



Bromford, Firs & Hodge Hill

COVID-19
Unsung Heroes
2022

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NEAR
NEIGHBOURS
BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Welcome to Unsung Heroes!

“to work together with neighbours across our area to develop our community into a place of creativity and compassion, where all feel welcome, all feel connected, all feel they belong and all feel that they can flourish”

(the Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together vision)

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested our neighbourhood in many hard and painful ways, but through it all we've seen just how amazingly creative and compassionate our neighbours are, and how proud we can be of our community here. This booklet gives just a tiny snapshot of all the many incredible stories from the past couple of years. We'd love to see many, many more in the years to come!

Florence Parkes, FBNT Chair



When Hodge Hill Church brought together the very first Hodge Hill Unsung Heroes event in 2012, we discovered an abundance of stories and people, passions and gifts in our local communities — countless small acts of kindness that mostly went ‘under the radar’. Our vision since then has been ‘growing loving community... with all our neighbours, across Hodge Hill’, and it's been amazing to see what has grown and flourished over the last 10 years — even through the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the hardest of times, the treasure in our communities has sparked!

Revd Al Barrett, Vicar





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Celebrating Community

When pandemic restrictions mean you're not allowed to hug your friend, not able to share a meal with people you don't live with, and sometimes not even leave your house, then how can you still be a good neighbour? How is it still possible to sustain, build and celebrate community life? Here are just a few of the amazing stories of neighbours who found creative ways to help our communities keep going and keep growing, all the way through COVID-19 times.

Mel Waite built a tree house for the community that people of all ages could come and put stones and messages in. Although it was vandalised several times, Mel kept on going back with her grandchildren to fix it back up again. Nothing would stop her. Mel was always full of energy, looking out for others, supporting whatever was happening, and posting pictures which inspired others.



Racheal and Keith Faloona helped and supported Mel through the lockdowns, decorating the tree house. They have also constantly tried to keep the car park by their flat clean by litter picking, joined in with community litter picks and always been happy to help when they can.



The Street Connectors

A man with glasses and a blue lanyard sits on a large inflatable Santa Claus. He is wearing a dark jacket over a light blue shirt. He is standing in the doorway of a shop, with shelves of bottles visible in the background. The inflatable Santa is red and white with a large red bow.

Celebrating Community



Celebrating Community



Tiffany, Sahra, Nikki, Ken and the residents in blocks 5 & 7 Kempson Road all came together to make over their communal gardens. They worked together to transform the space for everyone in the block. They also hosted a stall on the Halloween Trail and the Wizard of Oz trail. They are a real inspiration by being good neighbours and looking out for each other.



Sahra Farah (a long-time member of the Street Connecting team) always goes out of her way to make new families to the area feel welcome and informs them of all the local activities that are around.

Kenny Ken, our neighbourhood DJ, played music outside several times a week for neighbours to enjoy!



Philip Hawkins decorated his front garden beautifully, brightening up the estate, and co-organised performances of the Bromford Theatre Group to entertain and educate the community, celebrating the hidden beauty and talent of the Firs & Bromford —including a VE Day celebration, a ghost walk, and the *Robin Hood Through Time* film.

Bromford Theatre Group

During the first lockdown the group wasn't able to do what it normally would do so re-imagined different ways of coming together to bring smiles and entertainment to the community. This includes filming ghost walks and a performance for VE day. As soon as lockdowns ended a film project was planned which lifted the spirits of all involved and gave people something to focus on, and something to be proud of. Last year the group were determined to bring back the pantomime and it gave so much joy to so many people involved and who attended.



Celebrating Community





Celebrating Community

Jill O'Hare goes out every day litter-picking, cleaning the streets on the Bromford Estate. She's part of an amazing team of litter-pickers, covering Firs & Bromford, and also the wider Hodge Hill area (through Hodge Hill Residents Group).



Antonio Moore was seen tipping some gravel onto a path in Comet Park. When he was asked who he worked for, he explained that he just walked through the park every day, and one day saw a lady struggling with a pushchair in the mud. He helped her, and then came back the next day and laid a harder, dry path.

Steve Harris has been cutting the grass on the large bank between Wetherby Close and Kempton Park Road for the last 10 years. Prior to that, no-one had been cutting it and people had been using it to dump mattresses and other unwanted items. He and another neighbour also keep the path tidy. Steve continued to do this during the last two (Covid) years. This kind act has helped to transform and keep the neighbourhood tidy and given pleasure to a lot of neighbours.



