

Are you a good neighbour?

THESE days, we don't always know our neighbours.

It's sometimes difficult to know who to turn to if we need help or want to offer it. This is when a voluntary care group can make all the difference.

Imagine the plight of a young mother who gave birth to twins and had to leave one of them in the hospital for an extra four weeks.

Not only were the babies separated, but she lived 25 miles away from the hospital too. She was fortunate as her local care group provided transport for her to visit the hospital twice a week while another volunteer cared for the twin who had already been allowed home.

Following this, the mother found difficulty coping and became depressed. The health visitor suggested she turn to the care group again. The same volunteers who had helped earlier made themselves available. They offered more support.

One of the volunteers had suffered from post-natal depression herself. She was able to understand what this young mother was going through. These good neighbours made all the difference.

the BIG issue



by Jackie Paterson, voluntary care groups adviser for south-east Hampshire

Each month, columnists in The Big Issue challenge us with moral, spiritual or social concerns. This month we ask how you can care for people in your community

Or what about the man in his mid-40s, recently discharged from hospital but feeling vulnerable and in need of support?

The care group's involvement started with a volunteer doing some shopping for him and continued with another care group volunteer spending an hour with him each week for nearly two years. Would you be able to help a neighbour in this way?

Voluntary care groups across Hampshire provided over 69,000 trips to GP and hospital appointments last year. It's not just the transport that is appreciated but also the support offered by the vol-

unteer.

This was the case with one client who, when she saw the specialist, was told to go to three other places in the hospital for tests. This took many hours with long waits in between.

However the client enjoyed spending the time telling the volunteer stories about her family. What could have been a stressful ordeal turned into a more pleasant experience with some much-needed socialising for this older lady.

All these examples are taken from a publication called *Are You Sitting Comfortably?* - a book of care group stories.

They illustrate the many ways of providing good neighbourly help and show that volunteers make a valuable and distinctive contribution to their community.

There are 103 voluntary care groups across Hampshire. They are independent groups who receive support and advice from the Hampshire Voluntary Care Groups Advisory Service.

The advisory service is a joint venture of Portsmouth and Winchester dioceses and is sponsored and supported by the primary care trusts and social services. The service operates across the whole of Hampshire, except for Portsmouth and Southampton cities (it is hoped that funding may be found to develop these areas in the future).

I work as the adviser for the south-east of the county and am employed by the social responsibility part of the Portsmouth diocese. I would be very happy to talk to anyone interested in developing a care group in their area or about any of the issues raised above.

● Anyone interested in finding out more can contact Jackie Paterson on 01962-624742 or jackie.paterson@chsewinchester.clara.net

Get set to mark Bible Society's bi-centenary

SUPPORTERS of the Bible Society in Portsmouth are being invited to help celebrate its 200th anniversary.

The society, formerly the British and Foreign Bible Society, will mark its bi-centenary with a special service of thanksgiving at St Paul's Cathedral on March 8 and a BBC *Songs of Praise*.

In our diocese, there will be a service of thanksgiving at St Jude's Church, Southsea, on May 9 at 6.30pm, when the Rev John Balchin, formerly minister of Above Bar Church in Southampton, will speak.

And in the summer, representatives of 137 Bible Societies around the world will converge on Wales for an international conference. There will also be a nationwide series of picnics on the same day - June 20 - to mark the bi-centenary and raise up to £100,000 for Bible work around the world.

Any parish that would like to hear more about the society's work or to book a speaker should contact alison.carter@biblesociety.org.uk



"According to research at an English university, it doesn't matter in what order the letters in a word are, as long as the first and last letter is at the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without a problem. This is because we do not read every letter by itself but the word as a whole."

That may be true but talking to us could help you communicate more effectively

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