

# INDEPENDENCE IS THE ESSENCE FOR SUE

Sue Fifer is a resident at Girton Green in Cambridge and a member of our National Residents' Panel. She tells us how Abbeyfield ticks her boxes of living independently amongst friends.

Sue Fifer lives at Girton Green independent living complex in Cambridge. With 76 apartments, it is one of the larger properties run by Abbeyfield Living Society (ALS), and it is also a more modern building than some, having opened in 2012.

"I moved in with my husband, Joe, on the first day that Girton Green was opened, about 13 years ago," Sue recalls.

"It was quite exciting for our core group, being the first people to live there, or work there in the case of the staff. Most of us had made a positive decision to come here, so we saw it as an opportunity for a new way of life and were determined to make the most of it."

Sue had retired a few years before, following a career in education.

She recounts, "I grew up in North London, but I met Joe when my first teaching job took me to Sheffield. We moved around a bit, living for a couple of years in Germany, where I taught English to German students, and then moved back closer to home in North London, where I taught modern languages. I gradually got involved in social and personal education and careers guidance, and was seconded to work at the Local Authority, coordinating one of their programmes of work-related qualifications.

"A similar job then came up at City & Guilds, co-ordinating the same programme at the national level. I finally retired from there some twenty years ago as Head of Learning and Assessment Policy."

Early retirement meant pursuing a number of other goals and interests, including family history.

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Sue attends the weekly Mahjong group and teaches others how to play

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'Don't Eat Alone' lunch in Honiton

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60 seconds with an Abbeyfield Wessex trustee



## BIENVENUE A WESTALL HOUSE!

Westall House in Horsted Keynes played host to a group of French students, who were keen to learn more about life at a care home in England.

The Channel-hopping group are all studying health and social care in France and, following a tour of Westall House, had the opportunity to chat to the residents about their lives. They also spoke to staff about their experience of working in a care home.

The student group said, "We wanted to visit a care home in the UK during our school trip to see how an English care home works differently from a French one, and take a look at the facilities it has, what types of care the residents receive and the activities organised."

The visit provided the residents the chance to ask questions of the students as well. Resident Mary Grieve said, "I thought the students were great and I asked

them a lot of questions about their schools and homes. They wanted to find out all about living in a care home. We had a really lovely afternoon."

Staff member Christelle Tarling, who was born and raised in France, acted as interpreter for much of the day.

"Westall felt French for a few hours, it was great," she said. "Being French myself, I was asked to help with any translation, which was very much needed, especially when ordering refreshments! Before Westall, I used to work for a French company, organising mini-stays in the UK for French school groups, so I felt right at home.

"The whole group thoroughly enjoyed their visit. The teachers told me that they found Westall House amazing and that the residents looked happy. After a few group pictures, we wished them all 'bon voyage!'"

## HATS OFF TO PATRICIA



Patricia Smith, a resident at Avondale sheltered housing scheme in Newport, Isle of Wight, has always had a keen interest in art.

"I was nearly always top of my class in art," she remembers of her time at the local grammar school, which she attended after passing the first Eleven Plus exam in 1944.

On leaving school at 16, Patricia was given a chance to explore her passion after being hired as a junior illustrator at the RAF Staff College in Bracknell.

"The Civil Service also paid for me to attend Maidenhead Art School one day a week, where I studied perspective and life

drawing. I worked at the Staff College for seven years, and I met quite a few well-known RAF personnel, including Spitfire pilots, and heard of their lucky escapes."

Patricia has also leant her artistic eye to other creative endeavours, including leather-work, crochet and knitting.

"My mother taught me to knit when I was five," she recalls. "I used to make my own clothes, and my two daughters', and I taught myself tailoring."

However, in doing what she loves, she has also been able to give back to her local community.

"I've knitted a few hundred hats for the maternity unit at the local hospital," she says, "and also knitted dolls for different Island charities. It is my way of donating and I have the time.

"I have been thanked for what I do by the people receiving the things I knit, and that's enough for me. I just enjoy what I do with lots of love over the years."

## IT'S RAINING CATS AND DOGS!

We went barking mad for National Pet Month at Abbeyfield in April, and we got to know some of our furry and feathered friends in time for National Pet Day on 11th.

The companionship of a pet, the active lifestyle that many animals encourage and the boost they make to mood and wellbeing are the reason we try to encourage residents who move into many Abbeyfield houses and homes to bring their beloved pets with them. Some also welcome in animals specially trained to work with older people, such as Pets as Therapy dogs.

Boo, a residents dog from Hampton House in Solihull, was described by resident, Richard Bunce, as their most popular resident. "He instantly makes me smile when I see him," he said, "I look forward to seeing him each day. Everyone at Hampton house loves Boo, and no matter what is going on people stop to stroke him, talk to

him and give him a huge fuss."

Marley, a Pets as Therapy dog and regular guest at Pratt House, Amersham, was also singled out, alongside a pair of rabbits from Abbeyfield Winnersh in Wokingham, owls that stopped by Abbeyfield House in New Malden, and Alpacas that visited Abbeyfield House in Lincoln – they were so well-trained they even used the lift!

