

Robert's Story

Robert, a Volunteer driver and befriender based in Falmouth, has shared how he got started as a Volunteer, how COVID-19 has impacted his role and the support he provides in the community.

Tell me about yourself?

I was born in '55' in the salubrious area of Redruth and following my unimpressive secondary modern education considered myself fortunate to pass selection for the Metropolitan Police Cadets.

This meant that I left the county at sixteen, with my next three years spent in a disciplined environment on a personal development programme. This programme included community service, introduction to law and the constitution, which was interspersed with sport, adventure training and service attachments.

The transition to becoming a police officer followed and I remained in London until my retirement in 2007. I have very fond memories of my time in London, having met, and spent time, with some fabulous people inside and outside of the service. I also have a variety of experiences that I cannot mention here and gained a broader range of swear words, but I would do it all again in a heartbeat.

Over the next ten years, I was able to utilise my First Aid and teaching qualifications obtained in the service - by facilitating First Aid at Work courses and defibrillator training for the St Johns Ambulance.

Volunteering for the Ambulance Service, as a Responder, has also enabled me to stay current and relevant in this area.

What challenges did you find during Lockdown?

For me, the lockdown has presented my family and me with more positives than negatives. I live in Swanpool, with my beautiful and patient wife Sheryl, we are a few minutes' walk from the beach and regularly exercised the most important family member, our cock-a-poo 'MayZ'.

In addition, we have three sons, all adults, meaning we are never quite sure who is a resident and who isn't - retaining food in the fridge is our biggest challenge!



The ever-positive Robert Jeffery. In July 2020, Falmouth Day Centre and Robert have helped to support:

- x32 sessions of Active Living Support*
- x372 meals delivered*
- x59 attendees joining us for garden club*
- x81 welfare calls*
- x21 regular outreach visits*

How did you get involved with Volunteering?

Following full retirement in 2018, I was keen to try to do something of value and joined the Falmouth Befrienders - our goal was to reduce the isolation, felt by so many people, due to a range of complex reasons.

"I instantly enjoyed the company of those I befriended and have learnt a lot about an incredibly special generation."

This volunteer role provided the impetus I needed, I quickly responded to Ann's advert 'volunteer minibuss drivers needed' in the West Briton. **As a result, I have been able to assist many groups, including: the 'Old Cornish society'; Age UK Cornwall's Charabanc Club; University of the third age and more... We have visited some really interesting places throughout Cornwall, not to mention we have enjoyed some fab lunches!**

Tell me about the support you have provided at this challenging time?

Since my driving role began, I would often support Falmouth Age UK Day Centre at the request of Lucy, the manager, if the regular driver was unavailable or additional transport was required.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought many challenges, particularly for Lucy and her team. Following government guidance, they had to close the Day Centre to incoming clients. This guidance was compounded with the loss of staff and

volunteers, meaning that the type of support they offered had to change, and change quickly.

Even though we have all had these challenges, **everyone was determined to ensure that vulnerable people would not be without a regular, hot, freshly cooked meal and some human contact.** I have really enjoyed being one of the teams delivering meals across Falmouth and the surrounding area - this service also provided regular contact and reassured people that they are managing their own circumstances. It is amazing to see this caring, creative and positive team continue to think of new ways to improve well-being and look after the most vulnerable in society.

In short, I have greatly enjoyed my time with Falmouth Befrienders, TAP and Age UK Cornwall, hopefully, I can continue to be of some help in the future, **but would warmly encourage others, who may have more time now, to also volunteer. I know that they would also find it so worthwhile and rewarding.**

"Robert Jeffrey, our volunteer driver, has always been the most helpful, relaxed and lovely person. He was here before COVID-19, during it and is still here today offering his support. There is nothing he won't do to help you and takes on every impossible task we set him with a smile."

"His funny personality entertains us all and lifts our spirits! I don't think I've ever seen him without a smile on his face - his positivity rubs off on us all."

"He drives our Electric Vehicle, takes out meals and helps with the garden - I can't list all the things he does as there are simply too many!"