

Volunteering Covid

I always knew how much I valued volunteering as part of my life generally but, specifically, as vital to my continuing mental and physical wellbeing and my recovery from alcohol issues, but if I didn't I became acutely aware of it going into the first lockdown.

My volunteering as a tutor at Access to Industry, my shifts at Scottish Poetry Library, most of my voluntary work at VE along with facilitating Serenity Strings recovery music group - it all came to an end and I was left with several huge voids; my weekly timetable was rent assunder.

I volunteered to do phone befriending on a weekly basis for several months, but this was insufficient to replace my routine. Volunteering gives me fulfilment and a sense of worth, so I was now struggling to keep mind and body active and making a contribution. I feared my old demons would return as my mood suffered and this was to happen in a serious way during the second lockdown which proved a stage too far for me.

Although I have my writing projects and the phone befriending, I found that I was becoming increasingly demotivated, and feelings of isolation and depression became harder to counter. Lack of personal contact, the to-and-fro of office life and especially not being able to play music with folk became more and more significant when it came to looking for reasons to get up in the mornings. I am a person who needs activity to battle against depression and anxiety and to enhance my already low self-esteem.

I am very much hoping that the world of work – voluntary or otherwise – does not return as a 'working from home'/Zoom environment as this does not suit me at all. I need to be busy among people and not in solitude reliant on computers for company.

I tried against all advice and my own instincts to re-enter the world of paid employment but, though I fought it, the pressure grew in me in a very bleak way, and this eventually fell through. It was a job I was singularly unsuited to. Instead of being a solution to my predicament it became a cause of another breakdown.

Doing voluntary work, for the moment, suits me, as it allows me into a work environment without inviting the pressures I experience in regular employment.

David Wylie, Volunteer