

We're not isolated!

Residents have found ingenious and fulfilling ways to keep spirits up.



PICTURE: GETTY

Smiles all around: A group of friends playing cards in a retirement home

BEING part of a supportive community is important at the best of times — even more so at the moment and especially if you live on your own.

'There's no doubt that the pandemic has promoted a wonderful spirit of community on our estate,' says Clive McWilton, estate manager of Cognatum's Muskerry Court retirement development in Rusthall, Kent. 'Many residents used to travel extensively, so historically there's been less interaction, but over the course of the last year they've all become closer, caring about each other.'

During the first lockdown, one of the residents started arranging a weekly quiz.

He prepared the questions and the management team printed and circulated them and then collected them later in the week.

Others have helped with emergency shopping, exercising dogs, picking up prescriptions, and sorting tech issues.

Whatsapp groups, have also been set up to make those who may be isolated feel part of a community.

Another resident, who pre-pandemic ran the Rusthall community cinema, has hundreds of DVDs ranging from Singin' In The Rain to Reservoir Dogs, so he invited residents to borrow anything they liked. *'He has become the Muskerry Blockbusters,'* says Clive.

Properties for sale include four renovated three-bedroom barns at Petersfinger Farm near Salisbury, Wiltshire, priced from £699,950 and two and three-bedroom apartments and cottages at Stuart Court in Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire, priced from £695,000. (cognatum.co.uk)

Recent research by Anchor Hanover discovered that two thirds of respondents over 70 stated that living within a strong community is important to them. Sandra Sudlow, a resident at Bishopstoke Park retirement village in Eastleigh, Hampshire,

has been impressed by the Anchor Hanover team during lockdown.

'They have been truly fantastic, offering help from delivering shopping for us to being at the end of the phone for a chat,' she says.

'Our Residents Committee has very much grown from Anchor's proactiveness. One of our first plans was to form a Buddy System whereby healthier members of the village contact others to provide their additional support.'

One and two-bedroom apartments start from £345,000. (anchorhanover.org.uk)

Being able to do something with other people is also important for one's mental health. One of the residents at Audley Willicombe Park, near Tunbridge Wells, Kent, started up a knitting club, knitting bonding squares for mothers of premature babies at Tunbridge Wells Hospital at Pembury.

Paul Kelly, 73, who moved into Audley Ellerslie in Malvern, Worcestershire, last July made a friend who was a fellow Rotarian and now they regularly have coffee together. Prices for one and two apartments and cottages start at £225,000. (audleyvillages.co.uk)

Residents of Pegasus retirement developments (part of the Lifestory Group) are also delighted to have a supportive community.

Geoff Hillier, 77, wanted to live somewhere less isolated after being widowed and chose to move to Holmwood retirement village in the heart of the New Forest in Brockenhurst, Hampshire.

'We have a wonderful host here who looks after us and organises activities and outings. Having the extra social activities adds to the community feel of living here which I find a great bonus.'

Prices start at £575,000. (lifestory.group/pegasus)

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