



# Volunteer Handbook

**07956 019 611**  
**[gns.nea@gmail.com](mailto:gns.nea@gmail.com)**  
**[www.neagns.co.uk](http://www.neagns.co.uk)**

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## Welcome

Thank you for volunteering to be part of the Abingdon Good Neighbour Scheme (GNS). This scheme would be unable to run without you. At all times we want you to feel valued for the service you provide to our community.

This handbook is designed to give you clear guidelines so that you can better support our neighbours. However it is not exhaustive, if you find something not covered in this handbook, please get in touch.

As a committee, we will keep in regular contact with you and provide you with the support you need. We will also hold social events to help you develop a sense of team identity; create bonds with other volunteers and also to say thank you for all your hard work!

We hope that the GNS will help make Abingdon an even better place to live.

## What is a Good Neighbour Scheme?

Good Neighbour Schemes are local voluntary groups, which offer a service in their community for those in need of help and support, which cannot be supplied through Social Care and Health and other professional care agencies.

The people that may need the support of the Abingdon Good Neighbour Scheme may be older people, people with disabilities, single parents and young mothers, people temporarily in need through illness or anyone who may be isolated in the community.

Abingdon Good Neighbour Scheme is a friendly group of local volunteers who give their time and services to help neighbours in our community. We offer help to adults of any age.

## Things we do

Below is a list of tasks we offer to help with. If there is another area not included here that you feel you can offer help with, please contact the co-ordinator.

- Visiting and befriending.
- Help in the garden.
- Writing letters, filing, forms.
- Changing light bulbs, fuses, replacing batteries, moving small items of furniture.
- Basic DIY.
- Collecting prescriptions, shopping.
- Changing library books.
- Dog walking/help with pets.
- Reading to people with a visual impairment.
- Helping people use email and the internet.

## Why have a Good Neighbour Scheme?

We can:

- Offer small scale support that can't be provided by professional services.
- Reduce feelings of isolation, exclusion, loneliness and anxiety
- Help prevent the need for more intensive or specialist care.
- Provide a link between the young and the old, and between new comers and more established members of the community.
- Allow individuals to remain independent and in their own homes for longer.

## Keeping in touch

Keeping the lines of communication open is very important for a number of reasons. It helps the co-ordinator keep our records up to date and ensures the smooth running of the scheme. Neighbours can be sure they will receive help promptly and volunteers can be sure they know what is expected of them.

The co-ordinator will email all the volunteers when they have a neighbour who has asked for help. Volunteers should respond via email or phone if they want to take up the task.

After the first visit volunteers should call or email the co-ordinator to let them know. If you are ill or can't make it, please notify the co-ordinator. If you arrive and find you are unable to carry out a task, please notify the co-ordinator.

Two members of the Committee will have always visited the neighbour and carried out an assessment of the environment and the person. The co-ordinators will never send a volunteer anywhere they have not visited.

## **Dos and Don'ts**

If you need any further advice you can contact the co-ordinator.

### **Do:**

- Make sure you have all the necessary information before you set off, including the neighbour's phone number.
- If they keep the front door key in a keysafe, make sure you have the code.
- Show your ID badge when you arrive.
- Many vulnerable people are disturbed by unwanted mail and telephone calls. Please offer to register the neighbour with the Telephone Preference Service and the Mailing Preference Service, which safely and effectively reduces the number of unwanted communications. This can easily be done online ([http://www.tpsonline.org.uk/tps/number\\_type.html](http://www.tpsonline.org.uk/tps/number_type.html) and [http://www.mpsonline.org.uk/mpsr/mps\\_choosetype.html](http://www.mpsonline.org.uk/mpsr/mps_choosetype.html))
- Feel free to make contact with family members if this seems appropriate. The coordinator can give you contact details.
- After you visit a neighbour for the first time, please let the coordinator know, and if you are visiting regularly, keep the co-ordinator notified, at least once every 6 months.
- Let the co-ordinator know if you plan to stop visiting.
- Inform the co-ordinator if you are concerned about a neighbour.
- Inform the co-ordinator of any accidents.
- Be careful when lifting objects. Don't lift anything you can't easily manage. If in doubt, seek assistance. Never attempt to lift a neighbour on your own.

### **Don't:**

- Don't try to complete a task you are uncomfortable with.
- Don't accept any inappropriate behaviour (verbal or physical) and inform the co-ordinator of any incidents.
- Don't give personal contact details to neighbours unless you feel comfortable doing so.
- Don't give loans to neighbours.
- Don't let a neighbour grant you a Lasting Power of Attorney.

