

GOOD NEIGHBOUR SCHEME

Those who attended the annual parish meeting in May heard a presentation by Jeanette Holden, a project officer at YMCA Lincolnshire, about her work supporting communities wanting to set up a good neighbour scheme. The idea isn't entirely new — coincidentally, elsewhere in this issue in our look back at what we were reporting ten years ago, Samantha Ford was interested then in just such a scheme for Welton – but the events of the past year have accentuated our sense of 'community' and our mutual interdependence. Many people and organisations have, spontaneously, been doing what they can to help those who need it and maybe the time is right to consider how best to formalise this sufficiently to keep it going. Whatever happens in the next few months, it is unlikely that the need for help will go away.

Recently, I spoke to Jeanette and she explained that her role is to support communities that want to create Good Neighbour Schemes. These act as a clearing house between those offering help of various kinds and those who need it, and have a level of formality that offers assurance to both helped and helpers. Of the more than 20 schemes already in place or being planned in Lincolnshire, some cover quite small geographical locations, some just a few streets or an area of a larger town, while others cover a whole village. Activities covered by schemes include collecting prescriptions and library books, providing companionship, dog walking, help with form filling or shopping, IT support and transport. This list is not exhaustive, though, and is not intended to duplicate what other organisations are already providing.

What is required to get a scheme going is, fairly obviously, a group of people who want to make it happen. What Jeanette then offers is help with the formalities of setting up the organisation. Jeanette explained that a common starting point is to conduct a local survey: "The first thing we work towards is getting a set of questions out there to establish what the needs are. It's not about what the facilities are in the community, it's about who needs help, who needs prescriptions collected, who needs help with shopping or filling in forms. I can't say there is a typical good neighbour scheme because everyone's needs are different. For the volunteers, it's their group, we're just helping them get up and running." Although schemes are different, Jeanette said that, during lockdown, loneliness and isolation had emerged as significant issues, but the feedback from the survey is crucial. Jeanette's team will pay for designing and printing the survey but it's up to the local group to distribute it. Her team will then help with the analysis of the results. From then on, it's for the group to decide on its priorities.

The last year has emphasised that there are unmet needs in our community but also a number of individuals who have done their best to help meet them. This individual action has been crucial but maybe the time has come to build this into a continuing organisation. So, if you are interested in setting up a Good Neighbour Scheme in Welton, with the support of Jeanette and her team, now's the time. The parish council is co-ordinating interest to start with, so just contact the clerk's office to get things going.

Graham Nicholls

*[You can listen to Graham's interview with Jeanette Holden, which can be found on the **NEWS** website on the Audio and Video Articles page. Ed]*