things to discuss at a later stage:

You will need to discuss a number of things with the care home manager to clarify who is going to do what, but these things don't necessarily need to be discussed the first time you meet. These include:

1. **DBS checks** – do the care home already have a process for vetting volunteers, such as taking up references and doing DBS checks? The care home may prefer to do this themselves, but if not, you will need to.
2. **Insurance** – does the insurance of the care home cover for volunteers – if not, it they will need to be covered by your church insurance. You may well find your church insurance already covers for volunteers but it is worth checking with your insurance company.
3. **Process of placing volunteers** – it's helpful to talk through with the manager the process of recruiting and placing volunteers in their care home. We have a suggested process sheet that you can talk through with them in the Appendix.
4. **Induction for volunteers** – this is something that you will want the care home to do so that volunteers feel welcome. [A suggested induction is shown in Appendix 3](#), which can be given to the care home manager.

Phase 3: Recruit and Train Volunteers

There are a number of options for recruiting volunteers:

1. Members of your church congregation:

Church members can be busy with so many things, but you will probably find some who have a heart for older people and a desire to be involved.

You may find people who don't want to volunteer on a Sunday, or at a fixed time during the week, but are happy to find a regular time in their diary, that suits them, to visit someone in a care home.

2. Members of connected church groups:

If your church has outreach to the community, you may find volunteers from some of these groups.

For example, if you have a parent and toddler group, you may find that some of the parents would be happy to become a volunteer.

3. People from the local community:

Ask yourself if your volunteers have to be Christians. The main attribute you are looking for is a heart for older people, and it is a great opportunity to create links between the church and the local community.

Here are some ways to get people from your local community involved:

- a) Poster campaign in local shops, cafes or community centres.
- b) Contact your local Council for Voluntary Services as they may be able to help recruit volunteers.
- c) Put an advert in school newsletters that go out to parents.
- d) Online volunteer websites like www.do-it.org
- e) Local community websites or Facebook pages.
- f) Your church social media accounts – Facebook, Instagram or Twitter
- g) Local radio

We recommend that you start small – just 2 to 4 volunteers, as you do not want to be overwhelmed with enquiries.

Consider whether you need volunteers to complete an application form to include details of two referees.

DBS checks for Volunteers

All volunteers must have a DBS check carried out, because they are working with adults at risk. Discuss this with the care home manager. They DBS check all their staff and may be keen to do the DBS checks for volunteers.

Most churches have a DBS process in place that you might be able to use - discuss this with the safeguarding team at your church.

Delays in getting DBS checks can stall your project, so it's important to discuss early on with the care home whether they or yourselves will do the check. If you are doing them, then prepare in advance by chatting to your church about how these are done.

We recommend that you give out the DBS forms (or send online links if doing them online) to volunteers who are interested before they come to the training and ask them to bring the ID they need to the training day. This ensures that there's minimum delay to getting the DBS checks completed, so that your volunteers can start going in to the care home.

Volunteers will need an enhanced check for working with vulnerable adults. We have found that when verifying an application it is helpful to write: "the applicant will be visiting a care home weekly to befriend and support residents".

Other factors to consider when recruiting volunteers

Young people

You may get volunteering queries from young people wanting to volunteer for their Duke of Edinburgh, or university applications.

We recommend a policy whereby young people aged under 16 *cannot* volunteer in this role, unless accompanied by a responsible adult, preferably a parent, who would need to be DBS checked.

16 to 18 year olds can volunteer, but there are certain actions and guidelines that need to be followed.

We recommend that when you are starting out you only recruit volunteers who are over 18 years old. If you are keen to recruit 16 to 18 year olds please speak to a member of the Embracing Age team about some of the added protocols and considerations around this.

References

All volunteers should also provide the names and contact details of two referees. There is space on the application form for them to write details of their referees.

The project leader will need to have an informal chat/interview with any potential volunteers who you do not know.

ID badges for volunteers

We recommend all volunteers having an ID badge with a lanyard that states “volunteer”, to avoid any confusion in the care home. We can provide a template for this if needed.

Policies and Procedures

We recommend you have a number of policies and procedures in place for good practice including:

1. Safeguarding policy
2. Confidentiality policy

We have ones that you are welcome to adapt if needed.