Some of our staff also sent in photos of their pets, which included cats, dogs, rabbits, and even a horse.



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From the right-hand sidebar (or further down the page on smaller screens) you can download the current and back-issues of the Voice. The PDF format is the full version, whilst the text-only Word version will allow you to enlarge the text for printing or use text-to-speech conversion software if required.

Towards the end of the page, you can find a selection of expanded articles from the Voice as standalone posts on our blog – great for a bit of light reading!



## ➔ INDEPENDENCE IS THE ESSENCE FOR SUE (CONTINUED FROM COVER)

Sue went on to set up a business, teaching computer skills to older people in their own homes, but also took time out to travel with her husband.

“After I retired, we travelled a lot,” says Sue, “where Joe pursued his love of photography – and I carried the camera bags! I still have a lot of his pictures with me today.”

The move to Girton Green in 2012 was an obvious choice for the two of them, having seen an independent living complex in Florida on their travels.

“They were huge places,” Sue says, “with swimming pools and athletics tracks that were used regularly by the residents. It was a bit full-on, but I thought there must be places like that in the UK too, and Girton Green was it.

“I found out about it at an Abbeyfield stand at a retirement show, and I knew it was just what we wanted. It has fulfilled everything I hoped from it, and I have never had any regrets about moving here.”

After 44 years together, Joe passed away in 2018, and Sue came to realise how important communal living can be for those who are on their own, for whatever reason.

“I wanted to be part of a community, and Abbeyfield does that. Everyone is friendly here. When I’m in my flat, it feels very comfortable, everything I have is here and it’s my home; but I can also go to see my friends who live down the corridor without the need to go out.”

Sue likes to keep busy and has immersed herself in life at Girton Green. In addition to currently chairing the



Visitors to the shop can enjoy a coffee

Residents’ Committee, she runs the twice monthly Jazz on Wednesday Night group, is a member of the creative writing club, and plays Mahjong on Thursday mornings, also teaching other residents how to play.

Sue is especially proud of the Girton Green shop, which is part of the original design of the building.

“What happened quite quickly,” she explains, “was that a group of volunteers started running the shop and turned it into a place to come for morning coffee. At some point we decided that it could also stock dry goods, and to this we added long life milk, a selection of greetings cards and we were in business.

“As well as an opportunity for people to meet – particularly those newly arrived

who wanted a break from unpacking boxes and worrying about whether they had downsized sufficiently – the use of volunteers to order supplies and make and serve filter coffee soon meant that the shop began to generate a surplus.”

The Community Fund, where this extra money goes, has allowed the residents to put on a range of free-to-attend events.

“It gives us a measure of communal independence” – and this independence to choose how the money is spent, on the things the residents want to see and do, is what is key for Sue.

“For example,” she says, “we try to have monthly social evenings with a quiz, bingo or beetle drive theme, which is followed by a light supper for the residents, prepared by the restaurant and paid for from the Community Fund. We sometimes invite choirs or musical performers to come in from outside, and we can offer some money to cover their expenses and provide cheese and wine for everyone afterwards. We can also pay to have the piano tuned, which is greatly appreciated by the performers.

“We also put on other activities such as exhibitions of our art and craft skills (Abbeyfield’s Got Talent!) and the Christmas party. If a local external visit, such as to Anglesey Abbey or the Fitzwilliam Museum, is wanted, we can pay for extra use of the local dial-a-ride bus from this fund.”

Sue has welcomed the opportunity to have a say in how ALS as a whole should be run, having recently joined the National Residents’ Panel, who meet regularly to discuss the inner workings of the organisation and ensure that residents have a say in how it operates and the services it provides.

“An active and independent lifestyle in retirement was what I was looking for,” she concludes “and that’s certainly how it’s been for me so far!”



The shop has generated a surplus, helping to fund outings and activities



# FROM AMERSHAM TO ARUSHA: SHUBHAN'S VOLUNTEERING AND FUNDRAISING JOURNEY

Shubhan Selvaranjan, a 19-year-old Care Assistant at Pratt House care home in Amersham, reflects on how volunteering at home and abroad has taught him invaluable lessons.

Shubhan has lived in Amersham for over ten years and is heading to university in autumn to study medicine. Having completed his A Levels at Dr Challoner's Grammar School, he is mid-way through a gap year, during which he has taken up a job at Pratt House to gain experience and fund volunteering adventures abroad.

"My journey at Pratt House started as work experience when I was 16. I was interested in healthcare and eager to make a difference. Following the focus on care homes during the pandemic, I felt inspired to contribute.

"There are misconceptions of what care homes are really like. They are sometimes thought of as isolating places, when in truth we support vulnerable people to live life to its fullest. The staff were so welcoming, and the residents were lovely. It was a privilege to hear their stories and laugh with them.

"I really enjoyed the experience and found I couldn't stay away. I asked if I could take on a voluntary role, and ended up volunteering at the home for two years.

"I applied to be a carer at Pratt House to gain further experience. The team is very supportive – it truly feels like a family here. Being able to leave at the end of the day knowing you have made a difference is a great feeling. Even if I wasn't offered the job,

I definitely would have stayed on as a volunteer!"