Barry Thornton wanted to show his thanks to the NHS by digging a flower bed spelling out NHS. It became a real symbol in our community during the lockdowns. He also shops for some of his neighbours and looks out for others.

Tom Wheatley had to stop his events business during the lockdown and work full-time, including nights. He still though came and did the sleigh. We did 2 Christmas Santa runs and also allowed us to use the sleigh for the Wizard of Oz. These were such important moments in the pandemic where we could come together safely.



Every year **Dave Edwards** decorates his garden with the most amazing Christmas lights. It is a wonderful display, and always raises money for important charities. Dave sadly lost his dad and the latest display raised £1000's for the British Heart Foundation in his honour. This display brings so much joy and real is a ray of light.

The Chapman Family (Gareth, Kelly, Emily and Finley) followed the Wizard of Oz procession around the estate and gave their time to support the events that followed. Since then they have got heavily involved in so many things including community events, the panto, theatre group, and youth activities. They can never do enough and are always offering to help.



Arwa Kassim had been leading a planning group which was organising a Big Iftar (communal fast-breaking meal). This sadly had to be cancelled due to the pandemic, but she still carried on helping to organise an Iftar during lockdown. Friends from different backgrounds all fasted for a day alongside Arwa and other Muslim friends. We all cooked for each other and shared a meal in our homes. It was a wonderful time to be together, even though we were physically apart.































































Celebrating Community





































Celebrating Community

Councillors Diane Donaldson & Majid Mahmood helped organise a local food bank & delivered food to those who were unable to leave home. If you have a question, they are always willing to help and ready to respond.



Alan Crawford does a huge amount of fundraising for local organisations in Firs and Bromford. It is his job, but he always goes above and beyond. During the pandemic he helped local groups access crucial funding which helped get the resources for food clubs and other emergency responses. He helped secure funding for the Hodge Hill Pantry project and is continuing to support in whatever ways he can.



The whole **TogetherWeCan!** team (Stewart, Lucy, Ria, Janey, Paul, Dan, Flo, Cath, Tim and Gemma) continued working throughout the pandemic, supporting neighbours and a whole spectrum of community activities, for young people, families and adults alike. They had to completely reinvent their ways of working, under COVID-19 restrictions, and went above and beyond their job roles to ensure local residents remained supported and connected, and to encourage creative neighbour-led initiatives.



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Growing & Sharing Food

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, food has been more precious than ever. Shops ran out of essential items, people who were shielding weren't able to leave their homes, travelling to and from shops was more difficult, and many of us struggled financially. Our communities stepped up to the challenges, not just helping neighbours to access the food they needed, but using that as a vital way of staying connected, looking after each other, and even trying something new — like cooking new recipes, growing food at home, and sharing what we've grown.

Ellen Knight set up a community food table. Ellen (with the support of **Emma Batch**) stood outside every day and made sure it was always full of food.



Jayne Higgins put a much needed free food table in her front garden, allowed food to be stored in her bungalow and let local residents drop food off there as well.

Flo Parkes & Phil Howkins provided a table of food to those who needed it locally. A night table (with food replenished daily) meant that plenty of people helped themselves to fresh food without feeling they had to ask. Many would have gone without if it wasn't there.



Growing & Sharing Food

Cleaner, Greener Firs & Bromford is an initiative of Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together, encouraging and supporting local residents to use and develop our local green spaces, and to get involved in growing and green activities.

Louise Marsh used her passion, ideas and energy to help change the way the Greener, Cleaner Firs & Bromford worked throughout the pandemic. She fully embraced the home-grow project by helping others and setting up her own garden to produce more plants for plant swaps. She was dedicated to the local community garden spaces throughout and helped to look after these as restrictions allowed, which enabled us to grow some produce to supply the local food distribution work even when the normal gardening groups could not take place. She has been a key part of planning and delivering many of the sessions we were able to put on in the last two years and has taken up opportunities to support her neighbours and local community further.



