

**May 2017 Press release**

## **End Loneliness in Mendip campaign – focus on volunteering**

Mendip District Council, working alongside a number of leading local health and wellbeing service providers, including Health Connections Mendip, Somerset Public Health and Mendip General Practices, has launched the End Loneliness in Mendip campaign, which aims to raise awareness of the support available for older people who are suffering from loneliness.

One local organisation backing the campaign is Spark, which supports the voluntary and community sector in Mendip, offering information, advice and training to small groups and organisations. The charity helps groups to get started, generate funds and promote their project.

Spark also runs the Volunteer Service, inspiring people to get involved and make a difference in their communities.

Sharon Blyth, Spark's Voluntary Sector Adviser for Mendip, said: "We promote a whole variety of volunteering opportunities, helping individuals to find the best match for them and have recently launched a Volunteer Co-ordinators support group in west Mendip. We are on hand to offer advice on volunteer recruitment, management and best practice."

Two organisations Spark works with who are helping to tackle loneliness in Mendip are Active & In Touch Frome and Friends of Shepton Mallet.

Active and In Touch Frome provide a volunteer befriending service to anyone who feels lonely and isolated either due to circumstance or a lack of confidence. Volunteers are matched with individuals who help them to identify interests and find a place for themselves. The organisation also hosts an 'Active Tuesday Group', bringing individuals together and inviting speakers or planning days out.

Friends of Shepton Mallet is a new initiative which aims to offer friendship to those in the community who are isolated. It is an informal group of volunteers who want to offer time and a listening ear and support people to find a way back into the community, accessing other support and social opportunities whilst making new friends.

Sharon said: "Both these organisations would love new volunteers who can offer a few hours of their time and would also like to hear from anyone who may benefit from their support. Spark is working with similar projects in other parts of Mendip and we are really keen to support these groups to make a real difference to the lives of individuals in their communities."

To find out more, contact Spark on 01935 475914, or visit the End Loneliness in Mendip website - [www.endlonelinessinmendip.org.uk](http://www.endlonelinessinmendip.org.uk) - for details of other volunteering opportunities.

During Volunteers Week, from 1 - 7 June, Sharon Blyth will be running a surgery at the Shape Mendip Hub in Shepton Mallet to promote volunteering in Mendip. Just drop in on Thursday 1 June between 11.30am and 1.30pm.