

### The Big Move

Our big office move from the Market Place to The Old Courthouse in Mill Road took place in January and all's well that ends well. Volunteer Action carries on indomitably in spite of obstacles.

### Why the change?

After many happy years in our old offices, we felt we had to move when Norwich and Peterborough, who had been very supportive of us from the outset 14 years ago, proposed a rent rise which we did not think we could reasonably ask our donors, supporters and Friends to pay. Reluctantly we packed up our bags and moved on.

### The Good and the Bad

The good news is that the new offices offer excellent working conditions. They are light and spacious and are in a well cared for building. Parking and access are easier as well. While we were about it, we did a bit of spring-cleaning of our files, cupboards and equipment.

What we miss is our town centre presence and no longer can passengers, drivers and volunteers pop in on market day quite so effortlessly. That is a small price to pay. We also have to face greater expense than in the past, but VA is not immune from all the financial pressures of 2011. We are especially grateful to Norman's for the free loan of manpower and vehicles during our move, and a band of volunteers who rolled up their sleeves and completed the move in record time. Not a day of regular bookings and drives was missed in the process. "We never closed".

### New Challenges for Volunteer Action

#### How Big is the Big Society?

As we go to press we do not yet know how our grants are going to be affected. Almost certainly our grant from Northants County Council will decrease by 22%. East Northants Council is in discussion with us and other drive schemes to see how it can best support us, while the future of the Primary Care Trusts both locally and nationally is far from clear. Thanks to good housekeeping and the generous support of our Friends we are in a robust position to ride out short-term uncertainties.

#### The Role of the Friends

There is no doubt that our Friends who already make a vital contribution to our funds on a regular basis are going to become even more important to VA. The Charity will eventually have to rely less and less on grants from local authorities and look to become more and more self-sufficient.

### Friends Rally Round to Support VA

A wonderful variety of events has taken place over the last few months in support of VA. **Andrew Spurrell** donated the takings from his **Poetry and Pints** evening in December at the Shuckbrugh Arms in Stoke Doyle. The **Green Family** from Cotterstock held a **concert** in St Peter's Church, Oundle, and generously decided to give half the proceeds to VA. **The Red Lion** in **Warmington**



held a **coffee morning** in March in aid of VA which raised nearly £250 thanks to the largesse of the hosts who provided home-made cakes, coffee and raffle prizes in abundance. We are grateful, too, to the organisers of the **Oundle Carnival** for their donation.

### Individuals Flock to the Colours

We have received gifts from all sorts of people and we prize them highly. Some have signed up as Friends willing to contribute, others have dropped in with a one-off donation. On another occasion we received a most generous donation as a result of a bequest from someone who had used VA's services.

### Best foot forward for VA

#### Peter Atchison walks from Coast to Coast

Peter strode out on behalf of VA last year to raise funds for us. Here is his account of this feat of endurance and pain!

*"I try and raise money for charity biannually and you are always in my mind as my "local" cause. I turned 50 this year and had always intended doing the "Big Walk" so combined the two as a means of raising some money and completing a personal challenge.*

*I completed the walk with a friend, as intended, in 12 days; finishing on the 16<sup>th</sup> September. Depending on who you believe, the distance was somewhere between 180 and 200 miles (My feet are prepared to believe the latter!) Overall it was an enjoyable experience with only the weather contriving to make some of the days extremely unpleasant. Typically this was of course during the "high" days in the Pennines and Lake District. My plan to walk "East to West" against the prevailing winds and*

*“Wainwrights” advice was going well, with warm South Easterlies during the first week, even pushing us along Blakey ridge.*

*We were however made to feel less “smug” during our second week when the prevailing Westerlies returned with a vengeance! The “low point” of the trip occurred at the highest altitude when climbing Kidsty Pike (2,500’) on the Monday. We had driving rain and gusting winds of up to 50mph (there was a severe weather warning for the lakes) I was literally blown off my feet at one stage! Otherwise the miserable wet days were amply balanced by pleasant walking weather and some fantastic scenery.*



*Did I enjoy it?.....overall yes. Would I do it again?..... probably not; as 12 days is rather a long time to be away, however I have at least proved that these old bones will take the hammering if they have to!”*

### **New VA Leaflets**

Volunteer Action has given birth to a litter of leaflets – with a little help from midwife sponsors Oundle Feoffees and Oundle Town Council. We need to get our three messages across loud, clear and colourfully. You will receive with this newsletter a copy of each leaflet and we hope that you will show them to friends and neighbours.

One concentrates on becoming a **Friend**, and it includes banker’s order and Gift Aid forms – both so important to us. The second is an invitation to become a **Volunteer**. We are always on the lookout for new volunteer drivers both from Oundle and from the villages. The third leaflet focuses on our fast expanding **Befriending Service** which may be of interest to you or your friends. We shall be distributing all these leaflets far and wide, but if you think you know of an organisation which would welcome a supply, then please let us know. This is yet another way in which you can help us.

### **How Big is the Big Society? Part 2**

Travel tokens will soon cease to exist. VA will be accepting them for as long as our passengers still have some; but no more will be issued. For those who don’t know about tokens, it was previously possible for an elderly person to buy £48 worth of tokens for £10 from

East Northants Council instead of a bus pass, for use on VA car journeys, and taxis– a real bonus for those not able to use buses.

ENC has decided not to continue with the scheme, and the County Council has declined to adopt it. So, if you’re fit and able to get on a bus, travel free! If you are infirm or don’t live on a bus route, bad luck!! VA has no political axe to grind: we focus only on the needs of those we serve.

### **VA Fills a Need**

#### **Befriending Service Highly Valued**

Volunteer Action’s Befriending Service has proved to be a winner. Here are some reactions:

*“There has been a void that has now been filled thanks to the Befrienders”.*

*“My visitor brings so much laughter into my life, like it used to be when I was more active”.*

*“If all the Befrienders are like my visitor, then no-one can complain. We are all so very lucky to have so many good people, not forgetting they are so much like the VA drivers”.*

*“I would be lost if I no longer had her (my befriender’s) company. She is a lovely friend and I am less lonely”. “She is so cheerful and kind, she is like a long-lost friend”.*

*“My visitor is so natural that I look forward to the next visit”.*

*“It’s nice to have someone to talk to: we are very good at putting the world to rights”.*



Volunteer Mel Hume and VA Manager Nancy Taylor can be proud of the service they have done so much to develop.

### **The Trustees and Team at Volunteer Action**

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The artwork and printing for this newsletter has been kindly donated