

Talking Point chat room 27 October 2014
Volunteering on Talking Point

KatherineW	Hi and welcome to the Talking Point chat room. The topic of this evening's session, which will start in a few minutes, is Volunteering on Talking Point.
KatherineW	We will be joined by several of our volunteers here this evening, and they will be here to answer any questions you may have about volunteering on Talking Point; whether you are interested in applying to be a volunteer, or you simply have questions about what being a volunteer on Talking Point involves.
KatherineW	I'm going to ask a few questions, but this is also an opportunity for members to ask your questions, so please do feel free to post them!
jenniferpa	'Evening Katherine
Izzy	Evenin' all!:))
jaymor	Evening Katherine and Jennifer
nellbelles	Hi everyone, hope you are all well
KatherineW	Hi Jennifer, Izzy, jaymor and nellbelles! First question for the volunteers: can you give some examples of the kinds of things you might do in a typical day as a Host or a Moderator?
sue38	Hello everyone :))
KatherineW	Hello Sue :))
jenniferpa	Ok - typical things might be discussing any posts that have been reported and banning spammers (everyone's favourite thing!)
Izzy	I tend to do an early shift! I don't sleep well and wake very early. I sneak my ipad into the bedroom and log on. I begin by seeing if anyone has posted through the night and not had any replies.
Izzy	Oh yes - I like banning spammers Jennifer - the kitchen sellers and the fake passport sellers!
sue38	Yes you have to be up very early to catch a spammer before Izzy!
KatherineW	Banning spammers can be very satisfying. ;))
nellbelles	Much of my input as a Host is much the same as before I became one, the

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	main difference being that I search the posts a little more intently to try to ensure no-one is missing out on their first reply.
KatherineW	Keeping an eye out for members who've not had a reply is so important nellbelles.
jaymor	As a host I would look at the new members posting for the first time and welcome them to the forum. I look out for problem posts and report them to the team just in case it has slipped through. Really it is doing what I did as a forum member.
jenniferpa	Izzy is sometimes so early that she overlaps with me. Or is that because I stay up way too late? Anyway, I and Joanne tend to keep an eye on the forum until the early morning hours, UK time (because we are 5 hours behind mostly).
Izzy	As mods we probably all check through the 'new members' list to see if there are any potential advertisers/sellers or general spammers. If I'm not sure about something I see I will always ask the other mods for their views.
sue38	Guiding new members to the most appropriate area of the forum is an important part of the role.
Izzy	Another thing we all do is to look out for anyone who seems to be very vulnerable. We might point them in the direction of the Society's factsheets or give them the link to the Samaritans emotional listening service.
KatherineW	It really is Sue. As is checking the members' list to see who has joined up. And keeping an eye out for particularly vulnerable members is crucial.
KatherineW	What do you all enjoy most about volunteering on Talking Point...and what might you say are the challenges?
nellbelles	Being part of a team is good, when you want to check out the best way to help support vulnerable members and ensure you give a measured reply.
Izzy	For me the challenge is making sure I have time to finish what I've started. If someone reports a post and I start to discuss it with the other mods there's every chance Bill will suddenly need to go to the loo and I have to go off line in the middle of it all.
Izzy	I enjoy having a purpose beyond my own involvement with dementia. Like everyone else on TP I'm learning so much from everyone else.
jenniferpa	Partly it's about giving back to a community that was an incredible help when my mother was ill, but also there's a strong sense of camaraderie in the team.

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	We don't always agree with each other but we do work well together. Challenge: I think the most difficult thing is removing or editing a post from a person who broken the T & Cs when they are obviously under a great deal of stress.
sue38	Following on from what Izzy says, we all know what other issues we have going on, and there's nearly always another volunteer ready to pick up the reins.
nellbelles	I did find it challenging when Tom was at home, my attention could so easily be distracted, and my replies weren't all I would have liked them to have been.
sue38	And as Jennifer says, we don't always agree, or interpret a post the same way, but we do all respect each other's views, and really do work as a team.
jaymor	I enjoy being part of the team helping to keep the forum running smoothly for the benefit of us all.
nellbelles	I do enjoy being able to give something back to the group that has helped me through some tough times, I did belong to a US based forum, not dementia related and I understood from that the need for peer support.
Izzy	Another challenge for me is remembering how to do all of the technical things. I'm always terrified I do something drastic! I mean where threads might have to be merged or duplicate posts need to be deleted and so on. Again – that's where the team comes in. I would usually ask a more experienced moderator to keep an eye on things in case I do it wrong!
Izzy	I still think of myself as someone living with dementia and needing support first and a moderator second.
jaymor	It is a challenge at times because of our caring roles but satisfying to be able to do the job. We are not under any pressure to commit to certain hours.
KatherineW	Lots of common themes there, both with the challenges and the pluses. All of you were regular members before joining the volunteer team. How did you find making that transition?
Izzy	I was (and still am) very tentative in my new role. I appreciated the phone call support from Serena and Katherine when I first became a host and then a moderator. I still appreciate the ongoing support calls we have.
sue38	A lot of what we do - welcoming new members, giving advice, being able to relate to our own experiences we did before we became volunteers, so in many ways it didn't change.

