

AMAZING STORIES

FACTFILE

NAME

Irene Cyhanko

ALTOGETHER BETTER PROJECT

Seniors Show the Way

WHAT SHE DID


Trained as a Community Health Champion to set up and run the Friday Group, a fortnightly social and health awareness club for older members of Keighley's Ukrainian community.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DID SHE MAKE?

Passed on healthy living messages to 170 people at the Ukrainian Centres in Keighley, West Yorkshire and Ashton, Lancashire.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Seniors Show the Way is an initiative, running in Bradford and the surrounding district, which aims to improve the health of communities by empowering older people (aged 50+) with the knowledge they need to promote positive health messages to people in their local community and in particular those who have been discharged from hospital.



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COMMUNITY HEALTH CHAMPION

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Forget Facebook. When it comes to real-life social networking, Irene Cyhanko definitely has ‘best friend’ status in Keighley’s Ukrainian community.

Born in the UK to Ukrainian parents who came to this country as refugees after the Second World War, she has always tried to keep the self-reliant culture and values of her community alive and to help those in need.

Treasurer and Administrator of the Association of Ukrainians’ Keighley branch as well as chair of the Ukrainian Women’s Association, Irene also volunteers as a language interpreter for patients at Airedale Hospital. Her proud voluntary record made her the obvious choice for setting up and running a regular social group for elderly Ukrainian patients.

“There was a need to get people out of their houses and bring them out into the community,” she said.



“Where else were they going to go? With people in the latter stages of dementia, you can’t

exactly go to the pub. But it’s different at the Centre. This is their home.”

After meeting Arfan Ali, a Community Health Activator with the Bradford-based Seniors Show the Way project, Irene trained as a Community Health Champion, gaining skills that would help improve her own and other people’s health.

“I learned relaxation skills that are particularly useful to me after a tough day,” she said. “I also learned some useful tips about healthy eating and staying fit and active that I could pass on to others.”

Finally, with Seniors Show the Way’s help and funding from Health in Mind, the Friday Group was born.

The Group’s fortnightly meetings at the Ukrainian Centre combine short advice sessions from experts on a range of subjects, from fire safety to diabetes awareness, with a chance to chat and catch up with friends or just watch some Ukrainian television. Irene and other volunteers provide a cooked meal for the 20 or so regulars and Jean McHale is on hand to provide alternative therapy, including massage and reflexology. But its main function is to provide a social lifeline for some very isolated people.

“One of our regulars says that being in his flat is like being in prison,” said Irene. “At the group, he can talk and laugh. He’d come every day if he could.”

One advantage of being part of a wider project is that Irene can keep in regular touch with

other Seniors Show The Way Community Health Champions through regular network meetings.

“It’s really interesting to hear what Community Health Champions are doing across Yorkshire, as everyone’s experiences are unique,” she said. “We all support each other. By talking to people you’ve got a little bit of knowledge that might help you or your group. I’m a big believer in sharing ideas.”

The meetings have helped Irene to develop new skills, giving her the confidence to speak in public for the first time.

“I never liked to talk in front of a lot of people,” she said. “But this has given me the confidence to do that and to be a little bit pushy when I’ve seen that people need help. Ukrainian people are very proud and they won’t normally ask for help. But they will now ask me directly. They know it’s between me and them: they look at me as a support network as well as a friend.”

She added: “I’ve always learned new things from work and life experience but the knowledge I’ve gained from Seniors Show the Way has helped cement everything. The Group will continue in some form or other. It’s too important to stop.”

CONTACT

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Using evidenced based community engagement approaches and our community health champion model, Altogether Better works with others to unlock the full potential of people, patients and communities to improve their health and wellbeing and that of the people they live and work with.

We work with the NHS, Department of Health and national partners to prototype models which support Foundation Trusts, CCGs and General Practice to engage local people. We have models to support people with the self management of long term conditions, birth and parenting; LifeCheck, local needs assessment, relationship support and Roma health.

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