

Neighbours put the Neighbourliness in their Neighbourhood Watch Scheme!

By Helen Kynnersley
CNWA Committee Member

For a newly established Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, Kate Walsh and the residents of Piper's Court in Hoole, Chester can be proud of what they have achieved in such a short space of time.

After the lock-down restrictions of 2020, a group of residents on the cul-de-sac decided to set up a WhatsApp group to provide a support network for each other.

In September 2020, Kate decided to propose the idea of turning the unofficial support network into something more concrete. Crime for Piper's Court is relatively low and Kate explained the impetus for setting up the scheme was not primarily to tackle crime related issues in the area but as an incentive to keep up momentum for the WhatsApp group, building on the good work and neighbourliness that the residents had already started.

As a previous member of a Neighbourhood Watch, Kate felt that a scheme would provide an official platform and give the group a purpose and cohesiveness going forward. She believes very much that neighbourliness can help to deter crime and the residents agreed that a scheme for their area was a great idea.

Kate recently posted on Cheshire Neighbourhood Watch's Facebook page about her scheme, "We probably message each other most days. A lot of time it's people asking if they can borrow a ladder, if anybody has a spare 3amp fuse, does anybody know what time the local shop shuts tonight, that sort of thing. We chat to each other when we pop out. One neighbour always drags the bins up the drive. One neighbour always buys all the kids easter eggs, or chocolate Santas. One loves bunting, lol. We've had a couple of street parties. We are looking forward to a picnic soon. I think I'm known as the area first aider. We all chip in, in our own ways."

Since setting up the scheme Kate has found that the relationship with the local police has improved. She has regular meetings with her PCSO who makes visits to the neighbourhood and she keeps in regular phone and email contact with him. She also follows her local policing team on Twitter for all the latest information.

Practically the setting up of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme has allowed Kate to introduce the sharing of issues relating to crime prevention with the group.

According to www.police.uk, Piper's Court suffers mainly with issues classified in the Violence and Sexual Assault and Anti-Social Behaviour categories. As a paramedic Kate realises that some of the offences in the former category will relate to domestic abuse. As a result she has started to share useful information regarding the issues that affect her community to raise awareness and provide much needed avenues for help for those affected.



Kate Walsh taking one of her neighbours for her first outdoor swim recently.

In regards to reducing anti-social behaviour, Kate and the residents of Piper's Court have made it their mission to reclaim a local playing field where most of the problems suffered by the estate seem to stem from. In the past there have been instances of drug use and drug dealing and neighbours want to see the field used more by families in an attempt to increase presence in the area.

Kate says, "there has historically been a reluctance to use the playing field due to the anti-social behaviour that occurs there. We are already noticing that youths who may have once gathered are moving on when we are around."

"We are hoping to hold more family-friendly, social events on the field such as picnics on the park, along with yoga sessions and craft activities and we'd like to buy a couple of picnic benches to facilitate these events."

Kate has been advised to consult with the PCC to apply for an Express Grant.

The residents of Piper's Court certainly seem to have all the right attitudes to making their newly established Neighbourhood Watch Scheme a success.

Kate commented, "as a community we have our eyes and ears open!"

This was certainly helpful when one resident noticed smoke coming from a nearby neighbouring property and called the fire service. Due to this early intervention there was extensive smoke damage but the fire damage was limited and thankfully, no-one was hurt.

Recently one of the residents saw a group of teens attempting to enter a vacant property on the estate and reported this on the WhatsApp group. A few of the neighbours went over to the property to investigate and disturbed the boys who ran off.

Kate says, "the sense of community we have means that when there is any potential crime, we all come together."

Currently Kate believes that she has a third of the residents on her estate officially signed up to the scheme. Residents cover a broad demographic but many are young families and make up the demographic that most Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators are desperate to attract.

There are 38 properties on the cul-de-sac and 11 are official members of the scheme, however, many of the households are actively involved in the WhatsApp group and are starting to engage and respond to the social elements of the group so Kate is confident she can grow the official membership to include all of the Piper's Court inhabitants. She's hoping that the new signage that takes pride of place on the street will also attract interest.

For a scheme that is in its infancy the momentum and the commitment to making it a success are clear to see. Whilst Kate welcomes support and ideas from other Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators it seems that she and the residents of Piper's Court have a good grasp on best practice communication and initiatives to enable their community to be a happy and safe place to live.



Residents of Piper's Court having a socially distanced street party at the start of lock-down.