Shubhan is no stranger to helping others, having spent last summer volunteering at a hospital in Arusha, Tanzania.

"Seeing the amazing perseverance of people facing hardships, in a system that is not accessible for everyone, was so heartbreaking, yet inspiring. It was a stark contrast to the care we are fortunate to receive in the UK that we often take for granted. Helping on the paediatric ward was highly rewarding and it was lovely to talk and be with the children; I was also given the opportunity to help on the emergency, physiotherapy and maternity wards.

"It was an honour to work with the doctors, nurses and other volunteers. I met amazing people, and will forever carry a piece of Tanzania in my heart. Together, we travelled the region and even painted a local primary school. One of us set up a fundraiser to help provide educational materials and healthcare equipment for the hospital, raising over £2,000."

Since he returned, alongside working at Pratt House, Shubhan has embarked on some fundraising for the Amersham-based MPS Society, a charity that helps people affected by Mucopolysaccharidoses, a family of rare genetic diseases – a cause very close to his heart.

"My brother, Shiv, was affected by MPS and sadly passed away when he was two years old. Seeing the children and families on the wards in Tanzania often made me think of him and what my parents went through, so I decided to do something to honour his memory and hopefully make a difference to other children's lives.

"I organised a stall at Chesham market in October, raising a few hundred pounds selling my home-made baked goods. The bakery across the road were impressed with my sales technique and even offered me a job, which was



Raising funds for the MPS Society in October

very sweet!

"I set up a JustGiving page, which has raised over £3,000 for the charity so far, and a further thousand through CAF and Gift Aid donations. My family and I are so grateful and blown away by the response. The funds raised go towards research on treatments, events and specialist support for families. I recently helped with the Society's fundraiser at Chesham United, which raised £600. I look forward to supporting the MPS Matters



Shubhan with a baby boy he helped deliver in Arusha, Tanzania



Shubhan with MPS Society staff and volunteers



**Shubhan received an Amersham Volunteer Award in March**

Conference in June and continuing my fundraising efforts.

“I aspire to do charity work and volunteer for as long as I am able – I look for how I can make a difference in everything I do. We must always champion causes that need support.”

Shubhan is enjoying his role as a Care Assistant and plans to continue volunteering at Pratt House when he is home from university.

“It’s an extremely varied job with new challenges to be faced every day. It can be difficult. The heart of the role is being there for the residents, and that is my favourite part – that personal connection with them is what I value most.

“In addition to developing professional skills, I feel I have grown a lot. I’ve learned that empathy is one of the most important things we have, something I will be taking forward into a career as a doctor and in life.

“Many people working here are at different stages of their journey. As long as you have a caring personality and put the residents at the heart of what you do, you can make a great difference in a care home, as either a volunteer or member of staff.”

Shubhan’s dedication is invaluable to everyone at Pratt House. He continues to volunteer to spend extra time with the residents outside his working hours, to further support them. His commitment has not gone unnoticed, and he was nominated by his colleagues for an Amersham Volunteer Award, which he received at a ceremony in March.

Care home manager, Joanne Wheeler, describes him “as an outstanding member of our team who continually goes above and beyond; his compassion and work ethics are truly inspirational. Despite not yet being a qualified doctor, Shubhan approaches every task with the professionalism, empathy, and drive of someone already in the role. He has a natural ability to listen, comfort, and

advocate for others. Shubhan will make an amazing doctor – his passion for care and unwavering commitment has already set him apart.”

As for the future, Shubhan aspires to travel further before starting his degree.

“I’m looking into some animal conservation projects abroad. I adore wildlife and learning about different cultures; supporting organisations that have an incredible impact is very important to me. I will be sure to come back with lots of photos and stories of my travels for the residents to enjoy.”



**Shubhan’s favourite part of his job is chatting with the residents**

## ABBNEYFIELD HOUSE UNVEILS NEW SENSORY ROOM

Residents, families, and staff at Abbeyfield House care home in New Malden now have a new space to enjoy – a recently completed sensory room.

Jay Ward, the activities coordinator, who spearheaded the project, has spent several months transforming the room into a calming place, documenting the progress with before-and-after photos that highlight the transformation.

What sets this sensory room apart is the personal touch. Jay’s thoughtfulness is evident in every detail, and he has dedicated his time to hand-stitch the curtains, selecting fabrics that add to the room’s peaceful atmosphere. The material boards, too, were crafted with care, each piece contributing to the room’s overall sensory experience. The materials used were generously donated by RWD, a design company located in the New Forest where Jay’s partner, David, works.

Jay said, “From the moment I had my walkaround during my interview here, I saw the potential of a little room that was an unused nursery. I knew that it could be turned into something special for the residents. I even remember asking during my interview if it could be done.

“Over the past 16 months I have planned, found fabrics, researched and finally managed to complete the sensory room for the residents to enjoy. The whole experience has been quite the challenge, which I relished. I have seen and been in many sensory rooms over the years, but never did I think I could make one myself.

