



Befriending team for older people feeling isolated

By David Melsome

Age UK Barnet has launched a new short-term befriending and support service to help older people who are feeling lonely, isolated or disconnected from their community.

Enabling Connections offers up to six months of free, volunteered support. Volunteers work one-to-one with individuals to help them regain confidence, rediscover interests, reconnect with friends and feel part of local life again. For people who are housebound, support focuses on digital skills and online connection.

The Age UK Barnet team, based in Oak Lane, N2, say many people may benefit: those living alone, recently bereaved, recovering from illness, caring for someone else, adjusting to retirement or experiencing low mood linked to loneliness.

The service also supports people recently diagnosed with dementia who can engage with short-term volunteer support. "Sometimes all someone needs is a bit of encouragement and a friendly face to help them take the next step," said the charity's Home Support Manager Rebecca Bayne, who is heading up the service. "Enabling Connections is about giving people the confidence to rebuild social connections in a way that feels

safe and achievable."

Volunteers help individuals set personal goals, whether that's joining a local group, getting out for a walk, learning to use a smartphone or simply reconnecting with old friends. All volunteers are DBS-checked, trained and supported by Age UK Barnet.

Referrals are open to anyone aged 55+ living in Barnet who wants to make positive social changes and can engage with a volunteer for up to six months.

To find out more or make a referral call 020 8150 0967 or email enablingconnections@ageukbarnet.org.uk



Togetherness: Friend to friend



Vinyl Club members with some of their favourite discs and host Phil Hilton standing centre rear. Photo Age UK Barnet

Music lovers put the needle on the record

The Vinyl Club at Age UK Barnet in Oak Lane, N2, has got off to a rocking start. Club host Phil Hilton shares what's become a truly life-enhancing pleasure for all involved.

Whenever I have to play an album track at the Age UK Barnet Vinyl Club, there is a gleeful tension as the group watches me crouch, squint, and tentatively drop the needle onto the LP. I frequently botch it up. My humiliation has become part of the fun.

At the start of the year, a member of the Age UK team had the idea of a music-listening group and my wife, who also works there, suggested this might be a constructive use for the countless hours I waste on rock-based books, podcasts and documentaries.

It's instantly become a magical space where people bring Andean panpipes, original Beatles singles and Eighties dance hits. We listen together, all the way through (unless the owner signals they've heard enough). If they don't have vinyl, Spotify is always on hand as backup. It's grown week on week, thanks to leaflets in Alan's Records, word of mouth and friends bringing friends.

Every track evokes both an era and a specific memory. The conversation is a mix of personal recollection and living history. Eric Clapton's 21st birthday party. One regular brought in an immaculate, alphabetical index of all his incredible rarities. I start each session with a half-hour slide presentation accompanied by some tracks. I try to find a theme that allows us to cover different

genres across different decades: it's a very mixed group with a real variety of ages and tastes. We've had: the politics of long hair in the 1960s, two very different songs from Harlem, hit albums made by people who couldn't stand each other... When that unmistakable vinyl crackle leads us into another song, everyone is immersed in the moment and experiencing the music together. It's a very special collective human pleasure. Each track creates a new mood and evokes a new set of emotions. And if I place the needle badly, even better.

Age UK Barnet welcomes anyone over 55. The Vinyl Club takes place every Tuesday at 5pm at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, N2 8LT. Entry is £3. For more details, contact activities@ageukbarnet.org.uk or call 020 8203 5040.

U3A activities

North London U3A is hosting its annual Open Morning this month to showcase the group activities they make available all year round.

Organiser Mike Lewin says: "The Open Morning is our opportunity to promote what we have to offer to retired and semi-retired members of the public from Finchley, Highgate and Muswell Hill, or further afield.

"Our members have been telling us that as well as interest group activities, ranging from subjects like literature and languages to more energetic

activities, more energetic activities, such as yoga and walks, they also enjoy purely social events."

The Open Morning event will take place on Monday 7 September from 10am to 11.30am at St Margaret's Church, Victoria Avenue, N3. Just drop in, or you can find more information on the NLU3A website: www.nlu3a.org.uk



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