Edgbaston Neighbourhood Network Scheme

NNSEDGBASTON@AGEUKBIRMINGHAM.ORG.UK @NNS_EDGBASTON



Pictured: Carole Lowe and Michaela Mooney

Feature Story

Giving Back, Getting More: The People Behind Volunteering in Edgbaston

When we think about volunteering, we often think about what people give: their time, skills, energy and experience. But what if volunteering gives something back too? Across Edgbaston, people volunteer in all sorts of ways and for all sorts of reasons. Some want to support a cause they care about. Others want to meet people, learn new skills, gain confidence or have something meaningful to do.

For Michaela, volunteering has been about helping others, gaining experience and discovering skills she didn't know she had. Her involvement with CASBA began as a participant before developing into a placement while she was studying for a Health and Social Care degree.
"I wanted more experience to put on my CV towards getting a job once I finished studying."

For Carole, volunteering has taken a very different form. She has volunteered as Secretary with South and East Birmingham Stroke Club for 18 years, since the club was established. She also volunteers with Friends of Manor Farm Park, provides free DJ services for community groups and is part of Celebrating Age in Northfield, the Northfield Neighbourhood Network's Older Persons Forum.

Success Story

Michaela's Award



Pictured: Michaela Graduating

We are thrilled to announce that Michaela who is part of our newsletter feature, was awarded the community impact award at her recent graduation. Michaela who was graduating with a BSc Hons in Health and social care, received recognition for all her hard work volunteering within her community and making a positive impact on people's lives.

Feature Continued

Finding a reason to get involved.

Although their routes into volunteering are different, both Michaela and Carole are motivated by helping others.

Michaela admits that new situations can feel uncertain.
"I always feel unsure about new situations, but they work out eventually."

For Carole, volunteering has been part of her life for much longer. Raised in a religious family where volunteering through church was part of community life, she says:
"It is in my blood; I have always tried to help people."

Since retiring, volunteering has given Carole purpose and something meaningful to look forward to each week. For Michaela, it has brought experience, connections and confidence.

Volunteering in action.
Their experiences show that volunteering isn't simply about turning up and following instructions. It can involve recognising a need, drawing on your experience and having the confidence to act. While volunteering, Michaela also had an opportunity to use her own initiative. During her placement, members of an advocacy group were unhappy about difficulties gaining employment. Michaela responded by creating a two-week workshop, with one session exploring good and bad interviews, giving Michaela the opportunity to develop her own skills in creating something meaningful for others.







Volunteering isn't always about simply providing company or helping with an activity. Sometimes it is about drawing on your experience, recognising when someone needs help and having the confidence to take action.

Feature Continued

Discovering what you're capable of.

Michaela is autistic and has learning disabilities, but she also enjoys talking to other people and supporting them. Volunteering has helped her discover skills she didn't know she had and shown her what she can achieve with the right support. ***"I can do it, when there is a good project with a meaningful purpose, I will work my socks off to complete it."*** The confidence and experience she has developed are something she can carry into her new job.

For Carole, volunteering has provided a way to remain active and make a difference after retirement. ***"As a retired community worker, I am pleased that I can continue using my years of experience and transferable skills to help others."***



Volunteers at St Boniface Church Quinton

Could volunteering be good for your brain?

Volunteering also connects with the wider conversation around brain health.
The NHS says there is some evidence that rates of dementia are lower among people who remain mentally and socially active throughout their lives and lists volunteering in the local community among activities that may help support this. That doesn't mean volunteering can prevent dementia or guarantee good brain health. Instead, it can bring together things that support wellbeing: social connection, mental stimulation, learning, activity and a sense of purpose.
For Carole, volunteering has helped her remain active, connected and involved since retirement. For Michaela, it has provided opportunities to learn, communicate, solve problems and discover new abilities

What could volunteering give you?

Carole and Michaela's stories show that volunteering isn't simply about what you give. It can also be about what you gain: people to meet, something new to learn, a chance to use your skills or the satisfaction of knowing you've made somebody else's day a little better.
For Carole:
"Volunteering is important to me because it makes me feel valued as an important part of my local community."
And for Michaela:
"Volunteering is important to me because it gave me skills I never knew I had."

So perhaps the question isn't only "What can I give?"
Perhaps it's also:
"What could I gain?". You can listen to our full conversation with Carole and Michaela on our latest podcast Time to Talk. Available on Spotify and Podcast app.