Organising a Training Session for Volunteers

All your volunteers will need training to prepare them for volunteering in a care home. This should include:

- active listening
- boundaries & confidentiality
- communication challenges
- dementia
- safeguarding

As mentioned earlier, we can provide bespoke training via zoom for volunteers – training that we have developed in the 7 years of running Care Home Friends projects. This is a three hour session (with a break mid way) and costs £150. If this cost is a barrier we are happy to accept a smaller donation. All funds given go towards supporting the charity.

This training is also available as an online course that that volunteers can work through in their own time. This costs £10 per volunteer to cover our admin costs.

We can also run a separate one hour webinar on dementia that is geared up to volunteers visiting care home residents. This costs £50, with the same proviso as above for those churches unable to afford this.

Phase 4: Launch your project

Involving your Church

It can be helpful to have a 'launch date' in mind, by the time you run your training session. This can give you, the volunteers and the care home a date to work towards.

Depending on your church, you may want to do things quietly, behind the scenes or you may wish to make a big splash.

It's great to let everyone in the church know what you are doing – this can encourage ownership of the project, get people to pray for you and you may even find new volunteers this way!

Here's some ideas of what your church might choose to do as you launch:

- invite all the volunteers up to the front, give them their lanyard photo ID's and pray for them during the meeting.
- celebrate the number of hours visited in your annual 'Vision' Sunday or report
- share on their social media

Introducing volunteers to the care home

When the volunteer has been through the training, has two good references and a clear DBS check they are ready to be introduced to the care home.

To introduce them to the care home:

1. Email the care home manager to introduce the new volunteer and let them know that they are ready to start. Let them know that the volunteer will be contacting the manager soon to organise an initial meeting with them.

The purpose of this meeting is for the manager to get to know the volunteer, to give them an introduction and short induction in the care home and introduce the volunteer to some of the residents who would benefit from a visit.

2. Email the volunteer to give them the contact details of the care home manager. Tell them that the manager is expecting to hear from them. It's up to your volunteer to organise an initial visit to the home to meet the manager and have a short induction.

You may prefer to have a specific date, when all your volunteers have their induction on the same day.

3. Follow up with the volunteer in a week or two to check everything has gone smoothly.

Phase 5: Support & Review

Supporting Volunteers

Support during the first few weeks

Volunteers tend to need most support during the first few weeks.

From time to time a volunteer might be matched with a person they find difficult to connect with, or who finds it difficult to connect with them.

Sometimes they're uncertain about a particular aspect of their role and just need some clarification.

Usually these matters can be resolved quickly, and we encourage volunteers during the training to discuss any problems with their project leader early on.

Regular volunteer meetings

When volunteers are settled in their role it can be easy to lose contact with them so we recommend regular volunteer meetings (such as quarterly), which are an opportunity to get together for a chat and share experiences.

Achievement certificates

As part of the regular volunteer meetings you may want to award light-hearted certificates for time spent volunteering. You may also wish to do this as part of your church meeting.

Reviewing your Project

We recommend regularly reviewing your project.

Why do we need to monitor and evaluate our projects?

- Enables you to keep track of your volunteers and resolve any issues or problems quickly
- You can measure the impact you are having
- This can be fed back to volunteers and donors and helps them to appreciate the difference they are making.
- It's really encouraging to hear stories!

How do we monitor and evaluate our projects?

We recommend the following:

1. **Volunteer Time Log:**

You will be able to see locally how much time your volunteers are giving and we will collect these figures annually so that we have a picture of what is happening overall nationally.

2. **Annual Survey**

An annual survey which involves sending a questionnaire to your volunteers, an email to the care home manager and interviewing a resident who has a volunteer visit.

The role of the project leader in Monitoring and Evaluation

- Ensuring volunteers record their time spent at the care home.
- Sending out an annual questionnaire to volunteers – see overleaf
- Sending an annual email to the care home manager – see overleaf
- Interviewing one resident who has a regular volunteer – see overleaf

Evaluation can seem like a pain, but if you keep it as simple as possible it can prove to be a real joy and blessing as you hear back wonderful stories from your volunteers and residents.

These are the tools we use to evaluate our projects. You are welcome to use and adapt them. We use a google form to send this questionnaire to volunteers.