Ian ('Tommo') Thomson became involved in the Greener Cleaner Firs & Bromford project prior to the pandemic, and just before the first lockdown used his passion and energy to plan and pitch a project for fruit trees for local residents. As part of a wider wish to see the area 'greened up' and more bio diverse he championed wild flower planting, our community gardening spaces, and supporting more residents to utilise their own gardens. Despite the difficulties during the lockdowns he was not deterred and was a key element in the delivery of the home-grow project which expanded from fruit trees to raised beds, seeds and plants for local residents to get gardening at home.

Cath Fletcher supports the Greener Cleaner Firs & Bromford team and activities (as part of the wider *TogetherWeCan!* team). During COVID-19, Cath and the team delivered seeds, compost and pots to people's doorsteps, organised a plant swap and Litter Picker Library, and helped with food deliveries.



Karen Priestley set up and ran (with her husband Steve) the HHCV Food Bank (from St Wilfrid's Community Centre). Although Karen struggles herself, she has helped so many lives, ensuring the community has been well fed.

Callie Taylor is a kind and caring young woman who has always helped out at St Wilfrid's Community Centre with the elderly and crafty kids classes. During this crisis and lockdown she has helped out at the centre's food bank, spending many hours sorting and packing food donations and helping to deliver them around our local area. She's a mom to a 10year old daughter and even though there is the fear of catching Covid, Callie has still continued to don her pinnie and just get stuck in.



Rose Ahmed took food parcels to families, and paid for them by contacting local shop/restaurant owners who donated generously. She then organised her family to deliver, at Christmas and Eid these parcels contained special treats.

Charles Cropper put a box on his drive for people to donate food for the Let's Feed Brum campaign, and knocked every door on his street to let people know. He took a car load over to donate. He is a star!



During lockdown **Mary Rooney** decided to make food parcels up, using the food she couldn't eat from the government parcel she received, and adding in extra items. She would call on neighbours to see if they were ok, and make an extra meal for a neighbour to make sure she was eating.



Sonny (Bromford Fish Bar) and his wife have been giving away (and delivering) free hot meals every night to the over 65's. It's all paid out of his own pocket and he receives no payment for doing it.

Growing & Sharing Food





Growing & Sharing Food



Tina & Craig O'Dell (based at CAFLO Community Centre) have been feeding those who need food, delivering hot dinners to the elderly, and also sending out food parcels and helping those worse hit by COVID-19. They have received no payment for doing it and most of the time pay for things out of their own pockets. They have also been providing a pay-as-you-feel food table outside the Community Centre.

CAFLO Community Centre



Melissa O'Sullivan has been coming off a long shift at work as a care worker, straight to the Centre to cook meals, sort and deliver food parcels, and take deliveries of food from other organisations.

After a long shift at work **Sally-Ann Smith** has come straight to the centre to make up a lot of food parcels, then delivered to those in and out of Bromford who are in need of food or hot meals.

Every Thursday from day one **Jo Green** was there to help deliver hot meals to those in the local community. No questions asked she was there having a little chat and making sure they were all ok and happy. Jo is also a long-time member of the Street Connector team, and has inspired many others with her courage to come out door-knocking, even when she is finding life hard.



JoJo Dugmore has helped throughout the pandemic. She supported the opening of Hodge Hill's Pantry (see next page) and volunteered every Thursday. She also spends many hours running a food table at CAFLO offering food to people who need it. She has also supported many community events including the Santa sleigh and events outside the Hub. She will do anything for anyone.

Martin twice a week has taken food from the Centre and distributed it to the elderly residents within his local area from his food table. A lot of residents were self-isolating so he's helped many to access food.





'Your Local Pantry' (Hodge Hill)

a volunteer-led community food project, based at Hodge Hill Church, supported by Lucy Poulson and the *TogetherWeCan!* team. It was launched during COVID-19 to offer dignity and choice in access to food, to reduce food waste, and to offer a Place of Welcome for the whole community.



