

Springdene newsletter May 16, 2020

"I FELT really emotional about it. Having a new friend really made my day." This was the delighted reaction of resident Hetty Cullen on opening one of the letters sent in through our Pen Pal Club, in which volunteers, including children, have been writing letters to residents, telling them about their lives and receiving letters back.

What better in this time of crisis than to make contact with somebody who could become a friend for life?

The scheme is the brainchild of Eirlys, our activities coordinator at Springview, who says: "It started out as a way of bringing people hope at a time of lockdown. I got members of my family, including my grandma, my mum and my sisters-in-law and their families, to write in. So far we have managed to pair 20 people – and more keep wanting to join in."

The latest recruits to the scheme are children from Merryhills primary school in Enfield. Their messages of love and hope are going to be greatly appreciated. And it's not just our residents who are benefiting.

Research for the National Literacy Trust shows that writing letters makes children feel happy and helps them express their feelings. Children who write letters regularly are more likely to be confident writers and have more positive attitudes to writing. So it is a winner for everyone!

In our other homes, everybody has been busy on the activities front. At Spring Lane Magda has been preparing daily packs for residents containing quizzes, poems and lots of topical material, while the art gallery is showing off everybody's creative side.

Steve, our new activities supremo at Spring Grove, has been providing his unique range of entertainment. Very popular are his inimitable afternoon singalongs in the corridors, where he is happy to respond to any request for a favourite 'oldie'. The songs sound great with their professional backing tracks, and there were lots of smiles when Steve sang for Lillian Clark on her 95th birthday – complete with a delicious cake baked by the chef.

In the meantime, our hard-working carers are continuing to get some very special treats of their own. At Spring Grove Rose Kallenburg's daughter Pamela Sinclair sent a large box of fabulous tins of cookies from Selfridges and Mrs Muskett's daughter, Jennie, did some delectable home baking, sending in a range of cookies and cakes.

There was a scrummy Marks & Spencer Chocolate Hamper Box from Mrs Clark's daughter Michelle, while Dominos delivered six boxes of pizza for hungry staff from Paul Bradley's daughter Roz.

Roz writes: "Dad has been so well looked after and is so content. I do miss visiting him and all the wonderful carers I have come to know. However, Dad is not missing me – he is very happy and relaxed, which is as it should be. Also there is so much going on to entertain him and other residents that I am just delighted and reassured of his well-being."

Over at Spring Lane there were some gorgeous orchids and chocolates for all staff from Pam Hudson and the Cataree family. All these gifts are hugely appreciated by our carers who have now been working selflessly on the front line for months to keep our residents safe from Covid-19.

It is stressful and psychologically demanding work, and the nature of care home life, involving close and intimate contact with others, poses great personal risk. We continue to be very grateful to all our staff, including our hard-working home managers Sony, Lori and Mary. Mark, our group operations manager, is doing a fantastic job holding everything together.

In a week that has seen Prime Minister Boris Johnson relax some of the lockdown restrictions for us all, we're pleased to say that in the homes, residents are enjoying returning to some of the communal areas, balancing a return to social life with social distancing. Walks in the gardens – in some of the lovely May sunshine we have had this week – have been a particular pleasure. Some have even been taking tea and cake outside.

On the practical front we are still doing well with personal protective equipment and our managers are pleased to have been able to source a good supply of face masks from China. One lovely volunteer has been busy sewing face masks for us

as well as donating some she has bought from the pharmacy. Thank you, Bronwen Vinson!

The news around testing continues to be frustrating. Back in April the government promised testing kits to assess residents and staff – regardless of whether or not they have symptoms. The idea was for them to be sent direct to the homes so everybody could be tested at the same time. But so far Whitehall bureaucracy seems to have got in the way and the process has been very slow. We'll keep you posted on progress.

One of the great benefits of being in one of our homes at this time is that there is plenty of engaging human company for people who might otherwise have to shield on their own. How much better to be looked after and well fed in a caring environment than having to rely on strangers to do errands for you and perhaps experience overwhelming loneliness at home?

It is a sentiment expressed by several of you, and we would like to share another warm testimonial from Jennie Muskett, daughter of Spring Grove resident Michael Muskett:

"I want to reiterate to you and express how grateful I am to you and your wonderful staff for taking care of my father. You always do an amazing job and during these difficult times, your standards have even elevated to meet the additional demands and difficulties. Your record speaks for itself.

"Not being able to see my father and hold his hand for all these weeks is incredibly painful, because I know that he too, is going through difficult times as his condition progresses. And it is inexplicable and unnatural to him that I do not visit him every day, as I used to do. But knowing he is in the very best possible hands, being taken care of by such experienced, kind and sensitive people, I feel very lucky and this gives me enormous peace of mind. I can relax, knowing he is safe, respected and that his needs are met with courtesy and kindness every minute of the day."

Stay safe and stay well!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J E Balcombe'.

J E Balcombe, CEO Springdene Group