Barnes care home combats loneliness for International Day of Friendship

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The staff and residents at Viera Gray House in Barnes are demonstrating the ways in which they prevent loneliness within the home, in time for International Day of Friendship on Friday 30th July.

‘Chronic loneliness’ is a pressing issue for many older adults worldwide, more so than for their younger counterparts, with 6% to 13% of people aged over 65 living in the UK saying that they felt lonely all or most of the time. Older adults who are socially isolated are also at a higher risk of both mental and physical health issues.

International Day of Friendship sees countries around the world celebrate the power of human connection. Many of us have spent so much of the last year apart, and care homes in particular have felt the effects of social distancing, as many residents rely on their daily visitors to strengthen their sense of social connection.

Viera Gray House, a Greensleeves Care home in Barnes, is focusing on how the periods of lockdown actually strengthened friendships within the home, amongst its residents.

One inseparable pair is Dodie and Gladys. The two ladies have been a great comfort to each other at Viera Gray House, having met years ago when they arrived at the home at similar times.

Activities Co-ordinator, Lorraine, said of their friendship:

“These two ladies have been in the home for many years. As soon as they met, they instantly clicked. They really do everything together. Gladys looks after Dodie and Dodie relies on Gladys for comfort. Gladys is very protective of Dodie.”

Gladys said about Dodie: *“She is a very good friend. I love her very much, like I love my children.”*

Residents at the home are encouraged to interact through the many scheduled activities, as well as one to one time with both staff members and each other. However, most of the residents do not need encouraging, and will befriend others with no trouble.

Some more unlikely friendships have formed, for example Beryl and Sandy, who have been described by staff at Viera Gray House as ‘chalk and cheese.’ Sandy can be quite shy, and enjoys spending time reading in her room, whereas Beryl is much more outgoing, and therefore helps to bring Sandy out of her shell at times. Beryl will encourage Sandy to join in with activities in the home.

Sandy said of her friendship with Beryl: *“She’s a good friend, and I wouldn’t want to be without her.”*

Activities co-ordinator, Gemma, said: “*We like to encourage everyone to join in group activities so that we all spend time together. One-to-ones are also something we plan in so that everyone gets to have a chat about how they are feeling.”*

The care home environment can provide opportunities for older adults to regain a sense of inclusion that is often lost during later life, and initiatives like International Day of Friendship will hopefully encourage new friendships worldwide.

For more information about Viera Gray House, please visit
https://www.greensleeves.org.uk/care-homes/viera-gray-house-barnes-london/

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