

Annex 2: Case study: how community connections services make a difference

Below is a piece sent in by one of the participants of Walking for Health who also attends the Next Steps Depression Support Group, delivered by the community connections service in Woking, CornerHouse.

“We are a motley crew us Tuesday afternoon walkers, hikers, one foot in front of the other’s. We meet every Tuesday at 1.15pm. Start at a convenient spot (with parking facilities) for our designated walk.

The group consists of men & women, tall ones, short ones, slender ones & not so slender ones. The pace is ‘of your choice’. We walk, talk & laugh. There is always a ‘back marker’ to keep tabs on the stragglers (often me). We walk for approximately 1.1/2-2 hours. Refreshments are taken at the ‘watering hole’ either in the middle of the walk or at the finish.

We cover quite a lot of the local countryside walking along tow paths-passing locks, canalboats, lovely houses & enjoying many spectacular views. We even ‘paid the ferryman’ to cross from Shepperton to Walton & back again.

Most of the walks are easy to moderate. One walk (just out of our patch) was eye-catching, but the upward climb to the beautiful pilgrim’s church of St Martha’s was a challenge for me. Walking, no talking & definitely no laughing. When I reached the top I felt like Sir Edmund Hillary & Sherpa Tensing must have felt on reaching the summit of Everest (a slight exaggeration ... No a mammoth exaggeration). As I stood to regain my breath I was stunned by the magnificent views. The climb had been worth it. As a result I was bought a pair of hiker’s sticks as a present. That particular walk is hopefully on the agenda for the future. This time I will approach the climb with GUSTO, and if he doesn’t turn up I will have my trusty sticks to help me.

As well as the friendly folk in the group (who are always ready to give encouragement) we are on occasions joined by wonderful four legged companions. They trot along beside us very friendly and one (a two pint bundle of fun) likes to be the ‘back marker’ rounding up the stragglers (me amongst them).

The mental & physical stimulus gained is not just for the 2 hours walk. Physically the body has had a ‘workout’ breathing-blood flow etc. Mentally the mind has much to savour. Thinking of the interesting places visited. For me, I can now talk with some knowledge about Botley Mansion, Papercourt Lake, Pilgrims Way & various locks in the waterside beauty spots at the places I have seen.

Tuesday afternoons are for me enjoyable & hopefully an aid to good physical & mental health.

To those who feel that loneliness is your constant companion, I say if you can put one foot in front of the other, take your courage in both hands & join us. Give it a try, who knows it might prove beneficial & give loneliness a holiday”.

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