

Volunteers' Week

Sandra



Sandra, now retired became a befriender at the start of 2021. She and her daughters speak every day. She has a busy lifestyle, walking her dog Frankie, gardening, reading and watching movies.

It was her New Year's resolution to help people in North Tyneside who might be lonely by providing some extra company. Having lost her husband a year before, Sandra understood how we can all feel lonely and wanted to share her time to help others.

Right from the start, Sandra was passionate about befriending and our two North Tyneside customers who she is in regular contact with agree. One said they were "blown away by her warmth and enthusiasm".

Sandra believes that showing kindness and talking with people who might feel isolated can make a big difference to how they feel "and it's such an easy thing to do".

Keen to raise awareness about befriending during kindness month Sandra asked us if she could speak at the first school where her daughter Nadine works.

Age UK North Tyneside are big supporters of intergenerational projects, so we obviously agreed.

Sandra's story...

A huge computer screen displayed Age UK North Tyneside's Befriending Service. The school children were sat attentively in their assembly. Nadine (my daughter) introduced me as a special person from the service. We then had a little bit of fun.

Nadine asked the children if they could guess who I was. Nadine said "I have lived in the same house as our visitor for a lot of years". Hands shot up - It's your mum!

After explaining what a volunteer does and the meaning of the word, Nadine then invited me to chat to the children. The importance for me was to find the link between talking about my role and also keeping it personal to them.

The school has been awarded the School of Character Kitemark. This is awarded to schools who can demonstrate that they take an explicit, planned and reflective approach to the cultivation of positive character qualities in their pupils to enable them to grow, flourish and achieve.

The monthly theme was kindness, so this was my first link to the children and my volunteer role.

I chatted with them about them seeing anyone looking lonely in the playground (heads were nodding and hands went up) and if so, would they befriend them? Should they talk to them? Should they listen to what is said? If that person didn't want to talk, then what would they do? The answer was heart-warming, "We would try again tomorrow".

At this point I spoke about my volunteer role of talking to people who are feeling lonely and isolated. I then involved them by talking about how they were feeling during lockdown, away from friends and school, Grandmas and Grandpas etc.

They affirmed this with bowed heads and sad faces. I thanked the children who had written letters to local, older people and told them how important and special those letters would have been.

My next link was listening and learning, which is so important as a befriender and equally as important in school.

Nadine asked if anyone had any questions to ask me, to which a little girl in the front row said "Is Mrs Fielding older than you?" Needless to say I smiled gratefully and offered a silent thank you.

A boy then asked how I was with technology, to which I replied not good but learning. He followed by asking if I had a mobile when I was young. No, I replied, but I did have a telephone with a dial on it, and a very small television.

On reflection Sandra said that it had been an "honour to share the idea of befriending with the children". The children remembered, in a safe, supported place, how lonely lockdown was for everyone. They were introduced to the idea of volunteering and understood how acts of kindness were special moments for any of us feeling lonely.

To learn more about befriending services contact Age UK North Tyneside on **0191 280 8484 Option 1** or email **enquiries@ageuknorthtyneside.org.uk**.