

YOUR HEALTH matters

Help to combat the misery of loneliness

Many ways to achieve community cohesion through volunteering, friendship events and free information resources

Report by **GARRY POULSON**
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RESEARCH has shown that one in 10 visits to GPs by older people are due to loneliness and in an ageing population like West Berkshire the growing problem of dispersed families adds to the problem.

This all has an impact on the cost of adult social care as more people struggle with the poor physical and mental health implications linked to loneliness and isolation.

Community cohesion can be achieved in small ways with village halls becoming community hubs for lunch clubs, parent and toddler groups, after-school clubs, film nights, book and DVD exchanges.

Volunteer drivers in community transport schemes – there's 10 in West Berkshire – also provide vital support for people with mobility difficulties or those with anxiety issues that make them reluctant to go out on their own.

Readers here may have seen the red Handybuses running around West Berkshire.

There are five operators of community transport schemes –



THIS column is brought to you on behalf of the West Berkshire Health and Wellbeing Board. The board is responsible for improving the health and wellbeing of our population across the district by developing improved and joined-up health and social care services

Hungerford CHAIN Handybus, Newbury and Thatcham Handybus, Downlands Handybus, Burghfield and Mortimer Handybus and Theale Care Bus.

There's also a host of volunteering opportunities aimed at supporting older people.

Volunteers receive training and ongoing support and keeping an eye on older people needn't become a burdensome duty.

In fact, many volunteers feel they benefit as much as the people they are helping.

Befriend West Berkshire is operated by Volunteer Centre West Berkshire and financially supported by West Berkshire Council adult social care.

Trained befrienders are carefully matched to befriendeds who have been referred to the charity for support.

They usually visit their clients once a week for a cuppa, chat or trip out.

They don't help with personal care or financial matters.

Village Agents in West Berkshire are also volunteers trained to help people with difficulties.

Call them on (01635) 581001 for a chat with Gill Comley, the Village Agent coordinator.

Take a look at the website of www.volunteercenwestberks.org.uk for more information.

And if you're looking for local services, try the new West Berkshire Directory, which is available online at



<https://directory.westberks.gov.uk> Of course, it's not just older people who need regular social interaction and the chance to make new friends.

And there's the chance to do just that at the annual Jo Cox Great Get Togethers, taking place locally on Sunday, June 23.

In memory of the murdered MP Jo Cox, the Great Get Together aims at bring communities together for a big community

lunch or party to celebrate all the things that unite people and make neighbourhoods friendlier and stronger places.

The local events are:
The Parish Tea Party, 2.30pm to 5.30pm at Donnington Recreation Ground, Donnington, RG14 2LD.

It's open to anyone and there's more details at www.shawcundonnington.org.uk
The second event is the Great Heritage Get Together

afternoon tea, which runs from 2pm to 5pm at Heritage Village Hall, RG18 9RL, and, again, all are welcome.

Another vital service for local people seeking support or advice on where to turn for help is the Patient Information Point at the West Berkshire Community Hospital.

It is holding its annual meeting on Wednesday, June 26, at the hospital, at 7.30pm, and all are welcome.

The guest speaker will be Carolyn Taylor, a seAP (Support, Empower, Advocate, Promote) advocate, who will talk about her work with the Independent Advocacy in West Berkshire.

This is a charity providing free independent and confidential advocacy services.

If you would like to attend, please email bks-trenquirispip@nhs.net, or write to PIP, West Berkshire Community Hospital, Thatcham, Berks RG18 3AS, or ring (01635) 273324 (office hours only).

Tell us what you think by emailing Kamal Bahia, chair of Patient and Public Engagement Group, West Berkshire Health and Wellbeing Board – ppe.chair@nhs.net