

CYC Community Health Champions – Reducing Loneliness & isolation

The Community Health Champions programme is proving to be an effective way of reaching people and is making a real difference within communities. Champions are increasing public participation, initiating community development opportunities whilst gaining new skills and knowledge. Within their families, communities and workplaces Community Health Champions empower and motivate people to get involved in healthy social activities; create new activities to meet local needs; and signpost people to relevant community activities and support.

Each Community Health Champion attends a 4 hour training and induction session covering key topics including health inequalities across the city plus City of York Council and key partner's approach to addressing and impacting those inequalities. Each Health Champion also learns how using a Making Every Contact Count (MECC) approach can influence positive behaviour change to positively impact health and wellbeing.

Core learning as a Health Champion covers key public health areas of healthy weight, balanced diet, smoking, alcohol and physical activity. The training focuses on how individual lifestyle factors affect these key areas of health and how peoples' social capacity and community networks play a key role in addressing health inequalities.

The Community Health Champions programme includes core principles of reducing loneliness and social isolation to improve social capacity. This recognises the role that relationships between individuals and between individuals and institutions has on health inequalities as a result of social inequalities. Community Health Champions help people to connect with their communities and local services, reducing social isolation and loneliness, increasing social capital.

All incoming Health Champions are offered a series of one-to-one conversations with the programme manager to explore project ideas in their local area. Recognising Health Champions as experts by experience in their own communities is a core principle of the programme and supports the development of projects based on local knowledge and experience.

Key examples of Health Champion projects currently reducing loneliness and social isolation are:

Strictly Fun Dancing - A barn / ceilidh style social dance taking place in Acomb, aimed at older people but inclusive of all age groups. The dances don't require having a partner and promote movement to music in groups in a social environment.

Mindfulness Minds – Promotes and facilitates “being present”, a key area of the five ways to wellbeing. Facilitating group craft activities in a relaxed and inclusive environment at New Earswick Folk Hall.

Let's Walk York – A sight-guided walking group for adults with learning disabilities, sight loss and / or visual impairments. Walks start and finish at Wilberforce House independent living accommodation. Health Champion volunteers are trained in sight-guided walking through the Guide Dogs Association.

Lunchtime Connections York – A weekly group video call for people living alone and working from home. The group connects people at risk of loneliness and social isolation.