



Left to right: the marquee outside Winchester Cathedral; the Bishop of Winchester, the Rt Rev Tim Dakin, meets members of voluntary groups; the special tea laid on for invited guests; and HRH Princess Alexandra with award-winners Chris Cornwell and Lynne Line after the presentation

# Royal tea party marks 40 years of care



Tracy and Joyce enjoy regular cappuccinos and chats together

## Good neighbours can become good friends

SHE started out as someone who needed help – but Joyce Plain quickly became a good friend.

Tracy, a volunteer for Hayling Voluntary Services, started visiting Joyce four years ago. It didn't take long before they realised they both went to the same church – Hayling Baptist, which currently meets in St Andrew's Church.

Tracy drives the 91-year-old to appointments at the dentist and doctor, helps her with shopping, and takes her to church and for day trips out. The pair have become good friends they enjoy a regular cappuccino most weeks.

"I couldn't survive without Tracy to help me," said Joyce. "Four years ago, I had just come out of hospital, and needed a lot of care. I had a walking stick, then a walker and now

a wheelchair. Tracy is there whenever I need her.

"We go out and feed the gulls, have coffee or eat ice-cream. I do have family living locally, but lots of people these days are quite isolated and lonely and do appreciate company."

And Tracy said: "Knowing you can make a difference to someone else's life is rewarding. We've also maintained a brilliant friendship.

"Joyce is an absolute joy to be with, and has been like another grandmother to the kids. Everyone seems to know Joyce when I go shopping with her. People think older people have nothing to offer, but Joyce is very wise."

If you would like to volunteer to help with Hayling Voluntary Services, ring 023-9246 4730.

**I**T was a special, royal occasion that celebrated 40 years of people helping people.

Hampshire Good Neighbours Network welcomed HRH Princess Alexandra to a tea party in the shadow of Winchester Cathedral to mark four decades of the organisation.

Representatives from more than 100 care groups and good neighbours groups across the county gathered for the birthday celebrations. They sat around beautifully-designed floral displays in a huge marquee, listening to live jazz music and sipping champagne, as they awaited their royal visitor.

HRH Princess Alexandra, the Hon Lady Ogilvy KG GCVO, greeted both the VIPs and volunteers warmly, chatting about the work they do to help others. She moved from table to table, taking time with each guest, before a speech and the presentation of some awards.

Then guests were treated to a luxurious tea party, with dainty sandwiches, scones and cream, and tempting cupcakes.

It was an appropriate way to celebrate 40 years of neighbourliness. In 1976, there were just a handful of people in six care groups who formed a network across Hampshire. Now, Hampshire Good Neighbours Network is the largest organisation of its kind in the UK.

The network can boast 120 separate care groups, and more than 4,000 volunteers. They support clients in all sorts of practical ways, including driving them to medical appointments, doing their shopping, organising social events, and befriending those who end up housebound.

It employs a small team, who are based in our diocesan office in



HRH Princess Alexandra took the time to meet guests from care groups based across the whole of Hampshire

Portsmouth and supports care groups in areas such as recruitment, marketing, safeguarding, insurance and transport issues.

It is funded by Hampshire County Council and Hampshire's NHS clinical commissioning groups, and supported by the Anglican dioceses of Portsmouth, Winchester and Guildford.

The chairman of Hampshire Good Neighbours Network, Andrew Robinson, said: "Whether it is a local driver, befriender, or a community lunch club, the support undertaken by Good Neighbours provides a vital lifeline to many in our communities – especially those who may otherwise

feel lonely and isolated.

"It has come a long way from its earliest inception to one of the most significant providers of very local community support in Hampshire and further afield.

"We are able to put a value on the enormous amount of volunteer time, and it is staggering to know that their hard work contributes £8m worth of work across Hampshire each year.

"As part of our landmark celebrations, we are inviting everyone to be a good neighbour by joining our 'People Helping People' campaign, and we hope that over the coming years our number of volunteers will rise. The

continued willingness of people to help others in their local communities is a message of hope and encouragement that we want to proclaim."

Each group that is part of the Good Neighbours Network is independent, volunteer-led and run. Each has a co-ordinator who will field requests from locals, and match them up with a volunteer who can carry out that task. For some clients, they literally have no one else to turn to.

Some of the groups also provide cafes, coffee mornings or lunch clubs, or even provide day trips to local landmarks.

HRH Princess Alexandra

## PETERSFIELD PIONEERS

IT was in the early 1970s that Petersfield Council of Churches considered that this expression of good neighbourliness was a way of reaching out to the local community.

The idea was presented to around 50 people at an open meeting in the autumn of 1974, and a committee elected. They recruited around 40 or 50 volunteers, young and old, who had signed up for the unknown.

By New Year 1975, Petersfield Community Care Group (later known as Petersfield Voluntary Care Group) was open for business.

They provided a teenager to walk an elderly lady's dog; provided meals and support for another bed-ridden

lady; a driver to take a disabled boy to a special school in Alton; and introduced a new, mature resident to help a young family where mum was struggling with two lively pre-school sons. That was all as well as the usual shopping trips, surgery visits and so on.

I can recommend such involvement as a wonderful way to make friends and quickly become part of a community.

All that was more than 40 years ago. Just seven years after the care group began its work in Petersfield, I found myself appointed to the role of care groups adviser in the Portsmouth diocese - the role that Elizabeth Foulds hold today.

JOYCE PERRY

presented two volunteers with special awards at the royal tea party for their exceptional contribution to the network of Good Neighbours groups across Hampshire.

Chris Cornwell, from Hartley Wintney Voluntary Care Group, and Lynne Line, from Botley Neighbourcare, received certificates and National Trust membership from the Princess.

Hartley Wintney Voluntary Care Group has 70 volunteers who perform three main services to the community – driving elderly people to hospital appointments, offering a befriending service, and running a dementia café each Tuesday afternoon. The drivers make 600 trips a year between them.

And Botley Neighbourcare has 38 volunteers who help their clients by driving them to hospital appointments, offering a befriending service, and organising a programme of social events.

Lynne, who has chaired the group for six years, said: "I love finding out about the lives of people who are living in our community. You can be driving

them somewhere, you chat to them and discover all sorts of fascinating stories about what they used to do. It's also rewarding to be involved in improving their lives.

"I understand that I've received this award for my work across the network of good neighbours groups. I have been involved with new groups, helping them to recruit new volunteers, and giving them ideas about what we have done before. It's a real honour to receive this award."

If you would like to volunteer to help your local group, or set up something new within Hampshire, please see [www.goodneighbours.org.uk](http://www.goodneighbours.org.uk), ring 023-9289 9671 or email [info@hampshiregoodneighbours.org.uk](mailto:info@hampshiregoodneighbours.org.uk).

The plan is for this kind of work to continue beyond Hampshire. Debbie Sutton, from St Jude's Church, Southsea, has now been employed to develop this kind of network in other areas of the country.

If you are interested in launching a new network, contact her on [debbie.sutton@goodneighbours.org.uk](mailto:debbie.sutton@goodneighbours.org.uk).