



York Blind & Partially Sighted Society

Volunteer Newsletter

Summer 2015



"It takes a long time to grow an old friend."



With Volunteers Week coming up, and as we continue to mark 25 Years of Home Visiting, I've dedicated this newsletter to that service and largely to the volunteers who make it all possible. Although we call it a "visiting" service, volunteer "visitors" are, in almost every case, more seen as "friends" by the people they support. The special quality of friendship is perhaps what makes the service unique. I hope

some of the stories I've used in this celebratory newsletter will reflect your experience of volunteering - even if you volunteer in a different capacity for the Society. Whatever your role we celebrate your gift of time, and your friendship.

Juliette writes *"Being a home visitor is nothing like I anticipated, but six years down the line I am still committed - let me explain why: When my son started school I wanted to give something back. I thought that home visiting would be good as I felt I could empathise with the feeling of isolation that might ensue from a loss of sight. I pictured myself doing lots of jobs and paperwork and being generally useful. After training I went with the then volunteer coordinator Alison to visit my client - an elderly lady of 87 who had recently been registered blind. The three of us had a slightly awkward cup of tea while the lady said that she didn't feel she needed someone to visit regularly but just a bit of help now and then organising papers. I could sense the reluctance she felt having someone come into her home giving "help". Alison was keen that I visit weekly and so we left it that I would pop in each week and see if anything needed doing, and if not I would go straight away. The lady's parting shot was "If there's nothing else to do we could always have a cup of tea."*

"My admiration for this lady has grown and grown. She is indomitable and amazing. I soon realised that she coped brilliantly on her own and really did only need me for the odd piece of paperwork and help doing the odd job. However, what she did lack was much day to day contact with people. She has a large extended family but few friends with whom she could share news about the family, or discuss current affairs, television programmes, the state of the world, religion. You name it we've discussed it.

"We have shared many highs together - births, weddings, christenings, birthdays - I have heard all about it! We have also shared low points - the death of her beloved dog and very recently of her sister. And she has reciprocated, hearing about my family and problems. We have been on outings too, but I always feel that my role is mainly to be another person in her otherwise slightly isolated life.

"If I'd known that this was what home visiting involved I would have thought "I can't do that. I'm no good at talking to people". But because the relationship has grown naturally, it's really easy now. Going with a particular purpose - a bit of paperwork - gave us the structure to get started. From there a friendship developed. If your experience is anything like mine you will feel that you are gaining more than you give!"

If you want happiness for an hour - take a nap. If you want happiness for a day - go fishing. If you want happiness for a month - get married. If you want happiness for a year - inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime - help someone else.

Thank you to Malcolm for this old Chinese proverb which he says “sums up my thoughts and experiences on being a volunteer home visitor over the last few years”.

Rachael reflects on the many rewards of her volunteering, as well as a special friendship:

"At initial training, home visitors shared stories of the great friendships built from visiting. I have been grateful to have gone on to enjoy that special bond, but I hadn't anticipated the depth of friendship that develops. At times it has been special to just enjoy a giggle together.

"But it's not just about the fun moments. Visits make a difference with little things, equally important, to both J and me. Knowing that I help someone feel more in control of their life is at the heart of home visits for me.

"And there are other positive effects; I've gained in skills, experience, confidence. But ultimately I've gained a great friend. It is hugely satisfying. As the saying goes - help one another; there's no time like the present and no present like the time."

Helen and Henry said "this is just one of the lovely moments the three of us have shared; walking on Sands End beach - K was beside herself with feeling the sand on her feet, dabbling in rock pools, touching and smelling seaweed, feeling the wind and sea spray on her face and chatting with dogs and little folk ! It was a typical beautiful English seaside day which we so often take for granted."



Teresa writes: "I started volunteering purely with the intention of paying something back for help I had received over the years. What I got was more fulfilling than I imagined.

"It is a real privilege to accompany someone as they tackle the practical and emotional problems of sight loss. It brings you close to people and allows an insight into the tremendous strength and courage of many visually impaired people. I have also found it intellectually challenging. Matching has resulted in my having clients who relished serious discussion. Also challenging was working out practical solutions and working out what will help them cope with the sense of loss. Surprisingly I found myself solving problems which, had they been my own, would have gone on the too difficult pile - so I benefitted too.

"One of my highlights has to be the week when I enabled one client to go on doing something she had thought was beyond her, and found something really precious for another client, something I didn't know she had lost. It was evident I left them in a better place than when I arrived. With all my clients I have had a sense of achievement knowing that they have done something they did not expect, or tackled an issue which was emotionally too difficult for them to tackle alone. It makes it all worthwhile.

"In summary, I have enjoyed myself, I have learnt a lot and I have gained a greater understanding of how people deal with loss."

Angela, who is one of our most recent recruits to the Home Visiting Service writes “ When Harriet read me pen pictures of possible clients, I immediately picked “my lady”. She is 90 years old, lives alone, and is a VIP, in both meanings of the acronym.