Unsung Hero nominees:

- **Pete Burrill** — Pantry team leader, “always there to listen, an inspiration to many”
 - **Michael Carolan** — “great at making sure people don’t get left out or left behind; delivering food parcels on his bike, checking in on neighbours; supporting Pantry... the driving force behind re-launching Men’s Brunch... unwavering commitment to giving back to his community”
 - **Lauree Carus** — “supports lots of community events with her wonderful baking skills... cooked weekly meals for neighbours... part of the Wednesday Pantry team and provided and cooked recipes for the Pantry’s Recipe bag initiative. ...so kind and generous with her time and gifts, but does it all very quietly.”
 - **Lyn Lynch** — “a wonderful woman who is so kind and caring towards everyone, of whatever age”
 - **Elaine Roff** — “helps collect and sort food, pack and deliver parcels... a key member of the team who prepare the Pantry shop each week and serve as a personal shopper on the day... deep and long term commitment to keeping these projects running”
 - **Courtney Smith** — “shows real commitment to supporting the Pantry project... a real do-er — we’re thankful he wandered in that Wednesday morning!”
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- **Genny Tunbridge** — “giving her time and energy, sharing her skills and passions for cooking and trees; made recipes for the Recipe bag project; made a tree trail on Hodge Hill Common”
 - **Andy Sheppard** — “regularly does late night food pick-ups, receives deliveries and stacks shelves; helping get Men’s Brunch going again”



Growing & Sharing Food





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Supporting Wellbeing

Living through the COVID-19 pandemic has been, for many of us, one of the toughest experience of our lives. Many of us have struggled with our mental health, and it's often been harder to look after our physical health and fitness too. As well as our incredible healthcare professionals, who have given so much through this time, our communities have shown us that our health and wellbeing begins where we live. Here are some of the people and organisations that have kept us going and looked out for us, picked us up when we've been down, and helped us discover the good in life.



Nicola Walrond set up a mindfulness Facebook page that has supported people and positively impacted their mental health, both in our local neighbourhood and much wider.

Sarah Dickenson (36 Fit) was out delivering food parcels through lockdown, and since then has been doing exercise classes which have helped people re-connect with each other and to their own health and fitness.



Susan Hands has checked on neighbours on her landing and supported them with their health and access to food. She has also been active in the community garden at Ambridge House.

Zalaykah Latham In lockdown this young girl went round and delivered plants to people so it can make them smile. She went round on her bike with her nan to make sure people were happy. She always goes out of her way to make people smile.



Supporting wellbeing





Supporting Wellbeing

During lockdown **Jazz & Rani (Mal's News)** made sure those who weren't able to get to the shop had food by offering a delivery service, and in turn checking on the residents as well. They have also worked closely with Hodge Hill Church's Mutual Aid Fund to enable neighbours who are struggling financially to access small grants for utility bills, phone credit, bus fares etc.

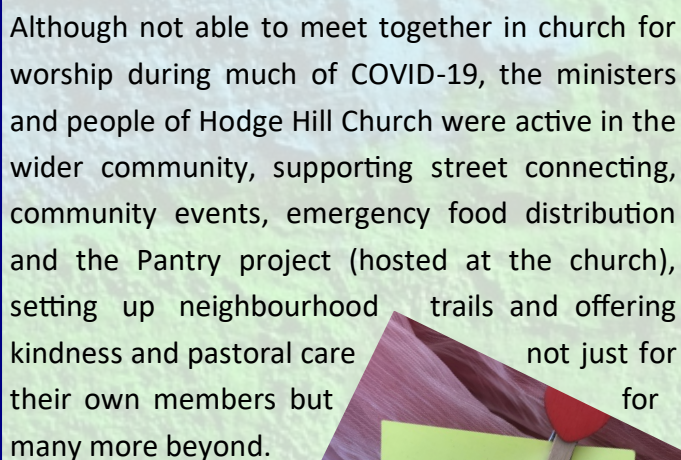
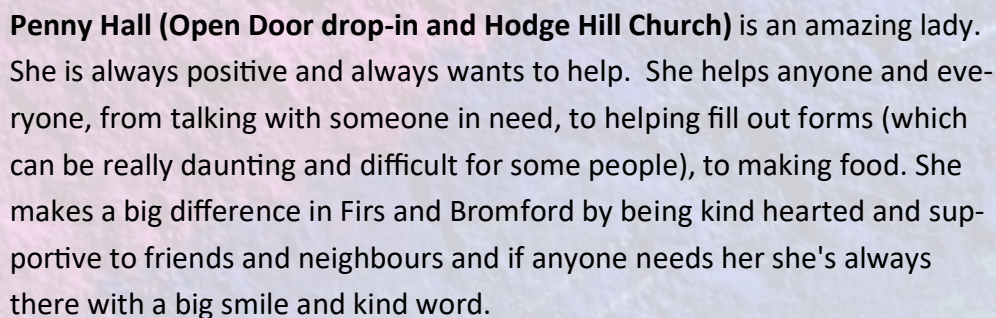


Shivani Sharma has been a key member of **Jhoots Pharmacy** on Bromford Drive for a few years now, always keen and willing to help anyone with prescriptions, health concerns, covid worries general health advice but has gone above and beyond her job. On top of that she has also made a lot of money for charity with her coffee morning and bake sales. She will be missed by many in the community (she's moving branch). Shivani is kind, loving, and always there for anyone that needs her.

