

Meet our Trainers – Mycal Miller

Q. Mycal, how long have you been trainer?

I first began training in the late 1970's as a volunteer for The Samaritans (now just called 'Samaritans'). The training focussed on listening skills, being non-judgemental, looking at ways of exploring options without telling people what they should do, not making assumptions and thinking about the individual. There are quite a few similarities with what today we would call the 'person centred' approach.

Q. How did you get involved in dementia training?

My voluntary work had to go on the back-burner in 1979 when I took a job in Birmingham with ATV, which later became Central Television. I left in 1989 to co-write and produce a horror film, 'I Bought A Vampire Motorcycle'. Moving back to London, I continued working as a freelance TV director and also resumed working with Samaritans. I was a Branch Director, then Regional Training Officer for London and later Regional Representative for London, supporting 17 branches. The voluntary work was almost a full-time job. One day I saw an advert for the Alzheimer's Society. I was interested in the subject because my Grandfather had had dementia some years earlier. The advert said they were looking for someone who had experience as a trainer and working with volunteers. It seemed I ticked both boxes, so I applied. Jacqui Wharrad gave me the job! I hadn't been in post very long when I was asked to help with a new video project. As well as being involved in training, I also produced several videos for the Society, including 'Remember Me' (to raise awareness within African Caribbean communities), 'Sahara Lo' (aimed at South Asian communities), 'About My Grandfather, About My Grandmother' (for schools) and 'Yesterday Today Tomorrow'. Some time after I left the Alzheimer's Society I was introduced to Mike Phillips. That's how I became a trainer with *for dementia* - later Dementia UK.

Q. Relate a typical day in the life of a trainer? Is there such a thing?

I don't think there's a 'typical' day! Every session unfolds in its own unique way because of the different people in the group. Although working to the agreed programme, I try to adapt as far as possible to the needs of the group, incorporating any issues that people raise themselves or concerns that they may have. I like to encourage group discussion and have a few extra exercises or activities up my sleeve if the need arises. I always try to finish on a high note, reminding everyone of the importance of their work, and the fact that they really can help to improve the quality of life for those they care for.

Q. How do you prepare for a training day?

A. I prepare my notes and print handouts and exercises that I like to use. I usually print off too much because I'm always worried that extra people may turn up and I won't have enough. (I'm a bit like that if people come for dinner - I always buy too much food.) I sometimes use PowerPoint depending on the course, but it's usually just pictures or simple captions - I don't like lots of text. However, I often use video

clips and these can help to encourage group discussion. If the course involves using a carer, I like to have a chat with them beforehand to discuss what we are going to talk about. Most importantly, I make sure I have the right address for the venue entered into my SatNav!

Q. Do you have other interests related to training in the dementia field?

I also work with volunteers, family carers and health care professionals. I like to attend meetings or conferences when I can. I presented a session at the Third Annual National Care Homes Congress. My topic was 'The Tyranny of Health and Safety'. Of course, I'm not against sensible Health and Safety - but I have noticed in some homes, over zealous Health and Safety policies are sometimes used as an excuse for avoiding a person-centred approach. A good Health and Safety policy should be about finding ways to empower people to do things as safely as possible, not used as an excuse to remove people's independence. It's one of my hobby-horses!

Q. What do you do if you're not training?

I continue to make training and information videos. I produced a DVD for the National Audit Office and more recently a video for the Dementia Research Centre, UCL Institute of Neurology. I also made 'Tomorrow is another day', a video training programme for the Alzheimer's Society. I like listening to the radio, watching TV and going to the cinema. I particularly enjoy re-watching old episodes of Star Trek. I read lots of newspapers and magazines when I have time. I probably eat too much. For some time I've been thinking about doing some exercise. Perhaps one day...

Q. What do you love about being a trainer?

Lots of things. I enjoy hearing people's stories, exploring ideas and sharing experiences. You can never be sure what people take away with them after a training day, but if I have succeeded in encouraging them that they really can make a difference, then perhaps in a small way I have made a difference too.