

Introduction

This short report is based on the experience of participants on the programme Your Life: Your Retirement that ran for six weeks during January-February 2020. This is the second time the course has been run in Hangleton and Knoll.

It was organised and supported by the Hangleton and Knoll Project (HKP) in Brighton and was held at St Richards Community Centre in Hangleton. The programme itself was a collaboration with Chris Baker from Work & Learning Opportunities c.i.c (WLO). It was based on the materials and approach that WLO had developed in 2017/18 with the support of Lottery Funding. WLO had piloted it in Brighton as a free programme with the focus on enabling people to enjoy a fulfilling, active and healthy retirement.

<http://www.workandlearning.co.uk/projects/retirement/>

For HKP and Clare Hopkins, the Community Development Worker - Older People, it afforded an opportunity to achieve the following: -

- Add a new strand of activity to their established programme of work for 50+ in the local community. <https://www.hkproject.org.uk/50plus>
- Provide an opportunity introduce participants to the activities and volunteering opportunities at HKP.
- Engage a new and potentially younger cohort in developing community activities.

Participants were charged £5 for the programme and the costs of advertising, room hire etc. were met by HKP. The promotional materials were developed by HKP in collaboration with WLO to include a positive message to ensure wide appeal and engagement. The targeted promotion and engagement to the course was led by HKP using local networks, outreach into the community, Social Media and email.

Aims of the programme

The programme had a number of overlapping aims, which included the following:-

- 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.
- To challenge participants to see this transition as a time of opportunity and personal growth.
- To present a range of practical ideas about what was available locally to stimulate interest and promote a healthy and active lifestyle.
- To encourage participants to plan for their immediate future and take advantage of the new opportunities they were discovering.
- To create an environment that was conducive to shared learning, enjoyable and formed the basis for creating new friendships.



Overview of programme

The programme was based around a number of interconnected themes as follows:-

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



Resources and activities, including worksheets, were provided for each theme. A list of local sources of information about the themes was given at the end of the session. Time was set aside for reflection and action on what had been presented and discussed.

Clare Hopkins (HKP) and Chris Baker (WLO) acted as co-facilitators. They ran the sessions and provided follow-up summaries at the end of each week. There were also contributions from local organisations where a specialist input was required. These included the MIND Wellbeing in the City, Harmonessence Choirs, and Stoneham Bakery.

Participants were encouraged to experiment and try things out both during and after the sessions. A What's App group was set up to enable those participants who wished to share ideas, links and support together between sessions as a light, accessible alternative to group emailing. This proved very popular and well used. It has also provided an effective way of the group promoting self managed activity beyond the course itself.

The last session provided space for participants to reflect back on the whole course- their learning, ideas, questions they still had and to think about next steps. There was also a quiz which tested some of the knowledge about what had been covered in x previous weeks. It finished as it started with participants doing a fun game where they shared with each other their ideas for next steps. Many of the group plan to stay in touch and meet for activities together after the course ends.

The participants

There were a total of 12 participants, 9 women and 3 men. This diverse group had a broad range of ages between 50 and 81, with three members with non-British backgrounds which added different perspectives and experiences to the mix. Two were still doing paid work during the programme and one retired during the six weeks. Attendance was very high throughout the course. The participants had a varied range of life and work backgrounds. Some came from the local community and others from further afield in Brighton and Worthing. This diversity formed the basis for rich and interesting discussions as they shared their life experiences and perspectives. This was felt to be a key component in the success of the course and in the benefits felt by participants. In addition the use a community facility at St Richards provided the ideal setting where participants felt comfortable, relaxed and enjoyed sharing coffee before the sessions started. This environment was much appreciated by the participants. Creating a safe and secure space was critical in enabling participants to talk openly about the difficult problems confronting them.

