

## Volunteers' Week 2021 - Michelle

Michelle is in her early 30s and, since July, has been volunteering with Age UK North Tyneside as a telephone befriender. She regularly chats to a lovely lady in her 90s who lives alone.

She works full time as a solicitor (currently from home) but manages to chat twice each week. She does this around lunchtime or if she is taking a walk or having a coffee break.

Michelle's grandparents are no longer alive, so she really enjoys talking to her Age UK North Tyneside friend. She says that they "discuss their views on the world, and have a little laugh together and its breaks up both of our days."



"During the pandemic, I really wanted to volunteer to help the elderly in an incredibly lonely and worrying time for them. I saw campaigns and news from Age UK North Tyneside which just really highlighted to me how awful the pandemic was on the elderly population.

"For years I have donated to Age UK, not really realizing that there were ways to volunteer that would suit full-time workers. As I am a full time working solicitor becoming a telephone befriender was absolutely ideal as I can fit a call into my day no problem."

Michelle went on to say, "Age UK North Tyneside took time to find me a suitable match, someone they thought would be a good match in terms of having plenty to talk about. My friend doesn't live too far from me and so we can talk about our local area together. It is important to remember that even if someone has family and friends they can still be lonely on a day to day basis particularly during a pandemic. Sometimes when they speak with family it is more a practical discussion than just a generic chat.

"I think the service makes a huge difference to loneliness, particularly during the pandemic and I have to say I think there is benefit to both the older person and the volunteer as I really enjoy the chat myself.

"We talk about anything at all. Sometimes it's just what we are going to eat for tea or a story about something she did years ago such as the first time she went to a football game which is lovely.

"You have to be very aware that often the elderly person doesn't have any particular news to share, especially during a pandemic, but there is always something you can talk about.

"Sometimes I find that my friend will repeat the same story, but that makes no difference to me. She is obviously quite happy to tell it again and at the end of the day people much younger than her have memory problems."

Michelle highly recommends volunteering as a telephone befriender. "I can't recommend becoming a telephone befriender enough, it is so easy to fit into your day. If you think of how much time you can spend scrolling online this literally just takes 15 minutes of your day a couple of times a week. There is always something that we can learn from the elderly and their stories of the past."