

# AMAZING STORIES

## FACTFILE

### NAME

Christine Charles

### ALTOGETHER BETTER PROJECT

Building Health Opportunities  
in Kirklees

### WHAT SHE DID

Took courses in Healthy Eating and Planning and Cooking for a Healthy Lifestyle, which enabled her to become a tutor, running Cook 'n' Eat sessions in the community. Participated in healthy living events run by community groups, passing on healthy eating messages to vulnerable local people. Supported Cook 'n' Eat sessions in a variety of community settings. Took further training in Relaxation and Meditation, Tai Chi and Reflexology and is in the process of setting up Relaxation and Meditation classes for people with neurological conditions.

### WHAT DIFFERENCE DID SHE MAKE?

Passed on healthy eating messages and skills to 70 people. Contributed towards improving the emotional well-being of 17 individuals who have taken part in Relaxation and Meditation classes. Improved her own physical health, self-esteem and confidence by learning new skills and by getting out and meeting new people.

### ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Building Health Opportunities for the Communities of Kirklees project exists to empower local people to promote healthy living among vulnerable adults in Kirklees through a range of activities aimed at increasing healthy eating and physical activity and improving mental well-being.



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# COMMUNITY HEALTH CHAMPION

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**Christine Charles has always helped others in her community while juggling the demands of home life and work.**

Christine, who lives in Huddersfield, has continued to boost her skills by volunteering, even when employment has been insecure and despite suffering from asthma. She volunteered first for a housing company and then with the Nerve Centre, a charity which supports people living with neurological conditions.

But even for someone with Christine's positive outlook, the two years before she signed up to be a Community Health Champion with the Building Health Opportunities for the Communities of Kirklees were a difficult time.

In July 2008, she gave up her voluntary work to look after her mother, who sadly died later that year. Then in February 2009, her temporary job in a residential home for the elderly came to an end. Unemployed and low on confidence, Christine spent her time cleaning the family home, gardening, 'counting the pennies' and looking for work.

“With my knowledge of admin, clerical and reception work I was willing to learn but I lacked confidence due to being unemployed,” she said. “Healthwise, I felt bloated and my asthma had worsened.”

After enquiring about local apprenticeship schemes, she got in touch with the Kirklees project about becoming a Community Health Champion.

Support Officer, Gillian Mallinson said: “It was clear that she was a kind and considerate person who would work well with vulnerable adults in the community. We wanted to offer her the chance of improving the skills she already had and also to learn some new ones, while at the same time improving her confidence and well-being.”

Christine took the project's Healthy Eating Key Messages course and the Open College Network accredited Planning and Cooking for a Healthy Lifestyle. These gave her the skills and confidence to run Cook 'n' Eat sessions in the community and inspire and motivate others to learn more about healthy eating.

At a Healthy Living Day run by a local diabetes support group, Christine made diabetic-friendly smoothies and passed on tips for eating five portions of fruit and veg a day. She has played a similar role with a hearing impaired group, inspiring members to eat more healthily.

“She interacts really well with everybody, chatting and explaining about the benefits of healthy eating,” said Gillian.

The project team then put Christine back in touch with the Nerve Centre. Initially providing support with Cook 'n' Eat sessions, she took another course in supporting people who suffer from stress, anxiety and neurological conditions and is now running a Meditation and Relaxation Programme at the Centre. Christine is also passing on newly acquired skills in Tai Chi and Reflexology to family and friends.

As her knowledge and expertise have grown, Christine's own physical and emotional well-being has improved markedly.

Christine said: “My diet has changed for the better. For instance, I have learnt to reduce my salt intake. From eating more healthily I have noticed a change in my complexion and I no longer feel bloated.

“The Relaxation and Meditation course has helped me to be more relaxed and feel more positive in my thoughts and action and the Tai Chi has shown me how to breathe properly, which has resulted in not needing to use my inhaler as often as before.”

Meanwhile her community work has boosted Christine's confidence and self-esteem. Her desire to find paid work is as strong as ever but the difference now is that she believes it is something she can really achieve.

“I love helping others and telling them about my own experiences and helping them to feel positive about life,” she said. “I hope that my story will inspire others to become more involved with community groups and to encourage healthy living activities.”

She added: “By coming on the programme, I have gained skills I thought I would never have had the chance to learn. I can now deliver my own sessions with community groups I never thought I would have had the opportunity to meet. The project is a great opportunity for people who are unemployed or have confidence issues to learn new skills and meet people.”

## CONTACT

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**Altogether Better** was founded on the firm belief that community health champions have the potential to make a significant impact on health inequalities. In 2008, we were awarded £6.8m from the BIG Lottery Well-being Fund to run our innovative, five-year programme in Yorkshire and the Humber. We have 16 locally-delivered flagship projects across the region, testing out different community health champion approaches in a range of settings.

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