

Neighbourly groups get chance to meet

Volunteers from Good Neighbours groups across Hampshire heard about a new project to help people to save energy

VOLUNTEERS from care groups across Hampshire came together for the first major event held by our Good Neighbours Network for five years.

Leaders of more than 120 Good Neighbours groups that support acts of kindness in their local communities met at King's Community Church in Hedge End for the day.

Among other things, the get-together saw the launch of the Positive Energy Project being run by the Good Neighbours Network to help those who may be vulnerable to save money on energy bills. Its energy advisers Stephen Dominy and Siobhan Butt explained how volunteers could offer advice about saving energy on heating and lighting, in the bathroom and in the kitchen.

And delegates also heard from Max Prangnell, director of communications and engagement at the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, about the government's plans for a review of the NHS. Delegates were able to respond to suggestions about how the NHS might be improved.

There were pop-up workshops about funding, communications and the Positive Energy project. The morning was concluded with a speech from Bishop Jonathan



Canon Nick Ralph speaks to volunteers from the Good Neighbours groups across Hampshire at Kings Community Church, Hedge End

before volunteers enjoyed lunch together. It was the first time they had met together since 2019.

The Good Neighbours Network (GNN) brings together more than 120 groups run by local people across Hampshire, who offer practical and emotional help to those living in their neighbourhood.

Each group is unique, and the tasks they help with vary from offering a lift to medical appointments to helping with shopping, as well as offering social activities such as lunch clubs and bike clubs.

Staff from the GNN offer support in areas such as governance advice, fundraising and recruiting volunteers.

The leaders, co-ordinators and team members of these independent groups come together to hear more about what is happening across the network and for mutual support.

On this occasion they gathered to hear more about the Positive Energy Project, which is part of 'Home and Well' - a collaboration between GNN, Southern Gas

Network and Citizens Advice Hampshire. It aims to deliver tailored energy support via a dedicated team of energy and engagement facilitators.

Energy adviser Stephen Dominy told delegates: "Since joining the project, we've already had the opportunity to meet with several groups and visit a number of events and we're hugely impressed with the work that you all do. There's a lot of knowledge, dedication and activity going on all across Hampshire.

"There's an underlying desire to reach out to people, to find people that might otherwise slip through the net, to make a difference in your communities. You're really practical.

"You provide lifts, lunch clubs, and some of you also provide gardening services. You notice the things that will make a difference to people in your community; things that are perhaps insignificant or small to many of us, but can have a big impact on the neighbours you are caring for."

'It's always inspiring to spend time with such kind, thoughtful people'

And colleague Siobhan Butt said: "With this Positive Energy Project, we want to give you the tools and information so you can add a further dimension to the time and effort you are already giving, to help your neighbours stay warm, save money and keep safe.

"So, we will help you notice the sort of things someone will be saying or doing if they are struggling with fuel poverty or carbon monoxide poisoning."

One of the ambitions for the Home and Well project is to reduce the potential impact on the NHS and prevent hospitalisation for people who are at high risk as a result of



Top: volunteers enjoying the speakers at the Good Neighbours event; middle: talking to those organisations that brought information to display; bottom: one of the pop-up workshops that were part of the event