

25 years of helping out has given me joy and fulfilment

Sybil Kretzmer, wife of the Mail's legendary former TV critic, Herbert Kretzmer – who as lyricist was a key member of the team that created the global box office hit musical *Les Misérables* – is a long-time NHS volunteer. Here she urges readers to join her.

THE TROLLEY DOLLY

THE Mail's marvellous campaign to boost the numbers of volunteers in the NHS is showing thousands of people what I've been lucky enough to know my whole life – that volunteering is a joyous experience, full of fun and a sense of fulfilment.

Today, I'm a proud Trolley Dolly, wheeling my little mobile 'shop' around the wards. I've been doing this for more than 25 years at the Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust in Chelsea – but I started volunteering long before that.

My first job was as a 'Candy Stripper', which is what they called junior hospital volunteers back in America where I grew up. I wore the traditional pink-and-white striped pinafore and worked at the children's hospital where my mother was a paediatrician.

Ever since, I've been signing up for volunteering duties in one form or another. So it was inevitable that, when I married and moved to London in 1988, I would want to keep on doing it.

The Marsden, a world-renowned institution, was within walking distance from my home. But it was dedicated to cancer, and the very word struck terror in my heart.

When I enquired, I was sent to meet a wonderful lady of the old school, Doryne Castle-Cleary, who took me under her wing. After a few weeks, I was given a weekly slot and paired with a fabulous partner who became my best friend. I was now an official Trolley Dolly. I also joined the gift shop rota.

Over the years I have knelt and prayed with patients, hugged them, listened to them, and cried with them.

We volunteers are sometimes the only non-medical visitors some patients have.

They appreciate the opportunity to chat with someone about anything and nothing, especially non-medical topics. I've also been lucky enough to meet many dedicated nurses and doctors at the Royal Marsden.

Sometimes people ask me if it's depressing to be a volunteer in a cancer hospital. Absolutely not! I always say the patients do more for me than I do for them.

Their courage, grace and gratitude is uplifting and contagious. They also help remind me to count my blessings. So join the Mail's campaign, sign up today – and I can guarantee that you will receive more back than you can ever imagine.

SHOP LADIES

Maureen Young, 74, has volunteered at South Shields Hospital for 28 years. With fellow volunteer Sue Goddard she runs the hospital's League of Friends shop. Maureen, 11ves in Cleadon, Tyne and Wear, with husband Alan, 76. She says:

One of the hospital managers recently said they couldn't do without us, which

was nice. I started volunteering after we returned from eight years' overseas. I was lonely and bored, then a friend suggested I take over her slot at the hospital shop. I jumped at the idea.

I'm in at 3pm-5pm on Mondays to check the stock and see what needs ordering and then back at 7am on Wednesdays and Fridays for two more three-hour stints.

The shop is very well-used and we bank around £3,000 a week. It is entirely staffed by volunteers.

Sue Goddard, 64, a retired accountant, who lives with her husband Ken, 68, a retired chief engineer, in Cleadon, has volunteered there for 12 years. Sue says:

Initially, I started off doing two hours' volunteering a week, but once the League of Friends Committee heard about my accountancy skills they asked me to become treasurer. I'm very proud that the shop made £67,000 last year, all of which was spent on hospital equipment.

I've made some very good friends here including Maureen. We're very proud of our contribution to the NHS.