“I am really proud of the outcome, and hope it brings some joy and peace to the people here. The most challenging part was creating the curtains – hand stitching lots of different fabrics together in a ‘Tetris’ style, and making sure they are all the same size, was difficult. I even had residents laughing at me occasionally when I caught my finger on the needle (which happened many times).

“When I finished, I took a couple of residents to the room. Their reactions were all I needed to know I had created something special. It was great fun to take on this project, and it will never truly be finished, as more can be added over the years to come.”

From the initial concept to the final beautiful room, this project shows Jay’s commitment to the residents he supports. The sensory room was designed to provide a peaceful atmosphere, offering residents a place to relax and find quiet respite.



**Above: Hand-stitching the curtains took many hours  
Below: Jay in the lit-up room, which provides a calming space**





# A HUB FOR THE CLITHEROE COMMUNITY

We spoke to the Abbeyfield Lancashire Extra Care Society (ALECS) Chair of Trustees, Janet Taylor, and activities coordinator, Lauren Scheldt, about how they have transformed their care home in Clitheroe into a community hub that benefits their residents, visitors and people in the local area.

In the heart of the Ribble Valley, Abbeyfield House provides dementia-friendly care for 40 residents. Janet Taylor has been involved with the care home since it opened 30 years ago.

“The home was originally built by several local Abbeyfield homes, and my father became the treasurer. He was instrumental in securing the funding for the development and brought me in when the home first opened to assist with some of the accounting. I’ve been involved ever since and now Chair a group of 10 trustees.

Janet has supported the home to grow and improve, and the past couple of years has seen a big change in the way it supports older people.

“I’m not one to rest on my laurels – I’m passionate about our Society and our local community.

“Around five years ago we brought in a new manager, Andrea Smith, who has made a huge difference. We are now proud to have all our rooms occupied and we’re even



The day care room provides the perfect space for a relaxing board game

generating a surplus, which we can reinvest in our services.

“Our reputation in the local area is fantastic as well – people know that we provide an excellent service, and some of our visiting professional health team have sent their family members to us, as they know they will be well cared for.”

Part of the reason for the home’s success has been the creation of a new day care room. Activities coordinator, Lauren Scheldt, explains that, although it is somewhere to hold a day care service for older people in the local area that includes food and activities, it is more than just another room.

“It’s a beautiful, multi-purpose room that can support all sorts of meetings, activities and events. There’s a small lounge section with a fireplace, a library, a tea and coffee station, a bar, and the centrepiece is a large activities table. The room also backs onto a small courtyard which we can take advantage of in good weather.

“The best thing about the room is that it allows us to offer a space to groups in the local area who are looking for a space to meet.

“We have a weekly mums and babies group, a

mental health support group and a friendship club who meet here regularly. We also have our very popular fish and chip Fridays. A group from the local church will come in most weeks for Friday lunch, and we even have people walking past who are drawn in by the enticing smell of the cooking.

“Some of the groups are happy for residents to drop in and out, but those that



ALECS like to host events that welcome the local community





want some privacy have the advantage that we can close the room off and have a separate entrance for guests, so they don't disturb the residents, and the residents don't disturb them."

Janet says that marketing the day care service was not straightforward, and many people were hesitant at first.

"People thought that, if they didn't require care, then a care home wasn't for them. The idea of visiting a care home wasn't appealing, and they saw it as the stereotypical place for older people where there's not a lot going on."

However, Lauren's efforts to promote the day care service over social media and through a variety of local networks is paying off. A couple of people who have started using the day care service have since become permanent residents. Furthermore, the community groups who come in are usually made up of people who are potential service-users, or have family members who are.

In addition to the day care provision, a busy year for ALECS has led them to acquire a new property, Castle View House, which provides independent living services for 10 residents. Although these residents don't require as much care and support as the care home residents, the services are run in parallel, and the staff team have supported the Castle View House residents to take more ownership of their home. They regularly hold their own fundraising events and were fully involved in redecorating the house when ALECS took over.

It is important to Janet, all the trustees and staff that both Abbeyfield House and Castle View House provide services that are resident-focused and take residents' views into account.

"We have small resident meetings, and try to speak to different residents each time, to make sure any issues are resolved. One of our trustees also attends these meetings so any important things can be dealt with at board level."

Janet puts much of the success enjoyed by the Society down to the work of her fantastic staff team, and Lauren has seen the home from both sides, having originally found Abbeyfield House as a home for a family member.

"I came here as a potential customer when my grandmother needed care. I looked at a few care homes in the area, and the facilities at Abbeyfield House were far superior – the garden especially, which was particularly important for her. The home was well

decorated, the staff were welcoming, and they were so helpful in assisting her to move in and get settled. They always spoke to her with respect, and we were embraced as part of the family.

"As an employee, the best thing about working here is that everyone is friendly and helpful. Whatever role they have, all the staff are happy to pitch in wherever an extra pair of hands is needed – at both Abbeyfield House and Castle View House – and my manager is available to listen whenever I need to speak to her. I love it here and I don't intend to ever leave!

"Although I was a customer first, nothing really changed when I started my job, and the family atmosphere has continued as strong as ever."

