

VILLAGE AGENTS: A helping hand for the elderly and vulnerable

Providing a personal touch for the lonely

By Megan Tatum

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WIDOWED and living alone in a Braintree retirement complex, Thelma Morgan praises the “marvellous” help provided by Village Agent Sally Austin.

Ever since the 89-year-old heard of the service a few months ago, Sally has become a regular visitor, helping with adaptations to the home, form-filling, and just chatting over a cup of tea.

“Sally has helped me an awful lot. I wouldn’t have known how to organise certain things otherwise, and it’s also nice just to have someone coming around,” said Thelma, who has lived in Braintree for about six years.

Recommended

“I’ve recommended it to my friends, too – there’s always somebody that needs some help.”

There are 12 agents currently working across mid-Essex, allowing elderly and vulnerable to access assistance with everything from welfare benefits to home safety or even signing up to a local social group via the service.

“We can help to keep people independent and in their own homes for longer. And the beauty of it is that we are fully trained on all these services and can explain them face to face rather than having to wait on the end of a telephone to speak with someone,” said Sally, who joined the service when it was set up four years ago.

“We’re a trusted and recognisable face in the parish, someone to turn to and seek advice from.”

Sally has helped Thelma, a grandmother and mother-of-two, to install grab-rails and perch stools



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in her bathroom so that the pensioner, who struggles to walk without support, can wash more easily and has helped her fill in forms for a disabled parking badge.

If the winter brings snow and ice she is also on hand to fetch her essentials like bread and milk.

“For some elderly people who might not have family, we can also help join them up with local clubs



FRIENDLY VISITOR: Thelma Morgan of Meadow Park has a chat to Village Agent Sally Austin

and groups,” said Sally. “Improving their levels of social interaction is shown to help their health.”

It’s hoped that the service, which relies largely on funding from Essex County Council, will in the future extend over the whole county but the council needs to make £235 million of savings over the next three years so it is uncertain.

The Chronicle has again teamed up with the Essex Community Foundation to support vital services such as that provided by the Village Agents as part of our Surviving Winter Appeal 2013, and to

work alongside agents and Age UK to identify people at high risk of fuel poverty or isolation during the coldest months of the year.

Grants from the 2012 appeal helped provide hot meals and warmth packs to the elderly and vulnerable, enabled essential social groups to keep running through the winter months, and supported shelters for the county’s homeless.

If your voluntary organisation supports elderly or vulnerable people and a grant would help, call Essex Community Foundation’s grants team on 01245 356018.

HOW TO HELP

- You can text COLD00£10 (or other amount) to 70070
- Give online at www.justgiving.com/Winter-Appeal-2013
- Or you can send a cheque to Essex Community Foundation, 121 New London Road, Chelmsford CM2 0QT – please fill in and return the Surviving Winter form, and remember to tick the Gift Aid box