

While I was working as a teacher, I never felt the need to seek other social activities. I was teaching for 45 years and for most of those at the same school, there was always something going on that involved getting together with my colleagues, who of course after so many years became my friends. When I retired, I felt a sense of achievement and fulfilment, the school community celebrated with me, I have very fond memories of that day.

During the first couple of years of retirement I caught up with friends from the school on a regular basis, we would have a laugh together and I would catch up on what was happening at the school it made me feel as though I was still part of the school community. I was also busy spending time at home in the garden or doing those chores that I always put on hold when I was working. I could also indulge in my love of reading, what a luxury!

But over a few years these catch ups slowly started to fall away, people move, or they get busy so it's quite understandable, but it did leave a bit of a hole in my life, and I started to feel a little lonely. I attempted to join a couple of community groups such as a book club and a gardening club, but they weren't for me, I don't know why I guess 'groups' are just not my thing! Then my sight started to fail me, and I was diagnosed with Macular Degeneration, this was a big shock and has definitely impacted on my ability to get out and about as I can no longer drive. To be honest it makes me feel a little frightened about my future and sometimes I feel very isolated from the world. My GP suggested I join a social club at the local community aged care organisation.

To be honest I was reluctant and a little anxious, as my past experience with social groups had not been the best. Also, I had started to become a little nervous when being in new places due to my sight not being too good, but I was still able to get around well enough and I knew I had to give it a go.

A girl named Hayley made me feel welcomed and although it seemed like a very busy place, she took the time to sit and get to know me. I did meet other group members as well, but Hayley appeared to understand me and knew that I didn't feel comfortable. Believe it or not she sent me home with some homework the first day ... me the schoolteacher! When chatting to her she had listened carefully and realised that being a teacher was still important to me and as I was leaving the Centre she said.

"June, I want you to have a think about what it was about your teaching career that gave you the most joy and what you miss the most. I look forward to hearing your answer next week".

It was certainly food for thought but after so many years in the job it came down to being part of a respected community service as an educator and knowing that I was valued within the school community. After chatting with Hayley about my 'homework' she gave me more food for thought as she had done some homework as well and provided me with some information about volunteer programs within schools, but I responded that I thought my diminishing eyesight would be a barrier to being able to assist in any capacity. Hayley suggested that an Occupational Therapist who specialised working with people with sight impairment would be able to help me with suggestions to overcome these barriers not only when volunteering but also while at home.

Together Hayley and I worked out a plan to see the Therapist and approach a school who was involved with the volunteer program, the aged care organisation was going to support me along the way. It gave me the confidence to take the next step and I am forever grateful to Hayley for making this opportunity come to life.

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