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Ellenor helps bereaved tread the path through grief together

Grief is a personal journey and people cope with it in many different ways. For Linda Rush, getting out in the fresh air helped her more than sitting down and talking about her feelings - so she instigated a walking group for others who had been bereaved.

Linda is one of our many volunteers. Before lockdown, our walks had become very popular. In fact participants were so keen to keep walking and talking that they have kept in contact during the pandemic, walking informally in groups of six when it was allowed last year, and in pairs more recently.

Linda says: “Of course the pandemic changed things drastically. We were really helping people to rebuild their lives, but lockdown obviously meant the group walks had to stop. But it was lovely that people still wanted to keep in touch and get out and about, just as friends.

“When I was widowed I was able to meet up with friends and talk things through but lockdown has meant people can’t do this -- you can’t give someone a hug. I had so much support from **ellenor** when Philip was ill and after he died. I don’t know how I would cope with the way life is now.

“But lockdown is easing and there is light at the end of the tunnel. The feeling I get is that we will start the walking groups up again in some form. I think the pandemic has thrown people out of their routines, but everything will evolve.

“I find that when you are walking, it’s easier to talk than when you are sitting in a room with a counsellor and a box of Kleenex. I know walking group members say that when they get home they can just take their shoes off and have a cup of tea knowing they have left the house, been out and met other people and had some exercise.”

During the past year Linda has been part of an army of volunteers regularly phoning carers and the bereaved at home.

She says: “I have a few people I phone regularly, just to touch base and see if they are OK. All the people I speak to are very grateful for the contact.”

Our Lead for Wellbeing and Living Well Andrew Lowden and his team have been doing all they can to give people “a sense of socialisation” during the pandemic. They have already been putting plans in place for more home visits and for activities like the walking groups to return and expand.

Linda has trodden her own path through grief since losing her husband Philip in 2016 at the age of 63 -- when they were on the point of retiring from their own business. Philip was an inpatient at our hospice and died at Darent Valley Hospital after prostate cancer spread to his spine.

She says: “When Philip was ill I was offered counselling and I did have 10 sessions but I was in a really bad headspace at the time, trying to run our

business and cope with his illness. I also remember being offered some mindfulness sessions, but I would rather have been out on my bike or walking.”

Linda was one of about four people who first attended the Thursday evening bereavement meetings at the hospice when it was started up five years ago.

She says: “I had already been attending the Carers Cuppa at the hospice on a Saturday morning so it seemed a natural progression. After Philip died a friend got me out walking and we did the couch to 5k training plan, which was very good for me. Then I started going to the Cyclopark in Gravesend with friends and having a coffee afterwards.”

Linda, featured in a documentary about **ellenor** shown on the Together Freeview TV channel three years ago, was inspired by broadcaster Clare Balding’s book Walking Home and her Ramblings series on BBC Radio 4.

She planned the initial informal walks in September 2018, from the hospice to Jeskyns park for a coffee in the café and following a round route back. Our family support worker Rebecca Richardson then instigated a risk assessment and the walks became part of a regular timetable of events.

we have recently started hosting a bereavement group again at the hospice on a Sunday once a month.

“It was good to catch up with people. I know some of them have also been doing the mindfulness sessions via Zoom with Sally Baker, the complementary therapist.”

Hospice staff and volunteers have done all they can to keep people connected during lockdown. The Wellbeing team and volunteers are looking forward to more restrictions lifting -- and walking group members are itching to put on their boots!

We are **ellenor**, a charity funded by the generosity of our local community, offering the best care and support to families facing terminal illness in Kent. We are the **only** charity in the county that provides hospice care for people of all ages – babies, children and adults - and their families. This includes pain

and symptom relief, end of life care, respite, bereavement support and emotional and spiritual care.

Our Children's Hospice Care, formerly known as chYps, is provided in the comfort of the family home and spans across North and West Kent and the London Borough of Bexley. Adults living in Gravesham, Dartford and Swanley, receive care in their place of choice, including their own homes, at our Hospice in Gravesend and in local care homes.

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