What sort of things do you do here at the Moorland Community Centre?

We have a lunch club, we help people with transport, and make sure that they can get out and about. We do LIFT (Low Impact Functional Training) exercise classes to help people reduce their risk of falling. We have a dementia group where people with dementia and their carers can meet up and get together.

It’s about bringing people together and having fun. People have so much fun here. People chat about the old times, and it brings a smile to their faces.

One of the biggest issues is isolation. A centre like this encourages people to avoid and escape isolation. We know isolation creates ill health. This can lead to other issues like drink. By helping people to get out and connect in the community, they can share and gain from being here.
Centres like Moorland can be a real lifeline for people. If someone’s having some problems, perhaps they’ve just got out of hospital and don’t have any family nearby, they can come here and get a hot meal. While they’re here, they get to know people. It can help restore people’s independence and confidence. We have an information desk here, and we speak to them and can offer support and advice. Where needed, we can signpost them to other organisations for specialist advice.

Ray has learned to do basic maintenance and repairs of hearing aids. While people are here having something to eat, he makes sure that their hearing aids are working properly.

What do you think is key to the success of the Centre?

It’s about giving people what they need in their community. We don’t sit down and think about what we ought to do, we go and speak to people and ask what they need. It’s often the simplest things. We hand out recycling bags for people who find it difficult to pick them up themselves. When people feel welcomed, word gets around, and more people get involved. Little things encourage people to do more in their communities. It’s like a pebble dropped in a pond. The ripples can go a long way.

We’re volunteers but this is also our community. People are more likely to speak to us as we’re one of them. They see us every day and get to know us. We treat people as people. We hate the term service user. It brackets you, it categorises you, and makes you feel like a number rather than an individual. People can do so much more than they realise. It’s not about doing things for people, it’s about asking “did you know about…” or “have you thought of….” and helping them to help themselves.

So many people suffer from loneliness and isolation. If you take the time to look around, you’ll always find different things to do. What we do is to try and get people out of their flats to get involved with what’s going on in our community. It’s about bringing people together to share time with each other - to smile, to joke, to laugh, and to love. People talk about how poor this area is, but there’s a great community spirit and people care about each other.
How and why did you start working with local schools?

In some cultures, the wisdom and experience of older people is revered. Here you’re sometimes made to feel like you’re on the scrap heap after you’ve raised kids and have retired. It’s really important to pass on and share all the skills and experience of older people.

We have a great intergenerational project going in partnership with Moorlands school. We run a weekly gardening club where the children come together with older people from the Centre. The children have a fabulous time. They learn about where their food comes from and gardening, and they are teaching us about how to use mobile phones and the internet! It’s brought so much joy to everyone. It’s an opportunity to learn from each other and to break down barriers.

The children love to hear everyone’s stories and see old pictures of where they live now. We all have something to share, and both the children and older people feel more valued when they have an opportunity to share their skills. It raises the self-esteem of younger people, and helps them identify their skills. People feel like they’re valued and listened to.

What do you get out from putting in so much of your time?

You get so much from being involved. It’s a chance to give something back to our community. It gives you a real sense of purpose and achievement. It’s a reason to get up in the morning, and it keeps you active, physically and mentally. We’re all learning so much as we try and help people. We see it as our responsibility to get people the information they need and to pass it on to other people it might help.

It’s also about helping ourselves. Any of us could need a bit of help one day. You get back from life what you put in. We’re learning things which help us to manage better in our own lives.
Has volunteering made you feel more connected with your community?

Definitely. We love what we do. This is our community, and we’re all proud of it. We’ve got to know so many people from being involved, and made such good friends. Everyone looks out for each other more if they know each other.

Linette: I fell down the stairs and fractured my toe. Word got around that I’d had an accident. So many people came to visit to check if I was OK, and if there was anything they could do to help me. It was really touching.

What would you say to someone who was thinking about volunteering in their community?

Get involved. Don’t be cynical. It’s not about what skills you have, but what you’re happy to learn and share. Do something that is important to you and which you care about. There’s so many people with different skills and experience. If a few of you can get together, there’s all sorts of things you can do.

Jeanette: When some people retire, they think it’s time to relax and take it easy. I say it’s the perfect time to get more involved in your area. I look forward to every single day, and I grab every opportunity. I’ve made such good friends here. I’m sixty seven years old, but keeping involved with things makes me feel like I’m twenty seven!

For more information about Moorland Community Centre, visit www.moorlandcommunityc.wixsite.com/moorlandcommunity or phone 02921 328 845.