

***Press Release***

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**Bluebird Care introduces dog visiting scheme to reduce loneliness in Woking, Guildford and Waverley**

Around 11% per cent of older people in the South East spend the equivalent of five days or more a month without seeing anyone according to a poll, says Bluebird Care Guildford and Waverley. To help address the situation, the organisation, which cares for people in their own homes, has started a dog visiting scheme across the area as part of its “Every Visit Counts” Campaign.

The Old Woking-based care provider encourages its team of 60 care assistants to bring some of their own dogs to visit canine-loving customers, who would otherwise miss out on a cuddle with a four-legged visitor.

Guildford customer Daphne, 92, a life-long dog-lover, is one of the first people to take part in the scheme. She said: “I have carers to help me to do things like make my bed and we go for walks around my garden, which I couldn’t do without them. I look forward to them coming and it’s even more special when a dog like Sophie comes too. I always had dogs of my own and I love seeing them.

“I used to go out on the bus and I can’t do that anymore, so having the dog visit me at home is a fantastic idea.”

Care manager Florie Eross, who owns five-year-old Golden Retriever Sophie, said: “It was lovely to see how much Daphne enjoyed spending time with Sophie. It is widely recognised that spending time with dogs not only helps to reduce loneliness, but can relieve any stress, stimulates conversation and can help promote happiness too and this certainly seems to be the case.”

The Hipley Street company has also introduced some training guidelines for staff dealing with customers who might be displaying ‘challenging behaviour’ because they are isolated, lonely or frustrated.

Bluebird Care director Brian Colvin said: “For many older people, life can be challenging and loneliness and isolation can play a major part in this. It is a growing problem in our communities and we should all try to do our bit to make time to talk to or visit older relatives, friends and neighbours.

“We created the dog visiting as a one-off and it was such a success we have decided to make it part of our ongoing service. It makes such a difference to people who would otherwise miss out – this special contact makes their day.”

A OnePoll survey of 1,000 over 65-year-olds, found 11% spent five days or more a month without seeing anyone. The poll was commissioned by Bluebird Care to mark the start of the Every Visit Counts campaign, to tackle loneliness. The aim of the campaign, which runs until October 5, is to highlight the high rate of loneliness among older people in the UK. The campaign brings expert tips and highlights ways that everyone can help to spot and beat loneliness in society.

The poll also found that in the South East:

* Nearly a fifth (17%) spend nearly a month (24 days) a year without seeing anyone.
* Four in 10 (40%) feel lonely either often or sometimes.
* A third (31%) would not admit to someone they trust that they are lonely.
* Four in 10 (42%) say they do not have access to support when they are feeling lonely.

There are 11.4 million people in Britain aged 65-years-old or more, according to Age UK, which means 1.3 million older people are spending more than two months a year alone.

Older women are more likely to have spent longer periods alone than older men with 21% of female respondents saying they have gone a week or longer without speaking to another person compared to 14% of men.

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