

AGEING BETTER SPARKBROOK HUB

Narthex Sparkhill has led on the delivery of the Ageing Better Sparkbrook Hub in partnership with the East Birmingham Collective, which aims to reduce isolation and loneliness and improve wellbeing for people over 50. The project was originally commissioned by BVSC with Big Lottery funding over 6 years. It was then extended until March 2022, with this being our final year.

Since the Hub started in 2016, it has successfully helped to reduce social isolation in Sparkbrook and has built strong partnerships, with a positive reputation in the community. The project seeks to set up new activities, with the help of volunteers of any age, to help older people feel more connected. The Hub has assisted local organisations and community members in

accessing the Ageing Better fund, which is a fund that offers up to 2k to set up new activities.

Since the start of the project **78 community led activities have been set up across Sparkbrook to engage isolated older people.** These include arts and crafts, meditation and wellbeing, exercise, reminiscence workshops, English classes, games groups, cycling, walking, gentle dance and much more.

2,187 Birmingham citizens have reported increased social and community connections and have been able to access community-led support through Ageing Better Networks.

Relax and Get Fit at Spark Green Park. The group met for weekly Tai Chi and Qi Gong classes.



803 older people have reported improved wellbeing, reduced isolation and a greater ability to cope.

The project initially faced many challenges as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. From May 2021 onwards, things gradually changed to become more positive, with face-to-face meetings resuming, albeit slowly. Many groups continued to social distance and wear face masks to protect their members. People seemed to feel more confident to venture out after receiving their vaccinations, although some anxiety still remains, particularly amongst those who are much older and vulnerable.

Details of some of the groups follow:

Women’s Happy Heart

This is a Bangladeshi women’s group who used their Ageing Better funding to run a series of craft workshops, using wax to make decorative pieces and items to aid stress relief. This included homemade fragrance candles, wax flowers, organic sleep balm, and lip balm. At the end of their sessions they enjoyed snacks and refreshments together. Their activities ran for 16-weeks, and to



finish off they had a celebratory community event in December 2021.

At this event, they were able to sell some of the crafts they made. They also learnt how to self-massage since many women felt isolated, anxious, and low in mood, as a result of the pandemic. They had a total of 27 women signed up to the project and they really enjoyed themselves. The group will showcase their craft work at the AB Spring Event in February 2022.

"I enjoy coming here and making things and seeing friends. I felt so bored at home." SH, Member

Yemeni Elderly Project

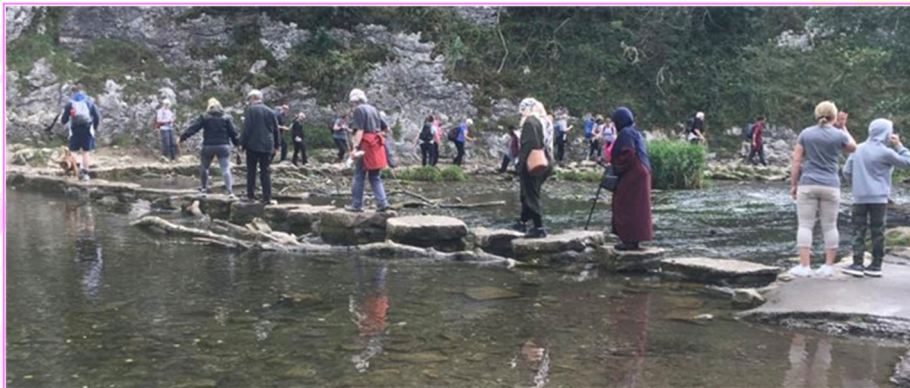
This is an Arabic speaking group that met for calligraphy workshops before the pandemic. The lead had

stated that most people were not sufficiently digitally skilled to keep in touch during the lockdowns and did not speak English. Some managed to keep in touch by phone.

When groups were safe to meet again, they found the tutor was no longer available. They also found that the groups needs had changed, with the lack of exercise affecting older people's mobility.

Due to this they chose to use their remaining funding to have swimming sessions, with the permission of the Ageing Better Fund.

They found that many people were still reluctant to come out due to anxiety and lower confidence. As a result of this they decided to apply to the transition fund and were successful and went for a day trip to the Peak District in September 2021. The lead said the people really enjoyed it and the feedback was excellent. In the photo below, we can see one of the Yemeni ladies on a trail, and it is encouraging to see that a walking stick did not deter her from getting involved. They booked a 72 seat coach and it was full of men and women from the local communities of Sparkbrook and Balsall Heath.



Peace Sanctuary

This is a group of men and women in Balsall Heath in their 50s and 60s, and from mixed cultural backgrounds. They got to know each other before the lockdown

in February 2020 and kept in touch. They were successful in their application to the fund in 2021, to run wellbeing workshops, as well as maintain an on-site peace garden.

The group ran twice a week on a Tuesday and Friday with craft and holistic workshops for people who have been bereaved and/or face mental health issues. This was followed by a healthy lunch and a pay as you go compassion café.

The group will finish in March 2022. It is going well, although they are finding that people in the area have been slow to re-engage with their community. They have 8 regular members.

"I feel this group has really supported me during some dark days. Everyone is always so friendly and warm." JH, Member

We love Ping Pong

This is a group set up by 5 Pakistani men in Small Heath aged between 52 and 75. They set up an activity group for men to play table tennis and darts, followed by some food and socialising. The pandemic meant that most men who would normally have socialised at the mosque, became bored and isolated.

They wanted to do something outdoors to get fit and active after spending so much time indoors.

They applied to the fund and were successful and their activities started in September 2021. They held their sessions at a community centre, which has a little garden outside. They were able to set up the table outside over the warmer months. During the winter they moved indoors to play cards and the photo shows the group having lunch.

The lead reported the sessions went well and were popular with between 15 - 20 men attending.



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