

ANNUAL REPORT - 2023

The statistics of our work in 2023 are shown on the separate sheet of undertakings. In comparing the yearly figures, it needs to be borne in mind that, due to lockdowns, LVC did not re-open our Keep Well Club until May 2021 and that the Escorted Shopping and Silver Surfer services did not re-open until some months later. Hospitals were also not fully operational in terms of out-Patient appointments.

Volunteers

2023 saw a welcome increase in the total number of volunteers, including drivers. This was largely due to our very successful participation in the Volunteer Fair organized by Volunteer Epping Forest and at the Loughton Community Day at the cricket ground. Christine Benbow kindly took on the arduous task of DBS Checker which has greatly increased the speed at which we can deploy new volunteers. Every year we have to say farewell to long-serving volunteers: this year we lost Councillor Caroline Pond after a Duty Office/Committee stint of about 35 years. On the plus side, retention of volunteers remains high. In December we again held the volunteer drinks event which gave the chance for volunteers to meet face-to-face.

Transport

It is pleasing that in 2023 we returned exactly the same number of medical transport undertakings (440) as in 2019 (pre-Covid). However, we still need more drivers as is shown by the large number of driving requests that we were not able to meet. Many thanks are due to Tina Robinson, especially for her liaison with the hospitals as regards permits and parking. She has managed to get several charges overturned this year.

Good Neighbour

There has been a significant decrease in the number of clients requesting shopping and prescriptions which may reflect a greater confidence in people returning to the shops and pharmacies themselves. The numbers of regular shopping and befriending arrangements are much the same as last year.

Escorted Shopping

The use of this service has more than doubled compared to 2022; the increase was most pronounced in the last 6 months. We did lose most of our nonagenarian users over Covid and it's great to see the numbers building up again. I would like to thank Mike Millroy and Ruth Howarth for their hard work in making sure that the trips run smoothly.

Social Activities

The figures for the social activities do not show any sign of recovering their popularity pre-Covid. There are a hard-core group of clients for whom we provide transport, but not many who make their own way. This is reflected in the figures for transport to social activities. A large team of volunteers is involved in these; it's invidious to single anyone out, but I would like to thank Carole Barrack for organizing the Keep Well Club so meticulously.

Following the success of the Jubilee celebration outings last year, we made two trips to Harlow Garden Centre, enjoyed by 19 clients. Additionally, 23 clients enjoyed the Christmas at the Toby Carvery, Buckhurst Hill and, again, the Hasler Foundation provided extra drivers to get people there.

IT Clinic

The Silver Surfer Club has been rebranded; it never was a club, but a drop-in clinic where people could sort out their particular difficulties. The number of people attending has stayed much the same as last year, but the number of attendances made has risen from 166 to 265. The need for it remains and we are very grateful for the students who are following the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and come to help out the regular

volunteers. Steve Bailey and Emma Pavett have taken a leading role in this project for many years and I would like to thank them for their commitment.

Garden Rescue

The Garden Rescue team had fewer calls on their time in 2023, but were kept working up to October. Again there are many people involved in this team, led by Manon Dixon, who visits to size up the job and deploy volunteers from her willing helpers. Thank you.

I would also like to thank the trustees/committee members for all their work over the year as well as the unstinting support they give me. I will often run issues and ideas past Chairman, Carey Adams and always get sensible advice. Catherine Mills has had the difficult task of making sure that the office is staffed as well as it can be. Laura Watson keeps the website fresh and Eva Bagurske works assiduously to make our Facebook page so attractive. Committee meetings are much easier now that Sheila Byford has offered to take the minutes.

In particular I will say how very fortunate we are to have such a pro-active Treasurer as Mike Robinson. Apart from getting the big reduction on our insurance in 2023, he has had to deal with the tricky and frustrating tasks of changing our cash account to a bank that is nearer than Walthamstow and dealing with BT over the changes involved in the digital switchover.

Finally and most importantly, I would like to thank all our volunteers. The last few years have been tough for everyone; LVC volunteers, as well as Loughton residents have had their own worries and problems.

As an organization, we continue to punch above our weight because everyone does their bit ... and often more. I never cease to be amazed at what volunteers will cheerfully take on.
Here's to 2024.