Janet agrees that ALECS is a great place to work.

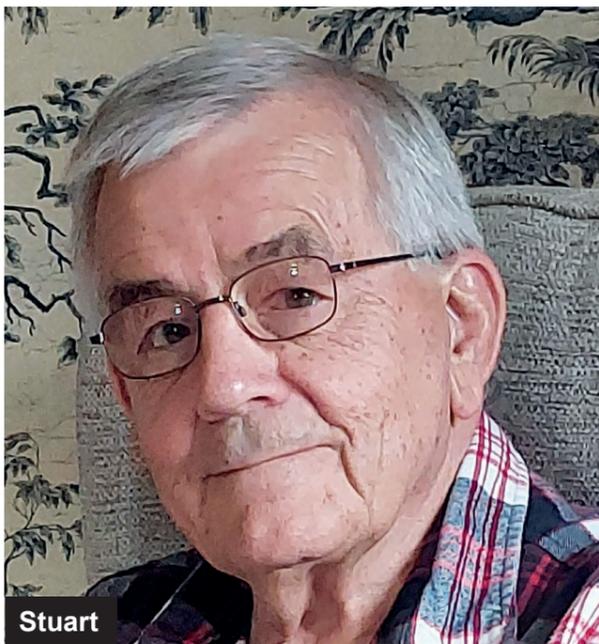
"The best part of my role is going into the home and feeling the buzz, the warmth and the friendliness. We have great staff, super trustees and a lovely atmosphere."



**The residents love it when local children come in**



# RESIDENTS TAKE THE LEAD: SHAPING OUR FUTURE SERVICES TOGETHER



Stuart

When we set up the ALS National Residents' Panel in March 2024, we had one clear goal: to give our residents a stronger voice in how we run things. Recently, we took a big step forward by involving members of the panel in two important decisions that affect everyone – choosing companies to carry out repairs and maintenance and fire safety services across the country. This was a chance for us to make sure residents' opinions were at the heart of these vital processes.

Three dedicated members, Phil, Peter and Stuart, stepped up to take on these responsibilities, to help evaluate bids from different companies and decide which ones would be best for the job.

Once we received all the tender documents, we shared them with an evaluation panel made up of both staff and residents. Phil, Peter, and Stuart carefully reviewed every submission, scoring them based on criteria including quality, value for money, and customer service. After this, we met together to discuss their assessments and agree on final scores.

Three companies were shortlisted, and each delivered a presentation. Phil focused

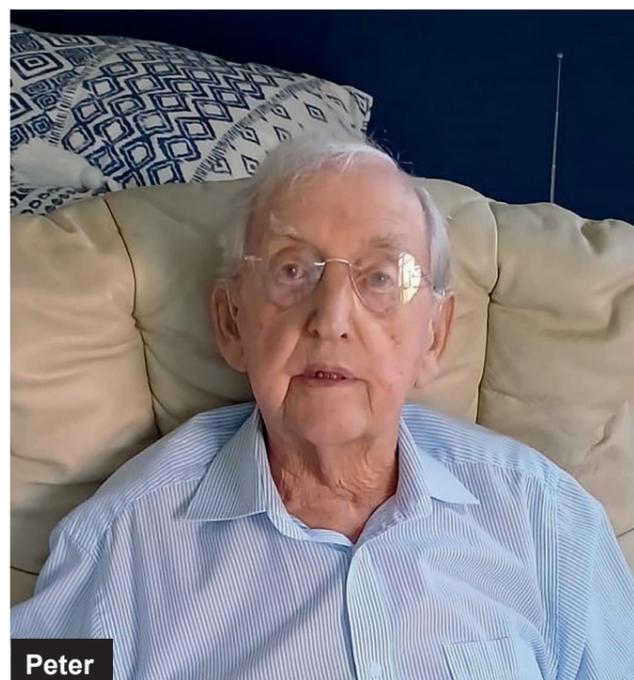
on the repairs and maintenance contract, while Peter and Stuart concentrated on the fire servicing contract. They attended the presentations, asked questions, and scored the companies again based on how well they performed.

Phil said, "It was great to be able to use the skills and knowledge I developed when working on tenders and contracts with the NHS to help improve things at Abbeyfield."

"I was particularly pleased to be able to participate in this procurement process," added Stuart, "and to have the opportunity to comment and express an opinion throughout. A significant step forward for resident involvement!"

After much deliberation, there was strong agreement between the residents and staff about who should win the contracts: Churches Fire has been awarded the national fire servicing contract, Dodd Group will handle repairs and maintenance in the North, and RPL Construction will take care of repairs and maintenance in the South.

This outcome is a testament to the hard work and dedication of Phil, Peter, and Stuart. Reviewing complex documents and sitting



Peter



Phil

through presentations isn't easy, but they excelled, showing just how valuable resident involvement can be.

"Our voice really does matter, and it is heard a great deal more than we think. We made a genuine contribution to the final decisions. It is certainly worth putting your name forward and getting involved," said Peter.

This experience has shown us what's possible when we work together. To ensure residents continue to have a meaningful say in future procurement exercises, we're now developing a framework to guide how we involve residents going forward. Your input matters, and we're committed to making it count.

