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NEWS RELEASE

POPULAR HAND IN HAND WELLBEING AND FRIENDSHIP SERVICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE IS LOOKING FOR 'COMMUNITY CONNECTORS' TO WIDEN ITS REACH AND BOOST SUPPORT

St John's Winchester is expanding its Hand in Hand community-based wellbeing, signposting and befriending service so that anyone in the local community can now refer friends, neighbours or even customers into the service. This expansion follows three successful years of Hand in Hand supporting more than 300 local older people to live independently for longer.

St John's is calling on anyone who supports, socialises or works with local older people to act as a St John's Hand in Hand Community Connector. A Community Connector simply puts older people in their local community in touch with the Hand in Hand service, who in turn can link them to activities and organisations that can help improve their quality of life. Linking people in this way helps create connections that can provide a safety net of social support to help people feel better about their wellbeing and where they live.

Previously referrals could only be made via the three local GP practices, and that relationship is continuing. With the introduction of the Community Connector concept, St John's is now building on the success of the GP route to make it easier for people to access the Hand in Hand service. Local people can also refer themselves into the service, which is open to anyone aged 55 and over in the Winchester community and surrounding areas.

Clive Cook, St John's Chief Executive, said: "We're thrilled to be able to expand and reshape our Hand in Hand service by inviting local people to act as Community Connectors and to encourage older people who might benefit from the service to get in touch.

"A Community Connector is someone who is sensitive to the needs of older people and wants to help. You can do that by spreading the word about our Hand in Hand service and encouraging people to self-refer. You may be a local retailer, a taxi driver, pharmacist, podiatrist or hairdresser. It's easy to become a Community Connector and make a real difference - there's no cost, no contract and no obligation, you just have to think about how we might be able to help improve the life of someone you know or come across.

"Our Hand in Hand service is suitable for any older person who could benefit from some additional support, including those who may have been shielding and have been socially isolated during the Covid-19 pandemic and would benefit from additional support to regain confidence and 'bounce back'.

“We believe that everybody should live their life well, with enjoyment, friendship, independence and choice. Sometimes in later life these things can be easier achieved with a helping hand.”

The Hand in Hand service is delivered mainly by highly-trained volunteers supported by full-time staff. Volunteers befriend and spend active time with members, signpost to services, encourage and support people to get together, and support friendship clubs.

Referrals can be made via the website <https://stjohnswinchester.co.uk/hand-in-hand/community-connectors/>, by phoning 01962 827795 or emailing handinhand@stjohnswinchester.co.uk

Ends

For more information please contact:

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