

The Importance of Friendship

Jane has a learning disability. This has made it much more difficult for her to join in with activities and events which people usually take for granted such as shopping, participating in sports, joining clubs and societies, going to the cinema, going out for meals and using public transport. Eight months ago Jane was matched with a volunteer through the Guideposts Trust Friendship Scheme.

The scheme aims to tackle the social isolation and loneliness experienced by many adults with a learning disability. Through the use of community volunteers, people with learning disabilities are supported to access their local communities, socialise and increase their circle of friends and enjoy a variety of experiences and activities. People's lives are often greatly enriched by the broadening of experiences, increased confidence and self esteem and increased feelings of belonging which result from having a volunteer friend to support them.

Jane and Alison have been friends for eight months now. The friendship scheme coordinator based the match on common interests, hobbies and personalities to try and ensure a successful friendship.

Alison says; "I enjoy being a friend to Jane. She has the same interests as me. We enjoy going on walks together, shopping and eating out. We also both enjoy gardens and plants and we have been to garden centres, parks and gardening events together. I get real pleasure from taking her places she wouldn't otherwise be able to visit. I feel that I get so much more out than I put in. Time spent together is very happy for both of us."

Jane says; "I've been seeing Alison for a long time now. We see each other every two weeks. We both like plants and flowers. We've been to parks and garden centres and a show. I always seem to make new friends when I go out with Alison because being with her helps me talk to people. I love having a friend like Alison."

To volunteer for the friendship scheme you don't have to have any qualifications or be an expert, you just need to be friendly, reliable and sensitive to the needs of others. Volunteering can give you excellent experience and allow you to develop as a person. It can strengthen your CV and could be of great value in any future employment.

If you would like more information about the Friendship Scheme please phone Emma on 01920 484946 or e-mail emetcalfe@guidepoststrust.org.uk