

A time of KINDNESS

PLEASE MAKE SURE HEADLINE CAN READ

It's been the worst of times – but it's brought out the best in so many people, and made us feel connected to one another in a new way. Mel Hunter interviews four women who have helped make that happen

'It's great to have played a part in bringing the country together'

Dutch Londoner Annemarie Plas started Clap For Our Carers, inspiring the whole nation to come together every Thursday evening to thank our key workers.

As the coronavirus crisis was unfolding, and so many of us were worried about our families, how we'd get food, and whether we'd stay well, I made myself take a step back and see that my concerns were small compared with those risking their lives on the frontline. Talking to friends online, I mentioned the idea of standing outside to clap to say thank you to those NHS heroes. It had been done in the Netherlands, where I'm from, as a one-off, and my nursing friends there had said how it lifted them at such a scary time. With my friends keen to join me, I made a leaflet in the blue and white colours of the NHS and posted it on social media and WhatsApp, not really expecting it to get picked up. But within 24 hours, it had been shared so many times – and the momentum kept building. Six days later, on that first Thursday night, I was overwhelmed when millions of people opened their

“**No one can say that Britain doesn't have passion and spirit**”

front doors, stepped outside and clapped and cheered for the doctors and nurses. Hanging out of the window of my upstairs flat in south London with my husband, Trevor, and our two-year-old son, Teddy, it was amazing to see so many people doing the same. Hardly anyone in my street knew then that it was me who had started it all so, banging my pan, I was able to appreciate that moment just like everyone else. And, of course, it wasn't a one-off. Clap For Our Carers has become a Thursday-evening fixture, growing to thank all the key workers who have continued to go out to work through this difficult time, from bin collectors to supermarket workers. They've all been risking their own safety so that others can stay indoors and keep safe. The second week it happened, I opened my door and was amazed to see that most of my street was already standing outside, ready. It had taken on a momentum all of its

own, becoming one time during the week when people would emerge from their homes to give thanks, and also have some much-needed contact with their neighbours. It showed that everyone was going through the same thing, together.

Some of the most touching things are the emails I have received: proud parents telling me amazing things their adult children are doing on the frontline, and self-isolating people saying how much that weekly contact with others means to them. A nurse messaged me



Grateful neighbours show their appreciation



The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge joined in, too



Quickfire

- Dawn chorus or night owl?** Dawn chorus. Teddy sees to that.
- Book or boxset?** Usually a book.
- Yoga or Joe Wicks workout?** For me, yoga helps to keep me in balance.
- How many unread emails are in your inbox?** Around 15.
- What inspires me most is...** People that are rooted and live fully in the moment.
- My life motto is...** Nothing is impossible.
- The advice I'd pass on is...** You are not your thoughts. Don't let your mind play tricks on you and control you. You are more than that.
- My simple pleasure is...** To cuddle those I love.

for free. They've shared their expertise while always looking to me for guidance, waiting for me to tell them how I want things to be. I have never had that in my life. I hope Clap For Our Carers will be a platform for something even bigger after the virus is behind us. After two years in the UK, I finally feel like a Londoner. It's great to have played a part in bringing the country together, especially when it felt so divided before this started. No one can say now that Britain doesn't have passion and spirit. The British people took the idea of Clap For Our Carers and made it their own, which is such a special thing.