

# Voluntary Support Scheme

Registered Charity Number: 1097279

Newsletter no. 22  
Feb 2010

## Coping with change? See the back page

I am delighted to note snowdrops in the bank opposite my gate, and birds flying about in pairs. I do not need to turn the light on to get dressed, and in the evening it is dusk for much longer. All this tells me that spring is on the way. The year is on the turn again, and I am glad of it.

I had to be evacuated in the second week of the snow. I hadn't been outside for a week because it was so icy, and I ran out of wood and the fridge was looking a bit empty. My wonderful oldest daughter (the one with the shower) battled with snowdrifts and ice sheets and arrived to take me back to Bristol.

I was immersed in a house full of teenage girls and telephones ringing and feet pounding up and down the stairs. After a week I came back to Dovecotes, grateful for the refuge Bristol had provided, but glad to be back in my own house again in the peace and quiet.

Nothing lasts for ever, does it? When things are going well we wish we could reach out and stop the clock and prolong the moment forever – but we would become bored if time stopped. Changes are often difficult, but they are what gives life its spice.

If you are in a bad patch look for the change that can make things better; if you are in a good patch enjoy it, but don't take it for granted.

My father never owned a camera. He said the photographs he took in his head were available to him all the time, no matter where he was. Rather than bother with focus and settings, he just enjoyed the moment, and developed an amazing visual memory along the way. The problem was, he couldn't share them with anybody else...I rather agree with him, but that's because I am a bad photographer.

Sue Larg



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Website: [www.voluntarysupportscheme.org.uk](http://www.voluntarysupportscheme.org.uk)



Do you enjoy visiting the cinema?

If you have a disability it is well worth asking your local cinema if they are members of the trade body, the Cinema Exhibitors Association (CEA). Most of our local cinemas are.

Participating cinemas take the CEA card, which allows a person with disability to bring a carer in free (the carer has to be someone who will help you in an emergency).

Application forms can be obtained at any of the cinemas and the card costs just a £5.50 admin fee for a year.

Alternatively, visit <http://www.ceacard.co.uk/>

# Happy 15th Birthday!!

In March the Voluntary Support Scheme will be 15 years old. That is a long time to have kept the show on the road with the hundreds of hours of time given willingly by many volunteers. Over that time volunteers have met with many people who are going through a rough patch in life and just need another human being to help them get back to ordinariness. It is always a privilege to talk to people and hear the difference the volunteers have made. In recent years we have also had a small band of volunteers enable a group of people we have helped to get together and support each other—whilst thoroughly enjoying activities ranging from card-making to line dancing, cycling to local history.

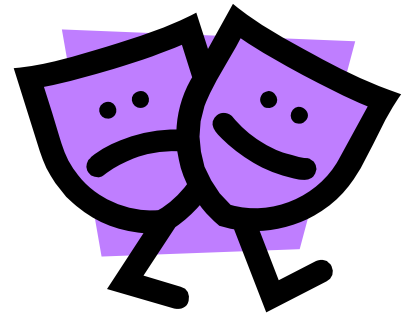
Behind all this work there is the less obviously rewarding (and in some cases, really boring) work that needs to happen. Policies need to be formulated, funding applications written, accounts kept. The volunteers who have taken on all of this deserve a medal and it is their hard work which has made our core work possible.



Thank you so much to all of the faithful VSS volunteers who have given so generously of their time and skills over the years and most especially to Sue Larg, our current Chair. Sue dreamed the dream which brought VSS into being and in the 15 years since then hasn't hesitated to put her hand to whatever needs doing, in spite of whatever she was having to deal with in her own life at the time. A lot of people have cause to be very grateful to you all!

## Can I be ill and happy?

In her very readable book on illness Havi Carel uses her own experience of living with chronic illness and her training in philosophy to answer this question.



She was only 34-years old, living a wide-ranging life as a university lecturer with many outdoor leisure interests when she began to notice a shortness of breath. This was not a passing illness but a degenerative lung disease which progressively limited her capacity to lead an active physical life. Her first reaction was to hide her incapacity as it affected her self-image and some puzzled friends fell away. There were some philosophical ideas which helped. For instance the ancient Greek, Epicurus, maintained he could extend his notion of always seeking pleasure by reliving past pleasurable experiences in his mind to outweigh the acute physical pain of kidney stones. In sociology she found that disadvantaged people living in the East End of London in 1960 's had surprisingly good mental health because of their acceptance of 'normal' illness and because of their community values.

Carel began to work on her subjective, lived experience (she calls this the 'phenomenological approach' although I don't think such expressions are helpful to most readers). She has learned to analyse different aspects of her experience. The social – how should she seek help and understanding from others? The spatial – noticing there is a slope she didn't see before. How physical aids like walking sticks can become extensions of her body.

These are the skills of adapting to illness but she has also found ways of enhancing her sense of well-being or happiness. She has gained inspiration in improved awareness of the present moment and a realisation of the precious fragility of life.

In healthcare practises, Carel calls for more emphasis on the social and emotional aspects of illness to complement the 'naturalistic' approach of objective symptoms and labelling.

This is a book I would recommend.

F.L.

*Illness* by Havi Carel, published by Acumen. ISBN: 978-1-84465-152-8



# Coping with Change?

10.30am – 3.00pm

Tuesday 23rd March

St George's Church Extension, Tiverton

Led by Jennifer French, psychotherapist with an adult community mental health team in Herefordshire.

## Free including lunch

(a £10 charge will be made for people who do not attend having booked)

## Booking essential:

Write to VSS, Beck House, Beck's Square, Tiverton, EX16 6PJ.

Email: [voluntary.supportscheme@virgin.net](mailto:voluntary.supportscheme@virgin.net)

or ring 01884 258507 by 16th March.

This day is open to anyone with an interest in the subject.

Change can bring good things into our lives, but it can also find us ill-prepared and resentful. This workshop will explore how the way we think about change can affect the way in which we cope.

The morning will look at changes we all need to deal with in life, as well as some of the more unexpected ones, focussing particularly on how we can get stuck, neither able to move forward or back.

The afternoon will introduce different therapeutic approaches to change and some ways of coping that you may not have thought about.

In small groups there will be the opportunity to talk about our own experiences and share those coping strategies which have worked for us.

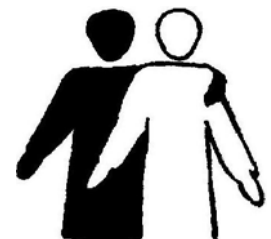
At the end of the day we hope you will feel a bit better equipped to deal with whatever life throws at you.

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**Voluntary Support Scheme**