1. Annual Questionnaire to Volunteers

1. How many different residents have you spent time with over the course of the year? *(It may just be one or two residents that you have got to know well, and that is absolutely fine. Others of you have led groups, in which case please give the average attendance at your group)*

2. What do you do with the residents you visit? *eg chat, play games, hand massages, manicures, read poetry, gardening, singing, etc*

3. Do any of the residents you visit have memory problems/dementia? Yes/no

4. What signs do the residents you visit show of enjoying the time that you spend with them? *eg. smiling, laughing, verbally expressing their enjoyment and appreciation, engaging in conversation or activities with you, etc.*

5. What do you get out of volunteering? (or what did you get if you have now stopped volunteering)

6. Has volunteering increased your confidence in engaging with care home residents?

7. Can you tell us any stories or anecdotes about your volunteering experience *eg. tell us about one of the residents you visit, what you do with them and what it means for them and you that you visit them.*

8. Anything else you want to add about your volunteering experience?

2. Annual email to Care Home Managers

Dear xxx

I know you are rushed off your feet but I wondered if you could spare 2 minutes to answer 2 yes/no questions about our volunteers who visit your residents.

We collect this information to get an overview of our impact and your feedback as a care home manager is vital. I promise it's really quick!

1. Would you recommend care home friends to other care home managers?
YES / NO
2. Would you agree that the quality of life has improved of residents visited by our care home friend volunteers?
YES / NO

(Optional) Any other comments you would like to make (positive or negative):

Thanks so much!

3. Annual interview questions for a resident

The idea of these questions is to capture the residents story and hear from them what it means to have a volunteer. In that sense it does not matter if the questions are adhered to exactly, although they are all good to ask. We hear some wonderful feedback – comments like “He’s transformed my life”. If you are able to get good quotes to jot them down you’ll find them valuable in feeding back to the church about the difference volunteers are making in the lives of the residents they visit.

- What have you been doing with your volunteer?
- What are the benefits of having your volunteer to visit you?
- How does having a visit from your volunteer make you feel?
- Does having your volunteer visit help you to feel more connected to the local community?

Ongoing support from Embracing Age

Embracing Age staff are available via phone or email to discuss any issues or questions you may have, or to organise training.

Our phone number is: 020 3778 0035 or 07735 332584

We have a Facebook page for Project leaders which you are welcome to join.

Connect with Us

You can connect with us on social media:



www.facebook.com/EmbracingAgeUK



[@embracingage](https://twitter.com/embracingage)



[@embracingageUK](https://www.instagram.com/embracingageUK)

www.embracingage.org.uk

Appendices

Suggested Induction for Volunteers at Care Home

(for manager)

The aim of the induction is to introduce volunteers to the care home and staff, so that they feel welcome and at ease. It's also a great opportunity for you to get to know them better.

Coming into a new environment can be daunting at the best of times and it might take a few weeks for volunteers to feel settled and comfortable as they get to know both staff and residents.

Tina English, the founder of Embracing Age was surprised how nervous she was the first day she started volunteering at a care home. She was a trained nurse and had worked in a care home, yet she still found coming to a new environment a rather nerve-wracking experience!

Here's our suggested one-to-one induction process:

1. Introduce to key members of staff – let them know who they can ask if they have any questions or concerns. *(They will have the ongoing support of the Project Leader, but that person will not be at the care home when they are, so it's helpful for them to have a contact person at the care home as well).*
2. Ask if the volunteer has any particular interests or hobbies that may be relevant to their volunteering (for example, playing a musical instrument, gardening).
3. Show volunteers where they need to sign in and out
4. Show them where the fire escapes are and show them a copy of the fire evacuation procedures
5. Introduce volunteers to the resident (s) they will be visiting. *(Sometimes it's better to not introduce them to too many residents on the first day as that can be a little overwhelming.)*
6. Show them where the toilets are
7. Give them any codes they need to get in and out of the building / doors.

Volunteer Role Description (to help in the recruitment of volunteers)

Role:	Befriending an older person living in a care home
Where:	In (name of care home).
When:	1 to 2 hours once a week.
Why:	Older people in care homes are potentially some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Research shows that they are twice as likely to be lonely as older people living in the community.
What does the role involve:	Undergoing a DBS (criminal record check) Attending training. Visiting and befriending an older person living in a nursing home. Possibly undertaking activities with the older person, such as reading to them, or playing a game, or showing them how to use a mobile phone or tablet, if you are confident to do that.
Attributes / skills needed:	Be reliable Have empathy and patience, Be friendly and approachable Ability to listen and engage in conversation
What's in it for you?	Meeting other likeminded volunteers. The satisfaction of knowing that you are making a big difference in the life of a vulnerable person in your community. Valuable experience of volunteering. Pre- agreed out of pocket travel expenses.
What you can expect from us:	Training and induction before the role starts. Ongoing support from the project leader Regular meetings with other volunteers. Opportunities for further training