

FIONA'S STORY

Fiona had been struggling to cope with multiple bereavements and had been feeling quite lonely and isolated as she struggled to adapt to life on her own. She had received a Places of Welcome leaflet through her door and had thought it might be helpful but felt she didn't have the confidence to go along to the group on her own, so didn't think any more of it. It just so happened that a friend called round one day when Fiona was feeling quite distressed and also suggested the group. The friend waited whilst Fiona got ready and brought her along to the group.

On walking into the hall Fiona was immediately greeted by one of the co-ordinators and quickly introduced to others in the group. She cried a lot during that first session but felt that instead of people trying to stop her crying or 'fix her' people just let her feel what she needed to, and be really listened to. Fiona felt that this simple experience provided some much needed relief from the anxiety that had built up in her over time.

From that point onwards Fiona became a regular attendee at the group. On one occasion whilst talking to one of the volunteers about her previous role, working in a school, it emerged that she had a talent for playing the piano. The volunteer thought it might be a good idea for Fiona to play some tunes that people could sing along to. Fiona brought some music to the next session and provided accompaniment for a sing-along that was highly valued by others in the group – everyone joined in and it really provided a mood lifting experience.

Because of Fiona's own empathy she became a much valued member of the group, welcoming others as she had been welcomed, and actively encouraging new people to attend. One week she brought in a jigsaw which was a photograph of her family members, and everyone had a go at putting a piece in, and jigsaws have been a constant activity ever since. Other activities introduced by Fiona include a Beetle Drive and card games.

She now has Places of Welcome as a regular event in her diary and is disappointed if she can't come, such as during the Pandemic. However, during the lockdown period, the connections Fiona had made at the group enabled regular telephone contact by people Fiona wouldn't have known previously. She feels she has made many trusted friends.