



It's a pleasure to take the time to listen – interview with Marie Decool, volunteer with the Support Team

How long have you been a volunteer with Arrels?

I have been doing volunteer work with Arrels for the last two and a half years.

What are your tasks as a volunteer with a support team?

Service users who live in housing provided by Arrels sign a contract and by doing that they agree to a weekly visit to their apartment. One of my tasks is to make these visits and I also go with them to the different medical services and help with administrative procedures.

“How do you like your coffee? We like it with you!”

I saw this message recently in a bar, and I believe it is a slogan that the Arrels volunteers could use. Indeed, I usually drink coffee with the service users. It's a pleasure to take the time to listen to them and to create a link that allows an exchange full of trust in a cafe or playing table football, walking alongside the sea, or taking a look at the fish in a pet shop...

I believe that we are also “social code translators”, I'll try to explain... I often find that the people I accompany have lost their trust in society, its codes and rhythms. More than once, in a medical examination, I have found myself repeating words like a doctor would, like "take your jacket off, lay down, raise your sleeve...". Usually, the person I accompany is easily stressed in front of a white coat or a counter, but as I am a person they trust, they quickly relax and follow my indications.

How would you say this differs to the role of the professional?

In my opinion not being a professional is what adds value to my role in Arrels, since I am seen as an equal, a society representative, even sometimes a friend to the client, and the relationship established is based on equality and trust rather than authority.

What is the most challenging aspect of being a volunteer in supported housing?

The most challenging aspect, in my point of view, is creating this link of trust that I talked about previously and maintaining it. Creating a team with the professionals and the volunteers can sometimes also be a challenge .

What training and/or support have you received?

Before starting my collaboration with Arrels I had an interview with the head of the Volunteers department, but it was mainly a selection interview.



Afterwards, I met up with the head of the Support Team programme and a social worker, they both explained the program and the way it works and we also had a conversation about my role as a volunteer in the team.

Not a long time after my incorporation in Arrels, I had the chance, along with other new volunteers, to attend a day of presentations about the different services Arrels offers.

We have monthly team meetings where we discuss our doubts and talk about our experiences; it's essential that we can take part as a team and share different situations that we have found ourselves in.

Twice a year we also meet with all of the volunteers and the Support Team professionals, we discuss and then work on a case study together.

I believe that in Arrels, the formation is mainly based on experience and reflection from situations we have found, which for me is very opportune. Personally, I think that I should have more formation regarding mental health and its treatment, along with how to react to and understand specific reactions that the service user may have. Despite the fact that I am a trained nurse I also have doubts about alcohol and drug addiction, it would be interesting to have a better understanding of these subjects.

Looking into the future do you think the role of volunteers should change?

I believe that in Arrels the role of volunteers is so important since without them we would not be able to run the projects that we have or those that will be carried out in the future. The volunteer work should be perceived as a society support to help with the difficulties and weaknesses that this same society creates even if most of its functions should be done by public administrations.

Any highlights from your time as a volunteer?

For me the main highlight would be the link created between the client and the volunteer that allows you to go further with the relationship and really help the person. Also forming part of a team and using my life experience to make the most out of it.