If you'd like to find out more about joining the Residents Panel, please don't hesitate to email [resident.engagement@abbeyfield.com](mailto:resident.engagement@abbeyfield.com) or call Justin on 07533 424367 for more information. Your ideas and insights are invaluable, and we look forward to working with even more of you in the future.

# ON YOUR DOORSTEP

We're excited to announce our first-ever Resident Roadshows, two special events taking place this year aimed at bringing together residents, sharing ideas, and shaping the future of our services. These roadshows are designed to ensure residents' voices are heard and that we continue to improve life at Abbeyfield.

At these interactive events, we will provide:

- Performance updates on how we're doing as an organisation and the steps we're taking to enhance our services.
- A Q&A session with the opportunity to ask questions to members of our National Residents' Panel and senior management team.
- Sustainability discussions, getting residents' thoughts on how we can

make our housing more environmentally friendly.

- Networking opportunities to meet other residents from across the region.
- Refreshments throughout the day, plus some surprises – including giveaways!
- Further opportunities to participate in resident engagement activities and help shape decision-making processes.

There are two roadshows planned so far: the first, in Tanterton, Preston, will be on 19th May; and the second will be around Southampton on 16th June (venue TBC). We will write to all residents living within an hour of each of the venues with an invitation – you may have received one already! All the details you need are included, and places will be limited, so please confirm your attendance as soon as possible. Further roadshows will

be organised in more locations in the future.

The roadshows are open to everyone from Abbeyfield Living Society (ALS) – you don't need any prior experience or involvement to join. Bring along a neighbour; it's a great way to spend the day, learn something new, and connect with other residents from ALS.

Your input is invaluable, and the roadshows are a key part of ensuring our services reflect the needs and aspirations of our residents. Together, we can create stronger, greener, and more connected communities. Whether you've lived with us for years or just moved in recently, you can play a critical role in helping us make informed decisions about our services.

We look forward to seeing you there and working together to shape the future of ALS.

Email [resident.engagement@abbeyfield.com](mailto:resident.engagement@abbeyfield.com) or call Justin on 07533 424367 for more information.

## HILL HOUSE TACKLES LONELINESS WITH 'DON'T EAT ALONE' LUNCH

Hill House care home residents and staff were joined by people from Honiton and Combe Raleigh, who would otherwise have been eating alone, for a delicious fish and chips lunch.

The free 'Don't Eat Alone' lunch was followed by music provided by the residents' favourite local band The Jim Jamz, who are fronted by Rachel and Albert Murphy, the daughter and son-in-law of a former resident. A harpist provided further entertainment.

Nic Trueman, Hill House's activities and wellbeing lead, said, "We know that there are people in our community who live on their own, and we have witnessed the untold damage that loneliness can do to one's mental and physical wellbeing.



"With the immeasurable value we place on social interaction, we created this opportunity to invite people in who would benefit from a hearty lunch, some fantastic company and entertainment, and maybe even make some new friends."

The event was hugely successful. Pauline, who lives alone in the local community, said, "What a wonderful afternoon we've had. Good food, good music and lovely company!"

Another guest commented, "I would normally have been sat at home on my own. This has been such a treat!"

Hill House Manager, Melody Taylor-Brown, added, "We are our own little community. Although this event lasted only a few hours, we hope that our guests were able to see the clear advantages of life here for our residents. We would be delighted if any of them were to consider joining us for a respite stay or as a resident in the future."

She continued, "The afternoon was such a success that we hope to make this a regular event and help alleviate loneliness in our neighbourhood."

The Don't Eat Alone event followed the home's highly successful Christmas dinner, where 10 guests, who would otherwise have spent the



day on their own, came along to enjoy turkey with all the trimmings – and even received a present from Father Christmas himself!

Hill House's lunch made such an impact that other Abbeyfield houses and homes have expressed an interest and begun to organise their own Don't Eat Alone lunches. It is hoped that they could provide an invaluable opportunity for social interaction for older people nationwide, and could tap into a whole host of potential new residents who may be looking for a community-focused environment in which to live.

Keep an eye on our blog at [www.abbeyfieldliving.com/blog](http://www.abbeyfieldliving.com/blog) and future issues of the Abbeyfield Voice for news of more Don't Eat Alone lunches and similar events around the country.



# HOMEGROWN HAPPINESS AT ABBEYFIELD WINNERSH



Winnersh's allotment takes a sustainable approach to growing food

A promising new initiative is taking root at Abbeyfield Winnersh, with a new allotment being built in the home's grounds, which will provide fresh, homegrown vegetables and herbs for the kitchen, promoting a more sustainable and cost-effective approach to meal preparation. Unused grounds have been repurposed to create the space, generating a useful and engaging area where residents can get involved.

The project is a collaborative effort, developed with charity Younger People with Dementia (YPWD), who provide support for people diagnosed with dementia under the age of 65 in the South-East.

Beyond the benefit of fresh produce, the allotment uses recycled materials and a compost heap to minimise waste, improve the soil and boost the home's sustainability credentials. It also offers therapeutic benefits, particularly for residents with dementia, providing a connection with nature and a sense of calm.