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jaymor	Not difficult at all Katherine, I am doing what I did before as a member. I did tend to just come onto the site in the evening when things were quieter re caring but now I dip in and out all through the day. There is always back up from all the team.
jenniferpa	And let's not forget: we do have a manual for the technical things.
nellbelles	For me as I just carried on as before, but knowing I had support if I found an issue difficult or disturbing is a bonus.
KatherineW	That's good to hear Sue and jaymor. Some aspects of the volunteer roles really are just building on what so many of our members do already: 'listening' and supporting others.
sue38	I think perhaps one change was that if there was a post from a member who was really in the depths of despair you could chat with other members of the team as to how best to respond.
Izzy	That's a good point Sue.
jeany123	You all do a great job
jaymor	Thank you Jeany
Izzy	Aw Jeany. You're kind.
jenniferpa	Hi jeany.
KatherineW	Hi Jeany :) Nice to see you here - I was just about to post to remind everyone who's viewing that, whilst I've been busily asking questions, members are very welcome to join in and post a question too. :)
nellbelles	Hi Jeany, thank you
sue38	Thank you Jeany - we try!
jeany123	I just saw Izzy telling Sue on the forum, I had forgotten about it been busy with Allen
Izzy	Aw Jeany you're a star! You really have your hands full with Allen's problems just now. I'm glad you popped in.

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jeany123	Yes more than his fair share of problems poor Allen I have to go get him his supper just thought I would pop in and show my appreciation to you all x
nellbelles	Thanks for your time Jeany x
jenniferpa	I think something that's really important for people to know if they are thinking of volunteering is that this isn't a sink or swim situation: not only do we have back-up from each other, we also get tremendous support from Katherine, Serena and Harriet. You never feel like you're left on your own to sort out a problem.
KatherineW	Thanks for clarifying that Jennifer. Teamwork is really important on TP.
KatherineW	Another question from me: all of you have a very personal connection to dementia. How does that affect your roles as volunteers on Talking Point?
Izzy	When things are not too good on the home front I think we all make this known to Katherine, Serena or Harriet. Everyone understands if there are periods of time when you just can't be around as much as usual due to what's going on at home.
sue38	Personally speaking I am a member first, and a volunteer second.
nellbelles	Without personal knowledge I wouldn't be able to give advice
Oxy	What is difference between volunteer and host volunteer? What checks do you make re. CRB for example? Was shocked surprised that you can see all keys pressed almost, well at least what a poster is looking at, hence need for checks?
sue38	Hi Oxy :)
jenniferpa	Hi Oxy, do you mean the difference between a moderator and a host?
Izzy	The roles are volunteer host and volunteer moderator. We have full CRB checks done before we begin. I'm sorry I'm not really understanding the rest of your question Oxy.
KatherineW	Hi Oxy :) I'll add links to the descriptions for the host and moderator roles to the transcript for this chat, which gives you a detailed sense of how the roles differ...
KatherineW	In short though: hosts help to welcome new members to TP, to direct members to helpful resources and to keep an eye on the forum...

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KatherineW	..Moderators have an extra element to their role, which is about ensuring the forum is safe and that discussions remain helpful and supportive. For example, making sure people aren't breaking our rules by trying to sell things to our members.
sue38	Oxy, do you mean we can see whether a member is looking at a particular thread, or private messaging?
Oxy	Yes I did Jennifer, sorry, don't want to have to leave mid sentence so rushing. I noticed when you look at your name that it shows what you are perusing which makes it look as though the cookies have quite a lot of 'sight'
Izzy	I'll need to pass on that one Oxy - too techy for me!
Oxy	Yes Sue, thread - didn't think as far as pm!
Izzy	Oh I see what you're meaning now.
sue38	I think all members can check another's profile, or the list of who's online, and see what they're doing.
Izzy	I'm pretty sure that's right Sue. I'm sure that was an option for me before I became a mod.
KatherineW	Yes indeed. And all our volunteers go through Alzheimer's Society's volunteer recruitment process Oxy. This involves a number of checks, to make sure they are suitable for the role they have applied for.
Oxy	Saw this morning someone wanting to sell carer services - so presumably that sort of thing - thank you all for helping us mere mortals!
jenniferpa	Sometimes it is that people are actively trying to spam the forum, knowing that's what they are doing and sometimes, like this morning if it's the one I am thinking of, just don't realise that this isn't the place for that type of solicitation.
sue38	Oxy, if you do see something that doesn't look quite right do hit the Report Post button. It's the best way to bring it to our attention, if we've not already spotted it.
Oxy	Will do in future - just sometimes busy or semi asleep!!
Izzy	I know the feeling Oxy!

