

# Fifty years of people helping other people

MORE than 100 volunteers celebrated 50 years of the Good Neighbours Network with an afternoon tea party in the sunshine.

The Good Neighbours Network brings together more than 4,000 volunteers who are part of more than 100 voluntary groups across Hampshire. They typically offer shopping trips, lifts to hospital, and other practical tasks to those who live in their area. The Good Neighbours groups benefit from the advice, guidance and resources provided by a small team based in our diocesan office.

And many of those committee members, trustees and volunteers gathered at Holywell Estate near Swanmore for a celebratory tea party to mark this milestone. They enjoyed relaxed chat and music, as well as tea, sandwiches and cakes, under a marquee in the grounds.

Mrs Annabelle Boyes, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, made a kind speech thanking all of those involved. And Bishop Jonathan had uplifting words for the volunteers. He spoke about how they are mediators between support services and the community.

And Canon Nick Ralph, chair of the Good Neighbours Network (GNN) and executive director for our diocese's Council for Social Responsibility, spoke about the origins of the network.

He told guests that it was Beryl Kenchington who co-founded the Hampshire Voluntary Care Group Advisory Service – which ultimately



**Guests at the 50th anniversary tea party for the Good Neighbours Network in the grounds of Holywell House; right: Beryl Kenchington, who co-founded the network**

became the GNN – alongside the then vicar of Droxford, the Rev John Townsend, back in 1976. She had the original idea that a network of voluntary groups could carry out these small, practical tasks, and ultimately became the first GNN adviser. She sadly died earlier this year, aged 103.

Nick said: “Beryl – or Bee – Kenchington was a force of nature, and we owe so much to her vision. She started this idea of people helping people, and she would be proud to see that the network is still running 50 years later, and still making such a radical difference to people’s lives.”

During Nick’s speech, it became clear that a number of those attending had been volunteering with their groups for more than 40 years. Church members are often

involved with either creating these groups or providing volunteers.

Karen Jordan, Good Neighbours Network leader, said: “This event is a meeting of like minds and caring hearts – with cake – and we can’t wait to do it again at our next milestone.”

And Jane Cadman, chair of the Stubbington and Hill Head Voluntary Care Group, said: “I want to say how much it meant to have our small contribution to our community recognised. The opportunity to chat to other groups and to share ideas and practices was invaluable and we left with a renewed sense of purpose and enthusiasm!”

