

Kirkby Stephen is a parish with around 2000 residents in over 1000 households. There is a GP practice, range of shops, a primary school and secondary school. The nearest hospitals are in Penrith - 21 miles away, or Kendal - 27 miles away.

Kirkby Stephen Good Neighbours Scheme has been supporting people in Kirkby Stephen and the surrounding area for almost a year now. They have a dedicated team of volunteers who visit people at home to complete odd jobs and tasks, for anyone of any age, in the local community.

Background

Kirkby Stephen Community and Council Centre is a community managed Local Links centre which has become a 'one stop shop' for information, community support and access to services, including the library and children's centre.

The Centre, which opened in 2011, is aware of local needs and therefore well placed to start new projects to support the community. Residents had been asking for help with small tasks such as DIY and gardening. Having heard about Good Neighbours schemes, staff at the Centre thought this could be a good way to meet these needs.

The Project

In the autumn of 2016, using the Good Neighbours Toolkit and a small grant from ACT, they put a call out for local volunteers interested in becoming Good Neighbours. Following a positive volunteer response, things took off really quickly and they now have 21 residents benefitting from support.

This includes tasks such as: doing the weekly shop; DIY jobs and gardening; accompanying on a hospital visit; reading the newspaper; and regular company.

The scheme is co-ordinated through the Centre, and delivered by a team of volunteers. It's advertised using posters, local newsletter and online, but word of mouth has been most successful.



(L-R) Wendy Hamilton and Zelda Bromfield with the Kirkby Stephen Good Neighbours leaflet

Initial contact is made with the Centre where Wendy or Zelda take the referral, check out some background information (being local really helps!) and contact a volunteer to see if they can meet the need.

All volunteers are DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checked and volunteer meetings are held to offer support and training if needed.

Referrals are also taken from Penrith Hospital, the Beacon Centre and local organisations such as Age UK. Many of the referrals are for older people but young parents and others in need have also received help.

Local volunteer Sue Capel said: "I wanted to do something useful when I retired from work and thought this scheme was just the thing. I helped someone on a hospital visit, going with them on the patient transport, helping them find the eye clinic and then helping them home again. It's good to know that with a little commitment the Good Neighbours Scheme can make a difference to peoples lives."



(L-R) David Parsons, Kirkby Stephen Good Neighbour for Maurice Braithwaite

The befriending visits are usually 30 to 45 minutes a week and volunteers go out when the Centre is open so they can make contact if they need to. If people need more help than the scheme provides, volunteers can also suggest referrals to other services available through the Centre.

What has been achieved?

The scheme currently has 17 volunteers who support 21 residents in Kirkby Stephen and the surrounding area.

A relative of one of the scheme users reported: "After a long, lonely time of grieving for the loss of a family member, my mum hit rock bottom and I was really worried about her.

"I finally managed to persuade mum, who is a very private person, to meet a Good Neighbour volunteer. The volunteer got on so well with mum that they now meet weekly and I feel a lot of the pressure of being mum's only contact has been eased.

"I can see that my mum now has a reason to get up in the morning and this has brought a real breath of fresh air to our lives."

The Learning

- The Good Neighbours Scheme works because local people are supporting other local people - we're being good neighbours.
- Learn from others - we've had good support from ACT to set up the scheme and from a similar organisation in Bedfordshire, which runs several Good Neighbour schemes.
- Running the scheme from the Community and Council Centre provides a base that local people recognise; they can come in to ask for support or to offer their time to volunteer.
- We had useful training from Cumbria CVS to support our volunteers in their roles.
- We take referrals from local organisations like Age UK, but we also make referrals when people need more than good neighbour support.
- When we do befriending, we share the role between at least two volunteers which helps prevent people becoming too attached.
- We are fundraising to help cover volunteer expenses and the small running costs of the scheme.
- We are lucky to have paid officer support to run the scheme, we know many other schemes are run entirely by volunteers.

Contact Details

For more information contact Wendy Hamilton: Community & Council Centre Manager, Kirkby Stephen Local Links, Vicarage Lane, Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria, CA17 4QX
Tel: 017683 71775

Email: wendy@kirkby-stephen.com

Website: www.kirkby-stephen.com

Visit the ACT website to access the Good Neighbour Toolkit: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk/Resources-Publications/Toolkits-Workbooks

ACT champions community and rural issues

ACTion with Communities in Cumbria, Offices O - Q Skirsgill Business Park, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 0FA
T: 01228 817224 | www.cumbriaaction.org.uk | info@cumbriaaction.org.uk | Follow us @ACTCumbria
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