

**You have just rung the doorbell of someone you have never met before.  
You are nervous... : On the other side of the door is someone every bit as  
nervous as you are... / The Terrence Higgins Trust.**

**Contributors**

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Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>



*You have just  
rung the doorbell  
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*You are nervous...*

**"When I first came into this  
I really didn't know what to expect."**

When The Terrence Higgins Trust was set up, by a group of Terrence Higgins' friends after he died with AIDS, one of the first services it offered was Buddying.

Those friends were aware how difficult it was to provide all the help he needed. They also realised that the social services, being continually under pressure and under-resourced, would not be equipped to provide the special care essential to anyone living with AIDS.

They sensed how valuable a role one special person could play, and the Buddy scheme was born.

There are currently over 500 Buddies active in the Greater London area.

So what is a Buddy? A Buddy is a volunteer specially trained by The Terrence Higgins Trust to fulfil a range of needs.

A Buddy gives a person with AIDS someone to listen, to use as a sounding board, to shout at, to moan at, to cry with...

Someone to do the shopping, walk the dog, cook a meal, help with the washing and the housework... and anything else that makes life a little easier.

Someone who is not employed by the statutory or medical bodies. Someone who is friendly, but is not yet a friend or a relation.

A Buddy is someone to enjoy life with.

Becoming a Buddy involves giving up free time - but can be immensely rewarding.

There is no such thing as a typical relationship between a PWA and a Buddy.

Here are two views of one Buddying relationship.

**In their own words, Jim and Maggie, his Buddy, tell how their relationship started and describe the extraordinary friendship which has developed.**



**Jim** - "For a long time I didn't want a Buddy - although I knew they were a 'good thing'. When I finally came round to the idea of having one, I didn't want another gay man. I specifically asked for a woman.

And that she should enjoy ironing - because I hate it!

Even at that stage I suddenly thought, "I've got enough to do in the evenings - what am I going to do with this woman?"

AIDS affects people in different ways. I know people who were real go-getters, real ambitious bastards - until their diagnosis. They then became shrinking violets. It's not so much down to their illness as a change in attitude. In fact, what with their healthier diet and way of life, many of them are a lot fitter than before.

There are PWAs, I think, who want to play the victim. Not me. I'd hate to feel patronised by some do-gooder.

I think the role of the Buddy is to empower the PWA to do things for themselves as much as they can. Of course there are PWAs who simply can't do much physically.

I mean, I have periods of being sick. People forget that you can get colds and flu like anyone else - and it will last for a couple of weeks rather than a day. It's not unusual for a PWA to get out of bed in the morning and feel like shit, but if you push yourself you can feel better. It doesn't always work of course - sometimes you feel worse.

Talking about the practical side of things, once when I was discharged from hospital after surgery and the dressings they had given me were totally useless, Maggie spent a whole afternoon trekking around south London getting stuff to create a custom-made dressing.

Unfortunately, she hates ironing more than I do!

Maggie knows more about me than any of my friends, things I would only trust her with. There are also things I know about her - because she's told me them - that I would never talk about.

When I bitch about people I know or my job she understands.



She's seen me at the worst possible time, so full of anger that I'm unable to speak - and that's bloody unusual! She has definitely seen my worst side - and it's not a pretty sight.

People ask us all the time how we ended up with such a good match. But we're complete opposites. If you programmed our details into a computer, no way would it put us together.

Some people who don't know her think she's a sweet mummy type. That's not the case at all.

I know I'm lucky. If I have a problem I would turn to Maggie first. Other PWAs ask me if they can have a bit of Maggie... I'd hate to lose her - especially now I've broken her in."



**Maggie** - "I buddied a PWA before Jim and it didn't really work out. So I knew what rejection felt like and I was a bit wary... but I knew how well the Buddy Support Group worked for me then.

When we finally got to meet, he kept me waiting an hour and a half.

At the time I first got into this I didn't really know what to expect. I had a sort of mental picture of me - a well, cheerful person clutching a bunch of daffs - visiting this terrible crumbling wreck. I soon forgot that - he's ten times tougher than I am.

When you qualify as a Buddy you are allotted a name of some faceless person. All the training is working up to that point when you go to meet this person. It's up to you to negotiate some sort of informal contract with them. It's a very phony situation really. Sure, you are expected but it's like turning up on a stranger's doorstep and saying, "Hi! I've come to be your friend." But you know you are prepared to work at it to make it work.

And being a stranger actually gives you an advantage in many ways. You didn't know them before their diagnosis - unlike their friends who may be finding it difficult to

come to terms with the situation. People have said to me, "I've lost friends with AIDS. I know what it's like to be a Buddy". They don't at all.

Jim can use me as an emotional punchbag. He can show me himself at his absolute worst because I won't think "God, I don't want anything more to do with him."

He offloads his anger about work - and that's part of why I'm here.

He's so difficult sometimes - and he knows it. He's said to me that the final part of any Buddy's training should be to handle Jim when he's like that - if you can handle that you can handle anything!

He's good for me. When I'm dithering, he helps me to make up my mind. Temperamentally we're a good match - and there's such extreme trust between us.

We were once out in a restaurant with some friends and the waiter - who was gay - said to Jim that he thought it was wonderful that he had such a good relationship with his mother! I don't feel in the least bit maternal towards him. No one would ever guess that I'm his Buddy.

I don't think I do a lot for him at all. Once - only once - I actually did some ironing for him. He was so surprised he took a photo of me for posterity!"

The Terrence Higgins Trust





*You are not  
family.*

*You are not  
a friend – yet.*

*You have no  
official role.*

*You are a  
Buddy.*





*On the other side  
of the door  
is someone every  
bit as nervous  
as you are...*

**"I suddenly thought I've got enough to  
do in the evenings – what am I going  
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The Terrence Higgins Trust is the leading UK charity working in the field of HIV and AIDS.

When Terrence Higgins died in 1982, his illness was barely understood and his needs were not catered for. A group of his friends formed the Trust in his name to give assistance to anyone whose life is touched by HIV and AIDS.

We currently channel the efforts of over fifteen hundred people, most of them volunteers. Anyone – regardless of age, gender, race or sexuality – can call us at any time.

We need money urgently to maintain our services at even the current level, since demand for them all continues to rise. So it is up to you to make sure we are here when anyone wants us.

We have achieved so much thanks to the generosity of individuals in giving their time – and money.

There is so much more to be done.

Thank you for whatever you can spare.

**The Terrence Higgins Trust**



The Terrence Higgins Trust, 52-54 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1 8JU.



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If you do live in the Greater London area and are interested in becoming a Buddy, please call the Buddy Liaison Office on 071-831 0330.