Staff at Abbeyfield Winnersh are keen to see the residents get involved in the allotment and to contribute in a meaningful and practical way, through helping with planting, weeding, and sharing their own years of gardening knowledge and experience.

To ensure the project reflects the interests of the community, Winnersh are in the process of setting up a resident and family focus group. This group will play a key role in guiding the allotment's development, helping to make decisions about what to grow, how to organise tasks, and how to make the most of the space.

The allotment project comes as a result of a successful partnership having been built between Abbeyfield Winnersh and YPWD, as part of the home's efforts to forge stronger connections with groups in the local community that hold shared objectives. The relationship creates new opportunities for clients and residents to engage in meaningful activities in a safe and purpose-built environment, and the allotment is just one such example of where this has been realised.

YPWD, who will also be taking advantage of the cinema room at Abbeyfield Winnersh to hold a regular film club, is just one of the organisations with which the home has recently partnered. The local branches of Age UK and the Alzheimer's Society are currently making use of their summer house for meetings and support sessions; and the local NHS Care Home Support team will shortly be hosting a series of workshops at the home on understanding dementia, for family members of people living with the disease and professionals working with

dementia-affected clients.

Customer Relations Manager, Amanda Sykes, explains, "At times, people who have an undiagnosed cognitive impairment slip through the net, as there is not always a clearly signposted path to take, and their family and friends are not sure what to look out for.

"Not only does working with other organisations enable us to share valuable knowledge and resources, but it also helps us to publicise additional services to the people who may really benefit from them.

"Shared events and activities benefit all parties in developing a deeper understanding of dementia and similar conditions, and open people's eyes to how they can get the care for themselves or their loved ones that is required."

Abbeyfield Winnersh has also developed a strong link with the Royal Berkshire Hospital Care Home Liaison team, enabling a relationship between a potential new resident, their family and the home to be established early on, thereby making the moving in process for new residents coming out of hospital as smooth as possible.

"Our residents and their families are able to see the full range of support available to them," Amanda continues, "and the same is true for other organisations' service-users."

And for these residents and others affected by dementia or similar conditions, she says, the benefits are even simpler.

"It's all about making memories, expressing emotions and, more importantly, feeling safe in each others' company."



