

PEOPLE: GOOD NEIGHBOURS

Villagers enjoy lunch club and outings

IF you live in the village of Botley and are in need of help, you're in good hands.

Botley Neighbourcare is the name given to the group of volunteers who can take you to medical appointments, offer you regular outings, and provide a befriending service. And every fortnight, they can even take you to a lunch club in one of the local pubs.

There are around 130 clients on the group's books, and the main requests they receive are for lifts to hospitals, GP surgeries, dentists, hairdressers and supermarkets. Around 30 volunteers respond to about 20 or 30 requests for transport each week.

Unlike taxis, the volunteers will stay with the clients while medical appointments are happening, checking that patients have found the right waiting room in a hospital, and also helping to keep them calm if necessary.

The group's lunch club meets every other Monday for a sit-down meal in a village pub. Around 30 or so regulars get together every fortnight, including some who are picked up in a minibus and some who make their own way there.

Every other Wednesday, an outing is organised to a local garden centre or tourist attraction. The group's minibus can transport 15 people and



Villagers enjoy their fortnightly lunch club, at which they are served by volunteers from Botley Neighbourcare

others are taken in cars, if needs be. The group also offers a befriending service, checking that people aren't left isolated.

And at the Good Neighbours Network conference this autumn, it was Botley Neighbourcare that won first prize in a competition based on providing unexpected acts of kindness. They suggested creating New Year greetings cards to boost morale in the post-Christmas period, based on cartoons drawn by one of their volunteers.

One of the group's leaders, John Spencer, said: "I retired two and a half years ago,

and was attracted to Botley Neighbourcare because of the flexible nature of their volunteering.

"It fits around my lifestyle. There's no set times or days – people ask for help, and if I'm available, I can do it. I enjoy getting to know the people that I help, and it is very rewarding."

Botley Neighbourcare started in 1992, and has gradually grown over the years. It is always happy to accept new clients and volunteers. For more information, please contact the group on 0800-9989132 or bnc.contact@yahoo.com.

fantastic concept and, thanks to the dedication of the wonderful people who willingly give up their time to help others, is also a huge success. Hampshire is leading the way, but it absolutely should be rolled out nationally."

And Karen Jordan, team leader for the Good Neighbours Network, said: "We decided that 2019 should be the year that we actively promoted acts

of kindness, and we think our statistics are already higher for this year than last year. We are also developing brand new groups in certain areas, increasing volunteer recruitment and renewing the group's branding."

She leads a team that includes network advisers Liza Smith and administrator Nicky Dodd, with support from Canon Nick Ralph and Gambol Parker from

our diocese's Council of Social Responsibility.

The network is funded by Hampshire County Council and the NHS, via its Clinical Commissioning Groups, and managed by a stakeholder liaison group. For more information about the network of groups and the Good Neighbours Hub, please see the website on: www.goodneighbours.org.uk.