

Dave is a lollipop man. Every morning from 8.15 to 8.45 and every afternoon from three thirty to four o'clock, Dave stands at a busy crossroads with his metal lollipop, shepherding children across the road in safety. When we read the word *lollipop* we usually think of a flat round sweet on a stick, but a lollipop man's lollipop is not something to eat. It is a sign he carries to warn car drivers that children are crossing the road. It has the same shape as the sweet, but is made of metal and is almost two meters high.

"I used to work right in front of the school until last year. Then they installed traffic lights, so there wasn't much need for me anymore. It was a pity really, because I liked standing there. I felt in the middle of everything, seeing everyone come and go. All the kiddies knew my name, and so did the mums and dads. Now, of course, I'm lucky if I get to see half the number I used to. I feel on the edge of everything here, stuck out on a limb."

Dressed in his bright yellow waterproof raincoat and wearing a white hat, Dave is easy to spot, even on the darkest dullest wettest afternoon in midwinter.

"In December and January it's still dark when the children go to school, and by the time they come out again at half past three, the sun has already set. If I weren't dressed like this, the drivers in their cars would never see me in time to stop. I wouldn't be much use to the children, then, would I?"

Dave's job is clearly a labour of love. He does it because he loves children. The council pays him to help the children across the road at a dangerous junction, but he would do the job even if he weren't paid.

"I used to be in the Royal Navy before I did this. Twenty-five years I was at sea. I don't know how I stuck it. We were out at sea, on board ship with nobody for company but a crew of tired men. There were no women and kids. In those days, it simply wasn't allowed. It was like being in a world without sunshine. I hear things have changed since I left though. Apparently, there are women in the Navy now, and I imagine life on board ship feels different. Hold on a second. Here comes another one."

Dave stepped off the pavement, his left hand raised to signal to oncoming traffic to stop. Resting his metal lollipop in the middle of the road, he waved across a group of faces peeking out from hooded anoraks.

"Alright there, kids? Over you go, now!"

"Thanks, Dave!"