

I didn't have to go to Parliament this week until Tuesday so made the most of the extra day at home in the constituency by meeting some incredibly special people. They are called "hosts" and they participate in KCC's Shared Lives scheme, helping vulnerable adults live somewhere other than in a residential home.

Shared Lives is a programme which helps people who require some emotional or practical support remain valuable members of their community by placing them in the homes of "hosts". A placement can be either short or long term but the latter is intended to provide a more permanent home.

I was struck by the caring nature of the hosts I met. All of them had nothing but positive things to say about Shared Lives, despite the occasional challenges. And it was hardly a surprise that they did face challenges. The scheme caters for adults of all ages and conditions ranging from young adults with learning difficulties to middle age people with poor mental health through to elderly folk with or without dementia.

In addition I met two service users, Stacey and Danielle. Both were young women with learning difficulties who had been welcomed into the homes of their hosts and supported in everyday life. I was inspired by their own devotion to their hosts, who had not only made their home that of the service user but who had welcomed them into the family.

The easiest way to describe the programme is it is like a fostering scheme, but for adults. It is challenging but rewarding and most important makes a massive difference to the lives of vulnerable adults while providing an alternative caring career for those who wish to escape from the traditional 9 to 5 role. Readers who might be interested in the programme should go to the County Council's website for more information.