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KatherineW	Jaymor mentioned not being under pressure to do certain hours, and time commitment is another difference between the two roles..
KatherineW	We don't ask our Hosts to commit to regular hours at all - just to contribute when they can. Whilst we do ask that moderators log in to TP fairly regularly - just so they are able to keep up with what's going on on the team. That doesn't mean our volunteers don't take breaks though - as some of them have said, they are members first and volunteers second.
sue38	Even as moderators we don't have anything like a roster. We just log in as and when we have the time.
jenniferpa	And even moderators get to go on Holiday! We just keep Katherine in the loop if we are going to be away for a period of time.
jaymor	When we have to take a break we just let the rest of the team know and they cover.
sue38	I work full time, others have caring responsibilities and other commitments, so there's different times when we can log in.
Izzy	It's good having Jennifer and Joanne on the other side of 'the pond'. If someone is in trouble during our night there's more than a good chance that Jennifer or Joanne will pick that up.
KatherineW	We have always been very lucky on TP - we've never needed to have a rota. Partly because our volunteers have always been so reliable, and partly because of our North American mods, and our UK-based early risers. ;)
Oxy	How do you ensure there is always cover where there is no roster? Surely there must be a loose one. Even mods from across the pond may not be able to necessarily fill the gaps?
KatherineW	I cross-posted with you Oxy - it was almost as though you read my mind! We don't have a rota, and I don't think a rota would work well anyway - all our volunteers have busy lives, and several are currently caring.
Izzy	It would be very unlikely I could commit to a roster. Bill's needs will always come first and I would feel bad if I had signed up for a specific time then found I couldn't do it because of home circumstances.
jenniferpa	Funnily enough, even without a roster there is rarely (very rarely in fact) a time when there are no mods online. Sometimes in the wee small hours there may not be anyone (which is why sometimes if you get on early in the morning you

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	might find 10 "let us sell you a fake passport" type posts).
jaymor	Oxy I am always looking at who is signed in and I can't remember a time that there was not one of the team logged in.
jenniferpa	I think the most difficult thing is if you happen to be the only mod online and there's a borderline post and no one around to discuss it with. But we generally manage.
KatherineW	It's really important that our volunteers are able to be flexible in their roles, and a rota could I think lead to people feeling pressured. And as Jennifer said, there is nearly always a volunteer online anyway. :)
Oxy	I realised that, seeing the times of posting. Thanking everyone for questions answered that I have mulled over since joining.
jaymor	Thank you for joining us Oxy
nellbelles	Oxy thanks for your input tonight
jenniferpa	Any more questions? I think Katherine will be closing the chat room soon. Although anyone can PM a volunteer and ask a questions they might not have thought of tonight.
KatherineW	Thanks Oxy for popping in and for your questions. :) And thanks to everyone else who's been following tonight's chat. Any other comments from the volunteer team, before we close this evening's session?
Izzy	Thanks Katherine for letting us have the opportunity to talk about our roles. Thanks also Oxy and jeany!
jenniferpa	Night Night all.
KatherineW	Yes, just to echo that anyone who has any questions about either being a host or a moderator, is very welcome to get in touch - either with members of the volunteer team, or with Serena, Harriet or myself.
nellbelles	I hope that any members who are interested will think about be a volunteer
jaymor	Good afternoon to you Jennifer
Izzy	Good night all!

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sue38	Only that it is really worthwhile, and I'm so glad I plucked up the courage to volunteer. Nobody asked me to - I just applied!
nellbelles	Goodnight all
jaymor	Goodnight everyone
KatherineW	I'll put together a transcript of this evening's chat asap. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped with tonight's session, and goodnight/good afternoon to you all :)
sue38	Good night everyone, and good afternoon Jennifer :)

Thanks for reading the transcript from our chat room session on 27 October. Some helpful resources on this topic are listed below.

Read more about Talking Point's volunteer team:

<http://forum.alzheimers.org.uk/faq.php?faq=volunteers>

Talking Point Volunteer Host – role description:

http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/download_info.php?fileID=2044

Talking Point Volunteer Moderator – role description:

http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/download_info.php?fileID=863

Talking Point Host – application form:

https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/xforms_form.php?formID=239&language=en

Talking Point Moderator – application form:

https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/xforms_form.php?formID=95&language=en

If you have questions about volunteering on Talking Point, or about our chat room, please contact us by emailing talkingpoint@alzheimers.org.uk

You can view the chat room here: <http://forum.alzheimers.org.uk/chatroom.php>