Dr Naresh Aggarwal (Hodge Hill Family Practice) gave up his lunch breaks to give presentations by zoom to better inform people on the Firs and Bromford on the facts about Covid vaccinations.



Khalid, Israr and the team at Pillars Academy supported many families during the pandemic with food and phone calls. They were on call for many people and made a huge difference. They have also enthusiastically engaged in wider community events and activities.



Martin & Wendy Millman, Brian Hodgetts, Steve Smith, Soobie Whitfield
Revds Al Barrett, Gloria Smith, Sally Nash & Paul Nash (ministers)



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Children, young people & families

Life changed dramatically during COVID-19 for our children and young people, and for their families. From the challenges of home-schooling, to the restrictions on getting out and about for family activities, and the pressures of living together in the same space 24/7, family life has often been hard over these past couple of years. Here are some of the people and organisations who've made sure the fun hasn't disappeared, kept us smiling, and supported our families when things have been tough.



Claire Maclean was part of the Family Events Team, and was heavily involved in supporting neighbourhood 'trail' events throughout lockdown, at Halloween and Easter, and the big summer Wizard of Oz event. Among many other things Claire spent hours making up activity packs for families.

Family Events Team

Amy Connaire and **Laura Collins** (part of the Family Events Team) came up with the idea of the Halloween Trail around the neighbourhood, and put loads of work into making it happen, including drawing lots of other neighbours into getting involved and running stalls and activities along the route.

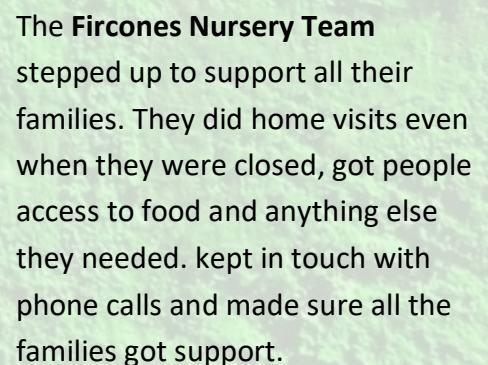




HEATHLANDS PRIMARY ACADEMY

Building on learning for a brighter future

Peter Higgins (Heathlands Academy) worked onsite at Heathlands Academy all throughout the pandemic. Ensuring care and provision was given to both children of Key Workers and those children who were the most vulnerable. Virtual schools were rolled out quickly and food vouchers distributed as quick as possible to ensure families and children did not go hungry, even when the government were so slow in getting them rolled out. surplus food from the school was donated to food banks to support families in need of food and Pete generally went above and beyond ensuring both Children, families and his staff were cared for and had everything they needed all without taking a holiday himself, and not seeing his own children for long periods of time. When schools returned he ensured that the priority wasn't just the children's educational needs, but that they felt safe, cared for and a real focus on well-being across the school. A true key worker and Unsung Hero!





Children, Young People & Families

126th Birmingham Scouts did carol singing, went out litter picking, and donated and delivered Christmas hampers to elderly neighbours.

The leaders of the **118th Birmingham Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorers** used their passion about Scouting, together with their time, energy and creative skills to keep the young people in this Scout Group engaged in activities right from the start of the first lockdown with weekly zoom meetings. They dropped off parcels to each young person containing what they needed to carry out activities. They even had a camping weekend - 'Build a fort in your own house and sleep in it!' As restrictions eased, they started to meet face to face again, but conformed to guidance by adapting meetings to be more outdoor based. Well done the 118th Group for making a difference to the young people in Hodge Hill during these challenging two years.



The leadership team of **147th Rainbows and Brownies** have worked hard to keep their young members involved in Guiding over the last year. They did not meet face to face until May but before that kept girls involved doing activities at home. Lots of outdoor activities were planned for meetings over the summer. Giving the girls opportunities to mix and develop friendships, play games and have fun has been important. Because of a number of girls wanting to join who were under 7, the team rose to the challenge and became a rainbow and Brownie unit catering for girls from 5-10.



