

## Making a Connection Karel and Louise

We all know that making new friends and connecting with people that we don't know, even those who live just next door, can be difficult. Sometimes all it takes is for us to be introduced by someone else to realize that we have things in common.

The Companion Visiting program at Saanich Volunteers can offer many wonderful stories of volunteers and clients who were matched up and discovered the joys of common interests and enduring friendships. This is just one of many such stories.

Karel is originally from England. She moved to Victoria and taught in local elementary and secondary schools. She has a great interest in theatre, having studied drama at Homerton College, Cambridge and taught locally at Bastion Theatre School for 9 years. A friend suggested that she should approach Langham Court Theatre. The director who auditioned her there not only cast her in the play he was directing, but also courted her. The couple married and spent many happy years together. After her husband died her grief and the stress of moving house prompted a friend to approach Saanich Volunteers to enquire about volunteer services.

Louise has been a volunteer with Saanich Volunteers since 2010. She is an Island gal, having grown up in Nanaimo and then transferred to Victoria with the company for which she ended up working for 40 years. Louise was looking for a volunteer position that would allow her to contribute to her community and this led her to Saanich Volunteers. She initially volunteered as a driver - she still drives for us once a week – but she now also assists with one of our support groups. She finds that this suits her retired lifestyle very well. Louise describes herself as a 'people person' who loves the terrific people she meets and enjoys listening to their stories.

Karel and Louise met when Louise became one of her volunteer drivers. They hit it off so well that they were quickly 'matched' and Louise became Karel's companion visitor. They see each other on the same day and time every week. What started as a volunteer relationship has grown into a warm and mutual friendship. Karel describes Louise as 'the most wonderful friend I have ever had' and says that being Louise's friend gives her confidence and that they share 'hearts and minds'. Louise looks forward to her outings with Karel and it gives her great joy to see Karel happy.

The two go out and about each week, shopping together to get essentials or maybe going for a drive. As Karel no longer drives, she appreciates the opportunity to see how Victoria is growing and changing. They also always make sure there is time for some socialising on every trip.

A recent government report showed that the social isolation of seniors can cause communities to suffer a lack of social cohesion, resulting in higher social costs and the loss of an unquantifiable wealth of experience that older adults bring to our families, neighbourhoods and communities.

Louise puts it this way, 'If more people gave time to others in their community we would all be stronger for it'.

It is connections such as these that make the Saanich Volunteers' Companion Visiting program an unqualified success and a considerable asset to our community.