

SUE TO RETIRE AFTER 30 YEARS AT AGE UK SURREY

I guess retiring comes with mixed feelings and my decision to retire has certainly done that! I have worked for Age UK Surrey for the past 30 years and I can honestly say that almost every day has been a pleasure with no two days ever the same!

When my daughter was 4 (she now has her own children of 9, 7 and 5) and going to nursery school, I spotted an advert in my local paper for someone to set up a Home Help Service in the Haslemere area. I had previously worked in the travel industry, but I thought this sounded good as a bit of a stop gap, it was 10 hours per week. I started off with a desk and a phone in the middle of a huge office which was actually the Doctor's flat right up in the eaves of Haslemere Hospital! One of the saddest cases I saw was a lady who lived alone in an old farmhouse and slept on straw bales, she had no toilet so used a bucket and slung the contents into the garden!



I have enjoyed many different roles in the organisation, gradually taking on additional responsibilities. I have worked with so many different people over the years which has been a joy (mostly!). I have seen so many changes in staff, many changes in service offerings and huge changes in obtaining funding. Years ago, it was relatively easy to get funding from local authorities and from trust funds and it was far less of an issue than it is currently and has been over the past 10 years. Our organisation has become smaller when funds have been scarce but then grown again when opportunities for new funding and new work have arisen. At times it has been rather like being on a roller coaster but that is the nature of working for a charity!



Of course, the main reason we are here as Age UK Surrey is to support older people in the county and I was reflecting on the challenges people face in later life and if they have changed. Some people have always been lonely and isolated, but it was not talked about years ago, so it is a good thing that we recognise it and talk about it now and try to help connect people with their local communities. The biggest change I think I have seen is with home care packages which were readily available 30 years ago and much of the service was provided directly by the local authority as opposed to being contracted out to agencies. It was easy for people to get support then whereas now the criteria are such that it is extremely difficult as funding is so tight.



I leave the organisation in a good place and in the capable hands of Diana Bignell who will take over as Interim CEO until someone is appointed to a permanent position. We have a very dedicated and committed team of staff and volunteers who are highly skilled and experienced.



I am sad to be leaving and will really miss everyone but wish the organisation the very best for the future.

Sue

Sue Zirps, CEO