

# **RICHMOND GOOD NEIGHBOURS**

## **BEFRIENDER - Sarah**

I joined Richmond Good Neighbours (RGN) as a volunteer befriender two months ago with the idea of helping someone feel less isolated.

Anne Speak, RGN's Organiser, put me in touch with Graham. Aged 82 he lives in Richmond and suffers from a lung condition of extreme breathlessness.

Anne had established he had a lively mind and had lived a full and interesting life.

We got paired up and immediately hit it off.

At our very first meeting Graham said he wanted a mutual friendship: a two-way street. And that's exactly how it works. We meet at his home, sit in his garden or share a bench on Richmond Green. We discuss local news and world activities, share stories of our lives, proffering mutual support, help and advice.

About three weeks into the befriending visits Graham said that after a very active life which changed so dramatically just 5 months ago, his only exercise now was chair yoga and chair meditation and that as he needed oxygen to leave his chair, he had lost confidence to do so. He was feeling increasingly "cut off" and isolated: he wanted to re-enter the world of interaction and conversation. We discussed ideas to rebuild his confidence: I gently encouraged him to proactively meet his challenges.

The next day to my astonishment he texted me to say that for the first time in three months he had left his home and had walked 150m to his favourite bakery for a coffee and a baguette! The fact he would try so resolutely to regain his confidence and seek some freedom and independence made my heart soar. (As I write this, Graham is on Day 17; day by day increasing, by perhaps only a few metres, the distance he walks. His breathing is less laboured. Doctors and nurses, family and friends are delighted).

Little did I realise when I started befriending Graham that he would become an inspiration and companion. We benefit each other so much. Graham has boosted my morale so much by his enthusiastic, determined, fantastic energy and his enthusiasm and interests in life.

Volunteering has given me so much pleasure. Thank you, Richmond Good Neighbours. It's a great charity and Anne was spot on when she paired me up with Graham.

## **BEFRIENDED – Graham**

In February 2022 I was diagnosed with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF) where the main symptom is extreme breathlessness. My world changed from being energetic and active – the breathlessness meant it was more comfortable being chair-bound.

But I felt I could adapt to the new reality.

After all, I never felt lonely. Complementing the wonderful NHS doctors and nurses I was cosseted with care and love and support of four children, six grandchildren, relatives, friends, and acquaintances, albeit all of them, living some distance away. I received at least four phone calls every day. I was blessed. Truly blessed.

But I was alone - with little or no face-to-face interaction. How much I missed the engagement, the conversation of everyday living. Absence of this stimuli was impacting on my health.

I confided these concerns to a friend who introduced me to Richmond Good Neighbours.

I was very sceptical at first. Gregarious by nature, it all sounded so artificial, two strangers in a staged environment becoming friends. Embarrassing. False.

But I did call them and a meeting was arranged with Sarah. It has proved to be one of the most important phone calls I have ever made.

She is delightful: so cheerful, so positive. We meet once a week at my home, in the garden or on the Green with interactions in between by text, phone, messaging.

We talk about everything and anything, sharing memories, experiences and opinions. Our meetings are enlightening and engaging.

We have been “connected” for just 8 weeks. I feel I have known her all my life.

With Sarah’s motivating encouragement I faced the challenge of stepping out of my comfort zone of being chair-bound by managing my breathlessness and taking a few faltering steps. In just three weeks I can now reach the shops for newspapers and grocery top ups and have recovered my confidence and strengthened my lungs. I have re-engaged with life and living.

Sarah has changed my life. I have found a friend for life.

Thank you, Sarah! Thank you, Richmond Good Neighbours!

