

**Your Retirement: Your Choice**  
**Encouraging a healthy, happy and fulfilled retirement**

**Background to the programme**

In the UK, as elsewhere in the world, the proportion of the population over 65 is increasing. The Centre for Aging (2019) reports that the number of people in this age group will increase by more than 40% within 20 years and that:

“Ageing is inevitable, but how we age is not. Our current rates of chronic illness mental health conditions, disability and frailty could be greatly reduced if we tackled the structural, economic and social drivers of poor health earlier.”

Much has been written about the need to improve health and wellbeing and concerns about the potential burden on national and local resources of an ageing population. But less is heard about the opportunity that this stage of life can offer individuals and their community. In this context retirement is no longer a fixed point in time but a fluid process where change can be exciting and positive.

In 2018 Works & Learning Opportunities developed and began delivering a retirement programme designed to support positive ageing. It was initially funded from the National Lottery.

**The programme model**

The programme was aimed at individuals who were about to retire or had already retired and was designed to:

- explore the implications of what retirement means for each participant and look at the issues raised for making choices in this stage of life.
- present practical ideas, provide tasters and raise awareness of free and low-cost activities to stimulate interest, promote a healthy and active lifestyle and combat loneliness.
- challenge participants to see this transition as a time of opportunity and personal growth.
- encourage participants to plan for their immediate future and take advantage of the new opportunities they were discovering.
- create an environment that was enjoyable, conducive to shared learning and formed the basis for creating new friendships.

Our model included a workbook plus teaching materials that could be passed on to other local organisations to deliver future. In addition participants with the relevant skills and interest were encouraged to volunteer to help with future deliveries. Our workbook was interactive and enabled participants to take stock of their situation and make plans for the future. It also included contact details for local organisations and activities.

**Piloting our approach**

In 2018 we ran two rounds of the programme as a pilot in Brighton & Hove which was free to participants. In 2019 we provided training, support and materials for The Hangleton & Knoll Project (a Community Development charity) to run a third programme on their premises for which participants were charged nominal £5 registration fee.

**Weekly themes**

The programme ran for one half day a week for six weeks and covered:

- Managing money, time and resources
- Making new friends and volunteering
- Looking after yourself
- Carrying on learning

- Using digital tools
- Looking to the future

Sessions have included input from local organisations as well as opportunities to try new things such as a social walk, a singing session and bread-making at a community bakery.

### **What we learned**

Our experience has shown that many retirees have concerns about the transition to retirement and:

- haven't really thought about the nature of the change they are facing.
- need a lot of encouragement to try new things, socialise and make changes to their lives - for example via exercise and diet or learning something new.
- don't know where to look for local free/low cost activities.
- aren't aware of the benefits that voluntary or other work related activity can bring in terms of personal fulfilment and new friendships as well as to the wider community.

The process of collecting feedback involved spontaneous comments from participants after each session, an activity in the final session and follow up questionnaires sent to all participants. For the purposes of this brief report, we have amalgamated and summarised the results of the three programmes done so far.

### **Increased knowledge identified in these areas:**

- Managing my money and where to go for financial advice
- Healthy eating strategies and opportunities for exercise
- The benefits of meeting new people
- Local volunteering opportunities and how to apply for them
- The benefits of learning new things and where to find free and low-cost opportunities
- How to make positive changes to lifestyle

### **Lifestyle changes made**

*"I have embarked on a weight loss programme and increased my physical exercise regime."*

*"Signed up for courses. Thinking about voluntary work. Looking into exercise programmes."*

*"Had health check and joined 'Dancing for Health', also took up walking in Stanmer Park."*

*"Bought myself a stepometer which I regularly use."*

*"On diet and now looking at volunteering work."*

*"I now take regular exercise; I am following a more healthy diet; I am more aware of healthy activities in the community".*

*"Have one meat free day a week. Trying to implement small changes."*

*"I have sorted out my pension and am now going to do a weekly expenses check to ensure my spending remains within my income."*

*"Still helping the Recovery College; in fact, I am training to become a classroom buddy."*

*"I will certainly go on some health walks and brush up on the guitar that I learned about many moons ago!"*

*"Yes, I have applied to Brighton Festival and had an introductory session last week. Also joined U3A but that is still being processed."*

*"Still pleased I did your course and remind myself every now and again of the '5 ways of wellbeing' and the 150 minutes I am supposed to do each week. Oh! And I have bought a stepometer which I carry with me! Also got the health check!"*

*"I have decided to learn a foreign language preferably Spanish, and will let you know how I get on."*

*"My next goals are to have a student, maybe learn to dance and go to another Arts Festival. ... I surprise myself with what I can do."*

*"I loved the hands-on experience of baking and the singing session. I have joined a choir, something I never considered previously".*

**What participants said about the programme:**

*"Thanks for an inspiring first session. What a nice bunch of people!"*

*"Really enjoying the course and hoping to gain ideas, inspiration and confidence along the way."*

*"The health walk opportunity was also good and I believe should always be part of the course. It's too easy to 'put off' trying these ideas out and this way we've tried as well as considered trying."*

*"It was a very well thought out event combining many different aspects of our retirement theme."*

*"The research that went into the content of the course enabled me to access a wide variety of free or cheap 60+ activities and opportunities that I otherwise wouldn't have known about."*

*"It helps you feel less isolated and empowers you to take control of your retirement."*

*"The group has helped me think about and prepare for retirement in a thoughtful and structured way."*

*"Many thanks for sending the recipes and photo; it was a really brilliant event - well done for planning such a super session into the course. I enjoyed it immensely and am pretty sure that everyone else did too."*

*"I have already enthused about the course to several friends. Anyone attending just one session would benefit."*

*"One of the best courses I have been on."*

*"Well worth attending, I was so glad I joined."*

*"Helped develop confidence and self-esteem."*

*"I found the course very helpful and would recommend to friends. Courses like this are very important for people."*

*"Yes, definitely, but approach it with an open mind and make sure you take part in discussion."*

*"I feel it is a good springboard to start a new adventure in retirement".*

*"It was great fun and more informative than I imagined it would be".*

*"I still have issues to come to terms with but this has set me on the right path"*

*"Thank you so much, I hope I can put some of your wisdom into practice."*

*"It has helped me to look at retirement as a series of transitions and broadened my horizons on many levels."*

**About Work & Learning Opportunities**

Work & Learning Opportunities c.i.c is a social enterprise created in 2010, with expertise in education, enterprise and employment. We undertake research, evaluation, training, coaching and project management for universities, colleges and both third and public sector organisations and agencies. Our specialist knowledge includes areas of disadvantage such as unemployment, homelessness and widening participation in higher education for underprivileged young people. More information about us and our work can be found on our website. [www.workandlearning.co.uk](http://www.workandlearning.co.uk)

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