

For many years, Ashfield Voluntary Action has provided a flexible and tailored wrap-around service to meet the needs of older members in our community through the Lifestyles project. This innovative and flexible project especially targeted those who were at risk of falls or social isolation. Funding for the project came to an end in March 2020 and we saw this as an opportunity to extend the remit of this work and develop a service to meet the needs of local people even more effectively.

The pandemic meant that we had to do things differently. This has been a positive step as it led to us 'thinking outside the box'. Before the pandemic, we were providing group activities recognising that loneliness and isolation lead to a variety of health and wellbeing issues. Since lockdown, we have used our experience, knowledge and history of working in partnership to provide a range of services.

We are providing befriending, check-in calls, video chat, shopping trips and support on surfing the net. Once lockdown restrictions have further eased, we will bring back group activities and computer sessions.



The lynchpin of this bold initiative, Samantha Clarke, is passionate about helping local people which is clearly demonstrated by her 'can do' attitude. Sam joined AVA in April 2017 initially as a volunteer, but before too long had proved herself as an invaluable asset, not only to the charity, but to the local community. Sam was appointed Lifestyles Co-ordinator in September 2017 and has since worked tirelessly. Sam recognised that people requiring our help, did not always fit into 'neat little boxes' and our ability to provide a flexible and tailored response is making a massive difference in people's lives.



*Sam said, "whilst people think of support, particularly through the Coronavirus, they think of collecting prescriptions, or doing shopping, but often the help needed can be quite different. I'm currently taking lunch to a 94 year old lady on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays; as well as liaising with her family in Kent for other issues. This has included taking photos of bills which need paying, checking medication and helping to arrange care provision. Providing this help has made a massive difference to this lady's life, enabling her to remain independent and in her own home. It has also given her family peace of mind and reassurance that she is safe and*



*appropriately supported. Our intervention, though a relatively light-touch service, has a significant impact."*

*Sam said, "another service user is elderly and almost blind. She asked us to help her to source audio books. Through our contacts we managed to obtain a second-hand Kindle and I am in the process of sorting out some audio books to add to it. I have also signposted her to the Mansfield and*

*Ashfield Echo and local Libraries both of whom do talking books."*

Whilst the remit of the Lifestyles project was to work with people aged 50 and over, we now have the freedom to work with other age groups too. Sam commented, *"I have a 47 year-old lady with autism and anxiety who I speak to almost daily. I have taken her jigsaws, DVDs, card making and cross stitch materials, colouring and jewellery making items. I was also able to provide her with a mitt through our Twiddle Mitt campaign and this has given her a huge amount of comfort and helped her to manage her anxiety."*

Sam said, *"I have also taken flowers to one lady who had been poorly and to another who was struggling emotionally. Sometimes a little gesture like this can make all the difference. This is on top of numerous phone calls I make to check and chat."*

*"I think we (staff and volunteers) are all doing things which show our care and support for the community over and above what is perceived to be the necessities of shopping and medication."*

Across Kirkby and Kirkby Woodhouse, Ashfield Voluntary Action has been working with the Diamond Centre (which provides 111 meals a week and food parcels to Kirkby residents), St John's Food Bank and the Ashfield and Mansfield Emergency Food bank to ensure that no-one is going without support in these difficult times.

To discuss this project in more detail contact:

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