The leaders at **82nd Birmingham Guides** have been busy supporting Guides aged 10-14 to continue to be involved in Girlguiding locally by providing an interesting and varied programme encouraging the girls to try new things and enjoy friendship and fun in what has been a difficult time. The leaders have gone out of their way to give the girls great experiences, a chance to try something new and memories that will last a lifetime.





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Memorial Awards

Tragically, the global pandemic of COVID-19 has seen a huge loss of lives across the world, and our local communities here have had our share of losses. Even when COVID-19 has not been directly responsible, losing a loved one during this time has been extra hard, as we've often not been able to visit them in hospital, be by their side at the very end, or gather family and friends together for the send-off we would have wanted. Here we remember just a handful of those loved ones to whom we've had to say goodbye. They represent the many more who will always be in our hearts, with deep gratitude for all they mean to us.



Gill Burrill has been a huge part of the life of Hodge Hill Church for many years, and in recent years she became a key founder member of the Real Junk Food Kitchen which ran at St. Wilfrids and then at the Hub. Along with husband Pete, they became a key driving force behind the project. Gill would help set-up, serve, clean up, help with the finances, and also generally be supportive, caring, welcoming and loving to all involved. During the pandemic Gill's health sadly worsened, but she remained a massive cheerleader and supporter of the newly formed Pantry, and if she was able to she would have been right there at the heart of the project.

Gill has been a loving, caring, generous and kind part of our community who would always look out for others.



Memorial Awards

Mary McKillop was 'Nanny Mary' to everyone! She was a caring neighbour, and also supported so many activities at St Wilfrid's Community Centre. Mary was always available, at the end of an event for a major clean-up at 12 midnight finishing at 2am. She loved to participate in all community activities and was more than happy to share her skills. Mary always thought of others before herself especially during the covid pandemic, volunteering during lockdown and whilst she was meant to be shielding!



Gary Burke attended many events held in and around the community. He loved the Tuesday Community Lunches and especially loved the Junk Food Project on a Thursday where he used to keep some of the volunteers on their toes. He is missed and remembered fondly by all who knew Gary in the Firs & Bromford community.

Last year Gary left us for pastures new. He did not want to leave but God had a special place for him with his Mom. Never a day goes by that we don't think about him and miss the banter. Thank you Gary for all the nice things you did for us.

Jayne Higgins got involved a lot with Ambridge House supporting community events, trips and being on committees for many years. She was also there as a friend to many. During the pandemic Jayne offered to put a much needed free food table in her front garden, allowing food to be stored in her bungalow and let local residents to drop food off there as well. That was her way she could help.

Jayne was very caring and she would help anybody, but she also did let you know if she didn't like what you were doing. She was honest and straight like that. Jayne was always there and you could go to her with anything. You could talk openly and honestly, and so would she. She would be there when you needed her. She was genuine, always fair and she just cared. Jane knew what it was like to go without and had times of struggle herself, and if she could help someone who was having a hard time, then she would. That is what drove her.





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Special Awards



Jess Elliot has been involved with Worth Unlimited and The Hub for over 10 years. From attending kids clubs, holiday provision to youth clubs and now as a "young leader" and "Youth Connector". Jess has shown a real passion for her community and especially other young people. She has stepped up into leadership roles within groups and always willing to help out with anything at The Hub, from cooking, admin and packing and distributing many hampers over Christmas...

Jess embodies all that we are about, looking out for others in her community whether they are young or old, she is caring, compassionate and willing to give anything a try, giving up hours and hours a week on a voluntary basis to help support the work we do!





Special Awards



We all know **Phyllis Lloyd** is the ultimate unsung hero! Even during the pandemic she still stepped up for her neighbours. She would look out for others, not thinking about herself. She helped to organise a street party, and also two carol-singing gatherings. We had the privilege of helping her celebrate her 90th birthday and as always she had that huge smile on her face, and was welcoming other people and wanting to see others having fun.









Looking back...

- During COVID-19, what signs of hope (e.g. small acts of kindness, creativity and compassion), were you aware of in your neighbourhood?

Looking forward...

- What are your hopes and dreams for the future of your neighbourhood?
- How would you like to get involved, to turn those hopes and dreams into reality?