Get Involved Today

Ready to help? Find the right volunteering role for you with:

Volunteer Brum is Birmingham Voluntary Service Council's online platform providing a way for Birmingham residents to search current volunteering opportunities by their interests and availability. visit: https://www.volunteerbrum.org/

Age UK Birmingham offers a variety of volunteering opportunities that cater to different interests and schedules. https://www.ageuk.org.uk/birmingham/get-involved/volunteer/

Advice on volunteering

If you're thinking about volunteering, try these five steps:

1. START WITH SOMETHING YOU ENJOY.

Think about your interests, hobbies, experience and the things you care about.

2. THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN OFFER.

Your skills don't have to come from a job. Life experience, patience, listening, practical skills and enthusiasm can all be valuable.

3. BE REALISTIC ABOUT YOUR TIME.

You don't necessarily need to volunteer every week. Look for something that fits your life.

4. START SMALL.

A one-off event or a few hours can be enough to find out whether volunteering is right for you.

5. FIND AN OPPORTUNITY.

Volunteer Brum is Birmingham Voluntary Service Council's online platform providing a way for Birmingham residents to search current volunteering opportunities by their interests and availability.

Upcoming Events & Programs Calendar

OCT 22ND — Edgbaston Men's Network Community Showcase



Edgbaston Men's Network Community Showcase. Come along, meet local organisations, Share experiences and find out what's happening for men in your community. Our first event will explore the things that give men a sense of purpose, connection and belonging. From learning new skills to community activities and shared interests. Lunch will be provided.

📍 **Holloway Hall,** Bartley Green, B31 1TT
📅 **Thursday 22nd October**
🕒 **10:30am - 1:30pm**

No booking required, just drop in.
For more info email:
nnsedgbaston@ageukbirmingham.org.uk

You can find all our upcoming events and book your spot via our EventBrite page.
https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/120738619268

NOV 25TH — Easy Read - Making communications acessible



Easy Read - Making all your communications accessible. Join us at St Germain's Church on November 25, 2026 at 10:00 AM (GMT) for a friendly and easy-going training session. This workshop is perfect if you work or volunteer with adults who have additional needs or are aged 50 and over, especially if you're part of a community organisation in the Edgbaston area.
We'll focus on how to make information simple and clear so everyone can understand it better. Whether you're staff, a volunteer, or a community worker, this one-day event will give you useful skills to help your community.

📍 **St Germains Church,** City Road, B17 8LE
📅 **Wednesday 25th November**
🕒 **10:00am - 4:00pm**

Click here to reserve your spot

In Other News

Help Shape Birmingham's Future

Birmingham City Council is inviting residents to help shape its new Corporate Plan and future budget priorities for the city. Through a public consultation running until 15 November 2026, residents can share their views on the issues that matter most to them, learn more about how council services are funded, and help influence future spending decisions. Local community groups and residents are encouraged to take part by completing the survey and sharing it within their networks. More information and the survey can be accessed via Birmingham Be Heard: Corporate Plan and Budget Engagement Survey.

Out and About

RICHARD LOFTUS FROM WELL RUN BRUM

On Tuesday 8th September, Darren joined the inspirational Richard Loftus, founder of Well Run Brum, to talk all things men's health and engagement as he made plans for a series of Edgbaston Men's Network – Community Showcase events across four locations.





GREEN GRAFTERS UNITED CIC

On Wednesday 19th August, Darren paid a visit to Rutley Grove Community Garden, in the Welsh House Farm Estate, where he met Graham and Barbara who run Green Grafters United CIC. Along with others, they spend their time tending the community garden and deliver local activities that help reduce isolation and support emotional and physical wellbeing.



Shining a Light on Small Grants

ReFuture Collective
Perrott's Past, Present and Future (PPPF) will be an arts-heritage project for adults aged 50+yrs experiencing isolation and loneliness. PPPF will bring people together to creatively tell the story of Perrott's Folly and it's local community from 1758 to present day, culminating in a community archive and exhibition

R Community Choirs
Three community choirs, one of which is in North Edgbaston. Free and open to all, meeting weekly during term time followed by refreshments and cake.

Karis BFriends
Reducing isolation in people over 50, through group activities and befriending in person, alongside phone support.

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PODCAST

Listen to our latest episode of Time To Talk with Darren and Maryam here:

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Birmingham City Council

Birmingham ageUK Let's change how we age

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