

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL PRESS RELEASE

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A brush with royalty and role in BBC documentary – all from volunteering

A brush with royalty, role in a BBC documentary and meeting people she would never have met – just some of the most memorable moments and benefits of un-paid work for one Wisbech volunteer.

Penny Stocks, 75, of Emneth, shared her experience of giving her free time for community benefit ahead of Volunteers Week, which runs from Thursday (June 1) to Wednesday June 7.

She said: “Through volunteering I’ve made some really good friends. I’ve learned a lot and met a lot of really nice people.”

Penny was instrumental in founding the Wisbech In Bloom group. The group, which works to improve planting, floral displays and the environment, formed around 30 years ago and was the first In Bloom group in Fenland.

Now there are many in Bloom groups in our towns and villages representing our area in the RHS (Royal Horticultural Society) Britain in Bloom competition that encourages horticultural excellence, environmental responsibility and community participation.

It was Penny, at the time a tourist officer for Fenland District Council, who began it all when she spotted some sponsored hanging baskets in Suffolk and took the initiative to make the same thing happen in Fenland.

In Bloom led Penny to meet King Charles when he was the Prince of Wales and came to Wisbech to meet volunteers and, separately, to appear in a BBC 2 documentary on In Bloom schemes, presented by Chris Bavin.

As a volunteer Penny also headed the original project to create the Merchants Trail in Wisbech – a trail that celebrates the history of the town – and has been involved in more recent work to update it and get it onto a mobile app.

Penny has also been a long-standing supporter of Wisbech Street Pride, which like its parallel groups across Fenland, holds clean-up and litter-picking events and delivers environmental enhancement projects.

Penny most values the sense of accomplishment from the work she and fellow volunteers do and the people she has met along the way. She has also worked alongside all kinds of people including people sentenced to community service via Probation Service Community Payback.

She said: “There’s quite a lot to In Bloom and we have to get as many people as possible involved. We’ve done projects with schools, old people’s homes, Community Payback and clubs where people get together to overcome mental illness.

“I’ve got to know a lot of people. When you’re working in town people stop and have a chat and know your name.

“I do love Wisbech and want to continue doing it for as long as I can.”

Penny and fellow volunteers have been acknowledged at numerous celebration events with individual and team awards and with top awards for their work from Britain in Bloom and other organisations including Keep Britain Tidy.

Cllr Susan Wallwork, Fenland District Council portfolio holder for communities, said: “This year has seen a particular focus on volunteering with the Big Help Out to encourage more people to do it.

“We have so much to thank our volunteers for and people who volunteer always seem to speak of all the wonderful things it brings to their lives too.

“It’s great both for the wellbeing of the community and of individuals.”

Wisbech In Bloom and the other In Bloom and Street Pride groups are always looking for volunteers to help support the work they do.

Wisbech In Bloom is particularly looking for people able to commit to regular time, which for the most committed volunteers amounts to numerous hours a week at busy times of the year such as the current Spring planting season. Volunteer numbers have particularly dropped off since the Covid pandemic.

Many groups are happy to hear from people who can only provide ad-hoc help or turn up to one of the regular Street Pride little picking events.

Volunteers support the work of Fenland District Council in many ways including by supporting Active Fenland health and wellbeing sessions, helping to deliver our [Four Seasons events](#) and as recycling ambassadors.

Dee Ucuncu, Ramblers Wisbech Wellbeing Walk leader, said: “I just love doing. I love seeing people coming here, enjoying themselves, meeting new people. It brings so much into your life.”

Read Dee’s full story of going from struggling to walk herself to helping others by [leading Wisbech Wellbeing Walk](#). Or watch her speak about volunteering here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIVukbBzhJM

To get involved in volunteering see:

- In Bloom and Street Pride groups in Fenland see: www.fenland.gov.uk/streetpride or contact the Street Pride co-ordinator at Fenland District Council via streetpride@fenland.gov.uk or by calling 01354 654321.
- [Active Fenland](#) to find out about becoming a [wellness walk volunteer leader](#) or other health and wellbeing volunteering opportunities
- www.fenland.gov.uk/article/15823/Volunteering-Groups

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Photos:

Penny Stocks, front left, celebrates Green Flag award 2018 with volunteer and Fenland District Council colleagues

Penny Stocks, front centre, with fellow volunteers and Fenland District Council representatives in 2018

Penny Stocks and former Fenland District Council Cllr Mike Cornwell at the Pride In Fenland awards 2017