We “clicked” from our very first meeting and even though it’s only been for a couple of months, we’ve already been to the theatre, and an historical house and garden. My lady was most impressed to have a piece of cake baked by a real titled “Lady” of the house (no names, no pack drill!). My lady is so elegant, humorous, highly intelligent and an inspiration in the way she deals with life. As you can imagine, she has many interesting stories of her life to tell. We have quickly formed a close and trusting friendship, and share lots of laughs together. There are never any awkward silences between us – far from it! I’ve met her daughter, who doesn’t live locally, and I think she is happy to know that I’m there for her mum. I help her with her mail, and sometimes read to her, but a lot of the time we have a good old chat about all kinds of things. We always “make a date” for my next visit before I leave.

I’m so pleased to be a Home Visitor; it’s both a privilege and a pleasure; so rewarding to both parties.

Writing about the client she supports, Jo says “ P has been a mentor and a friend to me during tough times in my life, and has been a role model for me to look up to. Even my friends and my 16 year old niece who have met her have said how much of an inspiration she is, and I believe we will remain friends regardless of the volunteering connection now. Volunteering has definitely been a two-way street for me.”



Kathy says “I am sure that I enjoy our outings as much as the people I visit do. It’s a good way to meet a wide range of people who always turn out to have had a very interesting life, with tales to tell!

And she highlights another unlooked for benefit! “When your friend has a blue parking badge, you get to park near the door when it’s raining!”

And lastly Frances sums up why so many amazing people make such a generous commitment, and the difference you all make: “I can only imagine how it might be to be isolated, dependent and often lonely, and how grateful and appreciative I would be to have someone who cares enough to spend some of their own time with me, someone who is doing it *not as a job or a sense of duty*, but as a listening ear, a supportive opinion, a practical help and most of all, *a Friend*.

“A kiss on the cheek, a gentle squeeze or a touch on the arm - can mean so much to those who are bereft of physical contact. For those brave, patient people who are battling with impaired sight and ability, we try to bring Light and Clarity into their lives.”

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this celebration of the Home Visiting Service - we have over sixty dedicated volunteers currently active in the service, and history doesn’t relate exactly how many people have volunteered over the past twenty five years, but take it from me, it’s a considerable number!!

Turn over for a special thank you from our chairman John Wilson, and also for a unique view from Barbara, a newcomer to the Home Visiting Service in a new role.

A message from John Wilson YBPSS Chair:

This message will be read out at the Celebration at the Marriott Hotel on 1st June, but there are many people who are not able to be there - so it is fitting to share here.

The dedication, support and care that you provide to the Society through the Home Visiting Service cannot adequately be expressed in words. Here goes however:

During the past 25 years the Home Visiting Service provided through the Society has grown from a tiny seedling to a tree of substance whose branches extend deep within the York community and whose roots now form a cornerstone of the Society's culture and foundation. There are many hundreds of visually impaired people who, thanks to your support, are now living far more happy and contented lives. Without your friendship, however, these same people would certainly experience feelings of isolation and inadequacy which often leads to depression.

So, on behalf of the Society and its Trustees thank you so much for everything you do for us. Your selfless contribution is deeply appreciated both by the Society and by those to whom you give your valuable time. Here's looking forward to the next 25 years of the Home Visiting Service. Given its current hugely positive impact, I am sure we can look forward with confidence to a successful future. The success of the Service is down to you. So once again, thank you so much for all that you do and we very much look forward to your continuing support in the future.

Barbara, monitoring volunteer, shares her unique view



I am delighted to introduce you to Barbara Capaldi. In 2012 Barbara experienced the devastating effects of sudden irreversible changes to her sight. Her condition has forced her to give up her work as a consultant

psychiatrist for people with a learning disability. She says "At first life seemed like a long holiday, however in time I began to realise there was something missing." Barbara had accessed support from YBPSS, and one day, having attended a group activity, Deb asked her how she was enjoying retirement. Sensing her mixed feelings, Deb introduced her to me, and I knew I was onto a winner! Here was the person I needed to help me with monitoring visits and assessing the value and impact of the service!

Having already got stuck in to carrying out a number of well overdue monitoring visits to clients Barbara says "I have been

overwhelmed by the reports I have received from members about the impact that the service has on their lives. For some it provides very practical help with reading and admin tasks - as one member said, "It helps me lead a more independent life." For others it is a source of company, emotional support and friendship.

"So far I have found most people seem to view their visitor as a family member, saying things like "he's been my everything. He is a better friend to me than my own son" and "I just treat her as one of the family". One person I visited said "Home visiting is one of the best services that YBPSS provides. It's helped to change the lives of a lot of people. It is second to none".

"I am really enjoying my new role and I'm looking forward to meeting the rest of the clients whose reviews are due, and to seeing those I've already met again!"