## **Befriending: how to make your visit go well**

Here are a few tips. If you have other suggestions – let us know! If you are unsure about visiting someone for the first time, do ask the coordinator if one of our experienced befrienders could go with you.

**Focus on the person inside -- that's who you want to connect with.** He or she is still there, even if the outer package has changed considerably. It can help to look into the person's eyes. They really are the "window to the soul."

**Time your visit with care.** Many elderly people have the most energy and alertness in the morning or right after a midday meal. Sharing the meal itself can give you both something to focus on, especially if the neighbour could use a little help. Call ahead to ask if you're unsure when a good visiting time is.

**Set the right tone with a warm greeting.** Don't stand stiffly, gazing down at someone in a wheelchair or seat who can't rise up easily to greet you. Imagine if your placements were reversed and act accordingly: You'd like your visitor to make eye contact, give a warm hug or handshake, and then sit down to talk at eye level.

**Tweak your communication style**

- *Raise your voice slightly if needed.* About half of those over 75 have hearing trouble. But don't shout, which can actually be even harder to hear.
- *Ask if you can turn off the radio or other background noise.*

**Bring props.** You can take off some of the "performance" pressure you might feel in making conversation by bringing along a helping hand. Examples:

- Some favourite or seasonal music (and something to play it on if needed)
- Recent videos to watch (a tablet with a large screen is easier to see than a phone)
- Old photographs or documents you've found
- Ask the neighbour or their relatives for photo albums
- An old toy or collectible
- Recipe cards

Young children and pets can be wonderful distracters, too. Keep child visits brief if they have a lot of energy (and keep them home if they're very noisy or disruptive). Ask ahead to check this will be all right.

**Come prepared with a few springboard phrases.** Look for topics in both the present and the past. For example:

- *Refer to the props:* "Look what I found. . . ." Or "I've brought something you might like. . . ."
- *Start with your own life.* For example: "It's cold today. What's your favourite season?" Or, "My son started secondary school. What subject did you like best in school?"
- *When in doubt, ask.* "Are you comfortable talking about X?"

**Try a change of scenery.** Moving out of the room can boost mood and give you both fresh focal points to talk about. If there's a courtyard or garden, the neighbour may welcome a chance to spend time there. Or consider going out for a short walk or drive.

**Choose short-and-sweet over long-and-vapid.** There's no ideal length for a visit. It depends on the health and energy of the person you're visiting and how your time together progresses. In general, though, briefer is better. Most people treasure a half hour of warm connection over sitting in silence for twice that time.

**Don't get intimidated by dementia.** Most of these tips can apply to [spending time with someone who has Alzheimer's disease](#). You'll need to be more patient with repetition and circular conversations, of course. But in some ways, this takes the pressure off: Find out what promotes a good time -- music, looking at photos, a change of scenery -- and run with it, visit after visit.

**Conversation Topics.** Ever feel like you don't know what else to say? Long-time befrienders often feel "talked out." For others, making conversation with a frail older adult can be hard if you're unsure what's safe or comfortable to bring up. And people with memory problems may resist direct questioning because they feel like they're being quizzed and get nervous about being unable to supply a "right" answer. It's almost always a good idea to ask about their family. Do they have children? Grandchildren? Great-grandchildren?

Try this conversation-starter alternative: "Tell me about . . ."

These three little words are nonthreatening and inviting. Casually curious, they work for any topic, from the weather to politics. They allow for open-ended responses. The conversation may go nowhere (try again another time) or take off.

Some examples:

- "Tell me about what winters were like in Scotland when you were a boy."
- "Tell me about your wedding day."
- "Tell me about this blanket -- you knitted it, didn't you?"
- "Tell me about that pet dog you had."
- "Tell me about the garden you always had."
- "Tell me about why you joined the military."
- "Tell me about how you stay so calm all the time."
- "Tell me about your mother."

## **Confidentiality**

While volunteering you may find out personal information about the neighbours you are working with. It is extremely important that people are able to trust and respect our scheme; if you are told something in confidence you should keep it to yourself or only pass it onto the co-ordinator.

However if you are told something that indicates risk or abuse this must be passed on to an appropriate agency. You should tell the person concerned that you must share the information. Get in touch with the co-ordinator, who will advise you about further steps to be taken.

## **Data Protection**

GNS keeps records of all volunteers with personal information as given on your application form. No one other than the GNS committee and co-ordinators are able to access this information, which is kept in a secure place.

## **Safeguarding**

If you suspect that a client or any vulnerable member of a client's household is being abused or is at risk of abuse, you must immediately report this to the duty coordinator.

If a client has abused you or any other volunteer or there is a risk that they will do so, you must immediately report this to the duty coordinator.

