What is Solva Care?

Gill: Solva Care helps to look after people of all ages in the community. For those of us who volunteer, it gives us an opportunity to give something back, and help those who might need a little extra support. It steps in where there is need, and helps to keep people living in their own homes.

How did you first get involved?

Gill: The Community Council sent out a questionnaire, asking what people would be willing to do to support the community, and what sort of things would be of help to them. The questionnaire showed quite a few people who struggled to get out and about, leading to them feeling lonely and isolated. Solva Care matches up people based on what they can give and what help they need.

Maureen: I was wondering what I was going to do with myself when I retired. I’d worked as a carer in the community, and wanted to continue to use my skills and help people.

Gill: I don’t have a lot of free time, but I do have a car, so I thought I could take people back and forth to lunch clubs, the GP or the shops.
What sort of things do you do as volunteers?

Gill: One gentleman I pick up is someone that I knew from my childhood. He was always a character in the village. He ran the local football club, and would go round all the houses to raise money for the club. Everyone knew him. Now I take him to the shops or the surgery and we have a great time together. You get to hear such fantastic stories and meet lots of different people. I’d dropped off one lady at the hairdressers, and was waiting with her husband. I found out that he was in the Royal Navy, and was stationed on the Queen Mary when it took Winston Churchill to meet Eisenhower.

Maureen: I’ve been visiting one lady now for over two years. She has dementia. If the weather is good, we’ll go for walks or pop out to a coffee morning. I make sure that the cupboards are all well-stocked. It helps her stay independent and provides some respite for her family. We have such good fun together. We sometimes sit down and she’ll start reminiscing. She talks about her time as an evacuee, which is fascinating. During the summer, she loves to watch the tennis on the television. I found out that she used to get complimentary tickets for Wimbledon as a volunteer for Barnado’s in London.

How do you think Solva Care benefits people locally?

Maureen: It provides a little bit of help where it is needed. It’s not time-limited. As all the volunteers are from the community, they’re recognised by the people they help. You see each other in the street, and can say hello and have a chat with each other.
Often the people we visit just want a bit of company and support. With Solva Care they get to see a familiar friendly face. It seems like such a little thing that we do, but it makes a massive difference. When you visit, you see their faces light up.

People can feel more comfortable speaking to their neighbours. You get people who have concerns, little things that mean a lot to them but which they might not say to social services or care workers. One lady wanted to get her hair done, but was worried about leaving her husband alone as he has dementia. We found someone who could pop in and spend some time with her husband while she went out.

It’s made us a better community, there are people here who we never knew before, but through Solva Care we’ve got to know them. It’s brought people together and made our community more integrated.

What do you get from being involved?

Maureen: It’s not one-sided. You get so much more out of it than you put in. You find out so much about people and the place where you live. We get to hear other people’s stories, and to share ours. You get to know people. It makes you feel more part of the community. It’s wonderful.

The people we visit are as much friends as someone we visit out of charity. It’s expanded our network of friends. You get to know other people locally who I wouldn’t have known before. We don’t do this as a job. We do it because we want to and because it’s fun.

People are so appreciative. It’s remarkable how much of a difference doing such a simple thing can make to people.
Do you have any advice for people who might be considering volunteering in their communities?

Maureen: Just get involved! Don’t worry about what you can’t do, you’ll be surprised at how little things can make such a big difference. It can be as simple as going for a walk or having a chat with someone. The rewards are more than you would think. For a little bit of time, we are rewarded with company, we get to hear fantastic stories, and we have a laugh.

For more information about Solva Care, visit www.solvacare.co.uk, email info@solvacare.co.uk or phone 07805 717 556.