



Jean Haigh and Otis.

Food for thought as retirement village residents visit Gloucestershire primary school for lunch



Richmond Villages Residents with Students.

Loneliness Awareness Week

SIX residents from Richmond Villages, Cheltenham, visited Deerhurst and Apperley C of E Primary School as part of Loneliness Awareness Week recently.

The initiative was launched by the Marmalade Trust in 2017 and aims to get people talking about loneliness. With mental health being a key element of the school's curriculum, Deerhurst and Apperley school were keen to take part in Loneliness Awareness Week and to involve their wider community.

John Sidwell, 85, Jack Wilson, 85, Mike Heath, 89, Olive Martin, 94, Beryl Foulkes, 94, and Jean Haigh, 96, joined the primary school pupils for their first Friday lunch to start a conversation about loneliness, not only for the elderly, but for young people too.

The visit comes after the residents were invited to watch the school choir perform at Cheltenham Festival. Upon seeing how much the children and the residents loved meeting each other, headteacher Jayne Neven was keen to keep the line of communication open. She said: "Mental health and wellbeing is always in our school's curriculum. We very much include it in all we do



Evelyn and Mike Heath.

and we wanted to showcase that with an open, transparent conversation with the community.

"We wanted to keep the connection we built when the residents saw our school choir perform. It's really important to keep these connections alive. Many of our children have elderly grandparents they've not seen in a long time because

of the pandemic. Loneliness Awareness Week shows the children what it means to be lonely for themselves, their community, and their relatives.

"To us, community doesn't always have to be next door to your school. It's bigger than that. We wanted to invite the residents to lunch to have a chat and to share their stories, which the children

love to hear. It's a relatively simple thing that can have a big impact."

Deputy Village Manager at Richmond Villages, Cheltenham, Cheryl Tranter, said: "Our residents had a wonderful time with the pupils of Deerhurst and Apperley C of E Primary School. They really enjoyed sharing stories of their past and hearing from the pupils

about their latest school projects. We have been invited back to watch the school production, A Midsummer Nights Dream, later on in the year, which our residents are really looking forward to."

The Richmond Villages residents were certainly delighted by their visit to the school. Mike Heath said: "We weren't sure what to expect but I thought it was excellent and I really enjoyed having lunch with the children and talking to them. The visit was over all too quickly and I'd love to go again."

While the pandemic brought loneliness to the forefront of everyone's minds, it has always been an issue that affects people of all ages. The Marmalade Trust aims to raise awareness and support people facing loneliness.

Lucy Norris, Head of Operations at the Marmalade Trust, said: "What we really want to get across is that loneliness is a normal human emotion and we encourage people to talk openly and honestly about it."

"We also want people to see loneliness as a blank canvas. Often, loneliness is a disconnect between the quality and quantity of the connections that we want in

our lives. We want people to see it as an opportunity to try new experiences and develop new interests and friendships."

The Marmalade Trust recommend investing in self-care to help combat the negative effects of loneliness. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle, starting a gratitude journal, and trying out new hobbies can all help to improve mental health when faced with loneliness.

The staff and pupils of Deerhurst and Apperley C of E Primary School are certainly breaking down barriers when it comes to loneliness and they are keen to keep their connections with their community strong.

The residents of Richmond Villages, Cheltenham, have been invited to watch Deerhurst and Apperley C of E Primary School's Key Stage 2 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream in Cheltenham Village Hall in June.

For more information, visit The Marmalade Trust at <https://www.marmaladetrust.org/law>.

For more information on Richmond Villages, Cheltenham, visit <https://www.richmond-villages.com/retirement-villages/cheltenham> or call 01242 806198.