If you are aware of any accusation of abuse (true or untrue) relating to an AGNS volunteer or client, you must immediately report this to the duty coordinator.

## Insurance

All volunteers in the scheme are covered by insurance. Public liability insurance is essential for a Good Neighbour Scheme, it guards against claims for accidental damage or personal injury caused by volunteers in the scheme. **You must let your car insurance company know that you do volunteer work** (it usually does not affect the price).

## Expenses

The Abingdon Good Neighbour Scheme is free to use and free to take part in. There should be no cost to either neighbours or volunteers. Where possible, we try to avoid incurring costs, however if you find yourself out of pocket for volunteering you can claim back your expenses. A form is provided for this purpose. Please contact the co-ordinator.

## DBS Checks (formerly CRB)

DBS checks are now routinely requested for all voluntary roles that involve working with vulnerable people.

You will be asked to complete the DBS check online. Be sure to sign up for the DBS Update Service when you do so.

## The Blue Badge for parking

If you take an elderly or disabled neighbour by car, you should ask if they have a Blue Badge, which allows you to use disabled parking. It applies to the person, not the vehicle, so the person does not have to be a driver. It is not given for temporary conditions, such as a broken leg. A person is eligible without further assessment if they

- are severely sight impaired (blind),
- receive the Higher Rate of the Mobility Component of the Disability Living Allowance
- receive a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) because they meet a 'Moving Around' descriptor for the Mobility Component because they cannot walk more than 50 metres. This is a score of 8 points or more.
- receive a War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement.

They are also eligible if they

- have a permanent and substantial disability which means that they have very considerable difficulty in walking,

but in this case they will need to be assessed by the local authority, who may ask them to attend a mobility assessment. More information at <https://www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge>.

## Useful Contacts

**111** is the NHS non-emergency number. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Abingdon Auto Taxis	527 711
Abingdon Community Hospital	(01865) 904 346
Abingdon Library	520 374
Abingdon Surgery (Stert Street)	523 126
Long Furlong Medical Centre	522 379
Malthouse Surgery	468 860
Marcham road Surgery	522 602
Police non-emergency number	101
Vargas Taxis	559 606

The Abingdon and District Volunteer Centre **Car Scheme** provides lifts to doctors' surgeries and hospitals.

Charge: Variable. Minimum Charge: £5.

NO WHEELCHAIR ACCESS AVAILABLE

01235 522 438

Contact office between 10.00 am and 12.30 pm, Monday-Friday.

We understand they normally require three days' notice.

No email.

The Silver Line is the confidential, free **helpline** for older people across the UK open every day and night of the year. Trained helpline staff:

- Offer information, friendship and advice
- Link callers to local groups and services
- Offer regular befriending calls

[thesilverline.org.uk](http://thesilverline.org.uk)

0800 4 70 80 90

With **Silver Line Friends**, you can receive a regular weekly friendship call. Or you may like to join a **Silver Circle** and take part in a regular group call on subjects that interest you.

The **Community Information Network Directory** lists a wide variety of activities, support and opportunities across Oxfordshire. Search under "Community" for numerous social groups suitable for the lonely or elderly.

The **Age UK** Abingdon Office and Resource Centre can provide information and advice about what services and support are available locally.

Open from 10am - 4pm, Monday to Friday.

Age UK Oxfordshire  
St Edmund House  
39 West St Helen Street  
Abingdon, OX14 5BT

0345 450 1276

Email: [admin@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:admin@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk)

**Contact the Elderly** organises monthly Sunday afternoon tea parties for small groups of older people aged 75 and over, who live alone. We don't know if they have a group in this area.

Ring 0800 716 543, [www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk](http://www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk)

or contact:

Suzan Hyland

02074 205 811

The Red Cross “**Home from hospital**” service in Oxfordshire provides short-term care and support in the home for people after an accident or illness. Referrals can be made while the person is in hospital, or even before they go in.

(01865) 760 555

[hfhoxon@redcross.org.uk](mailto:hfhoxon@redcross.org.uk)

[redcross.org.uk](http://redcross.org.uk)

## Donations

Donations are always welcome. Donations can be made by cheque, made payable to NEAGNS, or in cash and forwarded to the Treasurer.

## The Committee

Chairman

David Harmsworth

Secretary

Carolyn Thorne and Judith Keymer

Treasurer

Alan Keymer

DBS coordinator

Michael Kovari

Telephone co-ordinators:

Valerie Shipp

Carolyn Thorne

Kevin Thorne

Michael Kovari

Vanessa Shenton

Alan Keymer

Mary Sheldon-Williams

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