Getting feedback

The process of collecting feedback involved spontaneous comments from participants after each session; an activity in the final session and follow up questionnaires given to all participants. The latter incorporated a standardised survey that is used for all HKP activities and an additional set of questions specifically about the participant's experience of the programme. For the purposes of this report the replies from both surveys have been integrated to form a single narrative. 12 questionnaires were issued and 12 responses were received. For the purposes of this report direct quotes have been italicised.

Benefits of the programme

When commenting on the overall benefits participants agreed on a number of factors that were important such as: Personal development; positive changes to lifestyle; better informed about health and exercise; made new friends; thinking about the next stage of life as a group and exploring the topics together; and gained information on opportunities at HKP, ideas for learning and volunteering.

'Provided a wealth of ideas and information about how to make the best of my retirement- learning, fun and sense of purpose.'

'It has been very helpful to have space and time to think about things in a group of people with similar issues.'

'It was helpful to hear about other people's experiences in the discussions.'



10 participants said they got what they wanted from the programme, with 2 saying that they partly had. When asked what three things they liked most about the programme the most frequently mentioned responses were: -

- Meeting people/sharing experience and learning environment
- Format/activities and information given to participants
- Challenging myself and gaining confidence

'I liked the course a lot. It had a positive, upbeat tone, and was realistic, discussing real issues.'

'Free tea, coffee and fruit', 'The bakery and singing'

"The course was led beautifully and was well organised. A wealth of knowledge to keep and make use of"

'Observing other people is interesting'

'I am already 'no longer working'- the course has revealed new options available to me e.g. I have joined an exercise/diet group.'

'It has been very good to meet different people with different life experiences who are in a similar situation.'

'I found out about many opportunities for learning, volunteering and fun. Also to get involved in the local community.'

In contrast there were very few comments about what participants liked least with one person expressing regret that they had enjoyed getting to know people on the course and now it was ending. They were some useful suggestions about what might be changed about the programme such as:

- offering it on a different day of the week
- providing an opportunity to explore the emotional aspects of retirement in more depth
- demanding more from participants in between the sessions, such as setting challenges and/or homework such as giving individuals the job of researching a topic they are interested in and feeding back to the group



When asked whether they would recommend the course to a friend all 10 made positive comments:

'Definitely go!! It has been refreshing, fun, informative and thought provoking.'

'Really helpful time to think about next phase of life. Well run and nice group of participants.'

'I have been sending the course material to my friend in Germany who has really benefitted to!'

When asked about how participants now viewed the next stage of their life 3 said they were really looking forward to it; 7 were clear about the next steps they would take and 1 expressed that they were still unsure about the future.

- *'The course was amazing. Helped me a lot to change my bad habits. I am looking forward to a positive future. I will miss the course.'*
- *'Fantastic course. I have changed my lifestyle and am looking forward to the benefits and to a positive future.'*
- *'I have clearer ideas about how to make the most of my retirement, keep healthy and continue learning.'*
- *'It has been a fantastic course. It has given me more confidence, lots of information to go forward with. I was nervous about retirement- not anymore!'*
- *'I joined this course because I had experience of someone having had a poor experience of retirement and was aware that it took some years to adjust. Although I am over 2yrs from retirement I wanted to hit the ground running and approach it positively rather than with trepidation. The course has done this and I feel more confident about where to look for ideas and how to structure my life when the structure of work is not there. I have also tried baking (I have already been in a choir) and met some lovely new people. Knowing that there are others at the same stage helps.'*
- *My main reason for coming was to give him some ideas and for me to reduce my anxiety about reducing work commitment. This course has made me feel more positive and confident about my plan to work p/t at 60*
- *'Life can throw up the unexpected but being clear about what I want helps me to move forward.'*

Summary

As with the first course run by HKP the feedback from this second group was overwhelmingly positive and most seem to have achieved what they wanted from the six weeks. They emphasized how much they had got from the experience both individually and collectively. They were surprised that the whole course only cost £5 and were keen to promote it to family and friends. There is clearly a need for this type of course in a supported community setting.