The residents are fully involved in tending to the plants

# PUZZLE PAGE

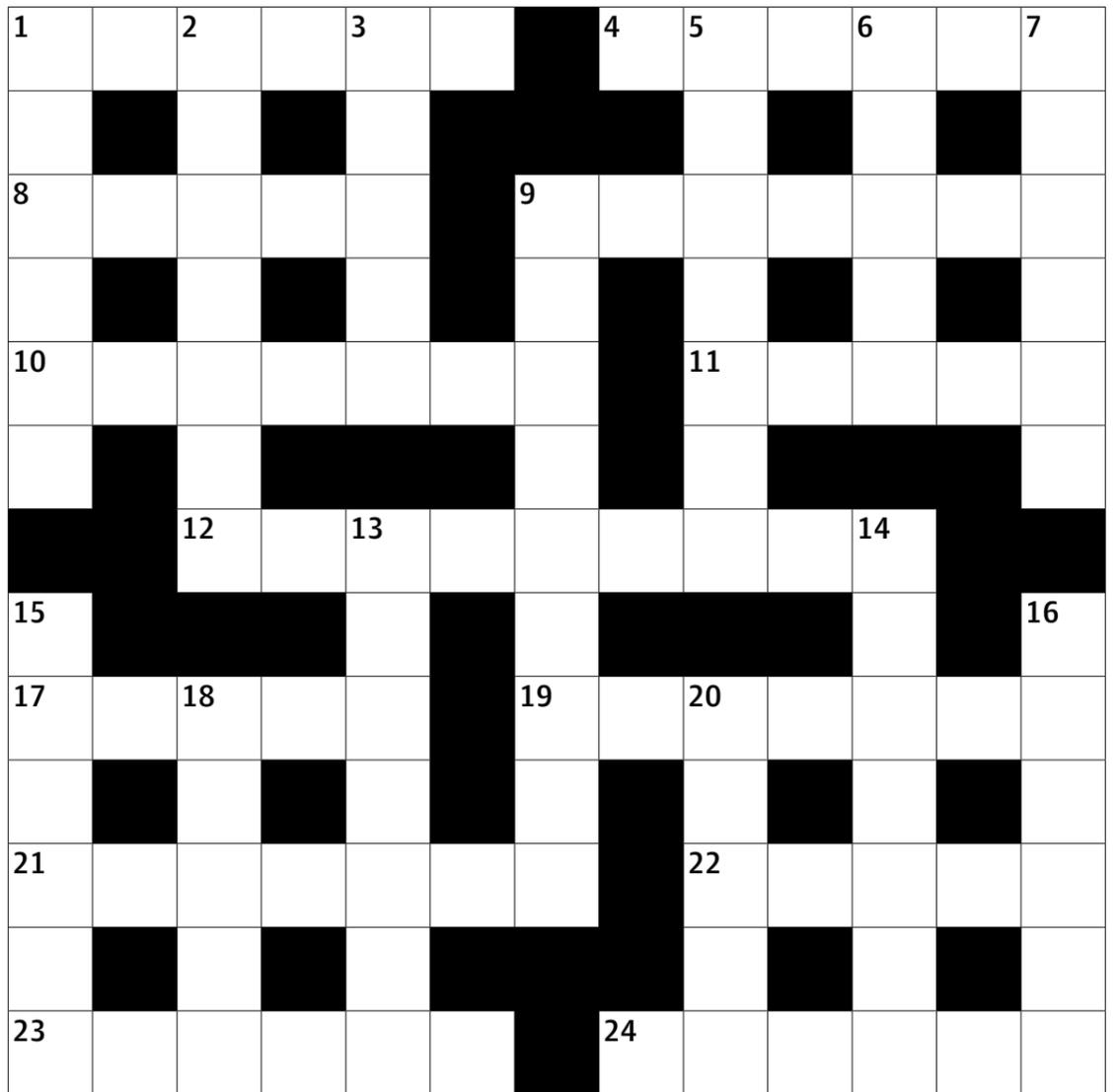
## CROSSWORD

**Across**

- 1 Prevent from happening (6)
- 4 Conduct (6)
- 8 Pop-up breakfast food (5)
- 9 Dribble (7)
- 10 Where the pilot sits (7)
- 11 Intestine (5)
- 12 Fox (9)
- 17 To any extent (2,3)
- 19 Prejudice (7)
- 21 Commercial preparation for making sponges etc (4,3)
- 22 Bad-mouth - unwanted stuff (5)
- 23 Water-based activity (6)
- 24 Precise (4,2)

**Down**

- 1 Tawdry - shtich (anag) (6)
- 2 Ursine baby (4,3)
- 3 Exercise for the stomach muscles (3-2)
- 5 Theatre, films, TV, pop music etc (7)
- 6 U-shaped loop in a stream (5)
- 7 Kick (6)
- 9 Device that enables a TV to receive signals (3-3,3)
- 13 Bottle deliverer (7)
- 14 Remove with some force (7)
- 15 Hooper (6)
- 16 Dragon killed by Apollo at Delphi (6)
- 18 Crooked (5)
- 20 Rise from one's bed (3,2)



## SUDOKU: MEDIUM

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## HARD

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# 60 SECONDS WITH SUE PERRY

Sue is a trustee of Abbeyfield Wessex, and has been involved with Abbeyfield for 50 years, making a huge contribution to the Member Societies in her area and beyond.



its merger with the Abbeyfield Wessex Society, which we achieved last November, and I'm now a trustee of Abbeyfield Wessex.

For a number of years I have chaired meetings of what is now called the 'Peninsula group' of Abbeyfield Societies, which has grown to encompass Societies in Somerset, Wiltshire, Devon and Cornwall.

**Do you have a stand-out memory from your time with Abbeyfield?**

I had the enormous privilege of meeting Richard Carr-Gomm several times. I particularly remember an Abbeyfield reception in Highgrove House for our 60th anniversary, hosted by the then HRH Prince Charles. I told Richard that I had met a few people, like him, over the years, who had seen a need and done something about it, whereas I would be worrying how to go about it and where the money would come from. He just smiled and calmly said, "But it takes people like you to make it happen", totally dismissing any idea of his importance.

**What achievements are you particularly proud of?**

Although I had to oversee the closure of 10 houses on behalf of the Executive Committee at Abbeyfield Bristol, I was pleased to be able to ensure staff and

residents found somewhere else to move (many within the Society), with the funds we raised enabling us to grow and develop. More recently I was glad to act as Chair of the Porlock Society and successfully merge it with Abbeyfield Wessex.

I was also honoured to receive the Royal Patron's Award in 2020 for my contribution over the years.

**What are you looking forward to over the next few months?**

I'm looking forward to working with an energetic and ambitious large Society, to ensure a vibrant future for it and the residents it looks after, now and for many years to come.

**What do you like to do in your spare time?**

I plod up and down the swimming pool regularly – I can't dignify it as swimming! I'm also an active Soroptimist (an organisation working to transform the lives of women and girls) and have discovered an enjoyment for baking cakes for regular monthly church matinee concerts, and a monthly cafe aimed at those living with dementia and their carers.

**How did you first get involved with Abbeyfield, and how has your role developed?**

I initially got involved in 1975 in fundraising for the Bristol Society's newly acquired house in the suburb where I lived. I was asked to be it's first treasurer, then also became treasurer of a second house acquired later. I retired as treasurer in 1981 due to personal circumstances, but came back the following year to become the Society's first paid Administrator, later Director, overseeing 14 houses at one point.

I retired again in 2008, becoming a member of the Regional Council and then an Assessor for each of the three Abbeyfield Standards. I was asked in 2022 to become a 'temporary' trustee of the Abbeyfield Porlock Society, to help assess its viability. In 2024 I became Acting Chair, guiding



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**PUZZLE SOLUTIONS**



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9	5	7	4	3	6	8	1	2
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