

# Opinion & Community Section



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## Column

# No bow ties or red carpets – but an insight into what volunteers do

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**A**n award-winning Scarborough volunteer said recently that at one time she could not understand why people would ever be a volunteer.

Her circumstances changed and now, after many years of helping as a volunteer at the Rainbow Centre, she was worthily acknowledged.

Her original feelings may be typical of occupied people of all ages who see volunteering as 'do gooding' and not for them; that the do-gooder is doing it to polish their halo.

It takes changed circumstances for there to be realisation that volunteering at the point of people's need is vital help to people who are suffering and feeling powerless.

Yes, volunteers are often privileged to see what their service achieves in alleviating social pain and restoring esteem.

I spoke to someone yesterday who wants to do good through an idea he has for a venture, because he personally has known what it was like to be in a pit, several times.

Not for him do-gooding but gratefulness and wanting somehow to put something back into the community.

The Scarborough event was the new YMCA Scarborough & Ryedale Community and Volunteer Awards celebrating a dozen organisations and individuals nominated for recognition.

No bow ties, long dresses or red carpets. It was simply a heart-warming insight.

Heart-warming to see the work done by inspirational



Community and Volunteer award-winners on stage.

people.

A teenage lad being interviewed ended by simply saying, "I want to help people".

WOW.

Volunteering had given him something valuable to do that made a difference to others and to him. A group from a community centre had a family who were involved as volunteers and it was obvious that being a part of something and belonging had an inter-generational family benefit for them, as well as others of course.

It's not often that one sees a boxing enthusiast with a tear, but a key leader was celebrated for his mentoring of young people not in boxing, but in life. He was likened by others to be a father figure in a "boxing family".

I believe that we need

do-gooding volunteers now as much as ever and maybe more so. In our new style of isolated living, the experience of community is being undermined just when the demographics are becoming age and infirmity top-heavy.

Coincidentally, on the day of the event there were two articles published.

One was 'When you need it, will it be there?' about the sustainability of the care home system.

The other was on self-harm among young people, girls in particular. Mental ill-health in the young.

There are daily signals of concerns about many public and quasi-public services.

We might regard such big issues as being beyond us to change, but there are vital niches that the voluntary

sector fills – the cracks often – which are doable do-gooding. I'm concerned that the sense of community, the glue that holds society together, is under threat by the rate of change in the context of life.

In the past that sense was passed on to the next generation because our interdependence was recognised and very necessary at street level. We are now societally conditioned to feel mainly responsible for ourselves.

Fine, but for many that is not, and will not, be a practicable case.

The Rainbow Centre lady and the Youth Champion simply want to help people. So do I. Simply does not mean it is easy. The first step is to change our mind-sets and our sights towards each other.



Jane and Lorna at the Rainbow Centre.