



Indirect Beneficiary case study from Seniors Show the Way Sally and her experience on the Artwalks

Sally considered herself reasonably healthy until she suffered health problems last year. She is a full time carer, having devoted the last 20 years to looking after a friend who is paraplegic and has complex health problems. She relocated to Bradford (a place she unfamiliar with) in order to do this. As a result her own health has taken a backseat for many years.

“It’s taken a while to get round to doing something that benefits me,” she explains. “A couple of years ago I started to have problems sleeping and I started to feel really quite ill. I went to the doctor and he prescribed me something, but it didn’t help. I had what I recall as an episode, it just all seemed too much. I was working and looking after John and I didn’t have a life of my own. It’s very easy for this to happen to a carer as you have so many demands on your time. I got to a point when, if I hadn’t put the washing out by 9.30am then I’d be practically in tears as I wouldn’t have a chance to fit all my other chores in! The pressure of trying to fit everything in was crushing me and finally I had a mental breakdown.”



Sally with one of her artwork pictures

“I’ve gained a bit of interaction from people and this was what was missing in my life, as it’s all too easy to find yourself cut-off, as everything is concentrated in the person you’re looking after.”

Sally recalls a particular episode: “I remember having an episode where I’d screamed and thrown some glasses at the wall. Shortly after, I had a visit from a policewoman and I assumed that the neighbours had complained, and quite rightly too! So she came in, and I told her about my situation. We had a cup of tea and she listened to me and she wouldn’t leave until I’d promised that I would visit my GP and insist on some help from Social Services. I found out later that she had only knocked on the door to advise me on crime prevention!”

Sally returned to her GP practice where she was prescribed anti-depressants and advised to get some form of counselling. Whilst that was being sorted the possibility of doing Art Therapy was put forward. “I was doubtful about doing the art therapy; I had this idea that you went to art therapy, produced some artwork and then they’d look at it and from that see what was wrong with you.”

Sally hadn’t done any art since she was at school and believed that she “wasn’t really good at it even then! But,” she continued, “I enjoyed it and very quickly, within the first two sessions, I realised it was about giving yourself the time and space and the opportunity not to think about life in such a serious way, but to express feelings through utilising the art materials.” Sally was able to take part in the art therapy for several months after which the Art Therapist suggested going along to the Artwalks and that’s how she was introduced to the Seniors Show the Way project.

The Artwalks are modelled on Health Walks. They are run by a qualified volunteer walk leader and are inclusive in pace. The difference is that the walking is broken up by sketching opportunities, and the subject of the artwork can differ widely, depending on where the walk is located that week. The Artwalks are well received with sometimes as many as 10 people coming along per Session; nevertheless there is almost always a core group of 5 'regulars' and this includes Sally.

David McCormack, Community Health Champion for Seniors Show the Way, runs the Artwalks every Wednesday afternoon and has seen Sally change since she's been in the group. "When she joined she claimed that she couldn't do any artwork, but as her confidence has grown there has been an improvement on how she sees her work." She has also learnt skills, David adds: "She's making really good artwork now." When asked about how she fits in with the group, David responded: "She's a lot more cheery and outgoing than at the beginning. She has started coming out of herself and now she's the life and soul of the group." David believes that "Sally is much happier" and that "she goes out of her way to help others out." Her attitude and personality have had a positive effect on the group. David continues: "I feel that she has brought me out of my shell a bit. I think I can talk to people a bit better now, and she seems to be having the same effect on other members of the group."

Sally has entered some of her artwork for exhibition, at the Seniors Show the Way Celebration event in June 2010, something she hadn't envisaged doing when she first joined. "I was surprised to see how different the artwork looked when it'd been framed. It was nice to know that people were interested in seeing my work."

Sally says of the Artwalks: "David is quite arty and he's very generous in pointing out things that you can do. He's not a teacher, he's not there to teach art but he's very generous with his time and happy to pass on his knowledge." He is evidently an inspiring force "It rubs off on you, he's drawing something that seems like a daft subject! But the more you see it, the more you feel inclined to have a go." Sally talks of feeling comfortable with showing him her work for critique, "with the hope that he'll tell me what's good and what's not, and that's great because then I can practise my skills and improve." But it's not just the art learning that has brought value, as Sally explains "I've gained a bit of interaction from people and this was what was missing in my life, as it's all too easy to find yourself cut-off, as everything is concentrated in the person you're looking after."



Sally with fellow artwalkers



Sally with one of the artworks that were exhibited at the Seniors Show the Way Celebration Event



The artwalks take place come rain or shine!

“When you’re at the Artwalks you can be almost in a meditative state, particularly when you’re out in the countryside. It sidetracks you from your life, you’re suddenly not in it. It gives you a chance to take a couple of hours of time out. Looking after someone in a wheelchair means that you are limited as to where you can go, sometimes I find that I don’t know the walks on my own doorstep as they are not accessible to wheelchairs.” In this way the Artwalks have helped fill in some of these gaps. She also enjoys being able to access green spaces with confidence, within a group setting. “When you’ve been ill you have more fear of something happening to you, you feel more vulnerable, but on the Artwalks you feel safe because you’re in a group.”



Artwalk Leader David shares his sketching materials

The Artwalks fit perfectly with Sally’s lifestyle: “The Artwalks work for me as you can just turn up once a week and do your art and still be a little bit remote. I enjoy this interaction.” This is particularly valuable as Sally has avoided making or sustaining friendships for many years, due to the demands on her times as well as the fear of taking on more responsibilities and obligations. “It’s a long time since I’ve had friendships that I’d commit to, but that’s purposeful, ‘cause I don’t have that time to commit.” Whereas, “You are not committing yourself to a social life on the Artwalks, it feels like an informal get together of people who enjoy each other’s company but don’t live in each other’s pockets, and that works for me.”

With regard to whether the Artwalks have affected her health, Sally says: “I think I was on the mend already but I was looking for something I could continue with that didn’t require too much commitment, i.e. not a course where you would feel under pressure to perform and go to every week. I wanted something laidback, so the walking with the art is brilliant because you get to decide whether you want to draw or paint. I could do more of it but it’s just sparing the time.”

Her general attitude to life has changed since the art intervention: “You have to slow down a bit, but it’s been quite a learning curve to figure this out as it goes against the way that I was brought up.”

When asked if there has been any unexpected outcomes, Sally responded “I’ve found out that I quite like art, I don’t know why I’m surprised. It’s opened my interest as I hadn’t thought I was that interested in it. Art therapy helped as I realised that I didn’t have to be ‘arty’ because I think that can put people off. I felt more brave, as I knew I didn’t have to produce a successful piece of artwork. “

In terms of behaviour and habits, Sally confesses to feeling “a bit braver in trying other things now, whereas before I went on the Artwalks I’d have felt that I was struggling to fit in a bit.” She’d like to continue coming along to the Artwalks. David has mentioned the opportunity for Sally to train as a Walk Leader but, she explains, “with my situation at the moment I don’t want to let anyone down. I’m learning to cut myself a bit of slack, and not try and meet impossible targets, as before I feel I was setting myself up to fail.” She does hope to get involved with the odd additional event in future. “As time goes on I think I’d like to get more and more involved.”

Sally feels very passionate that the Artwalks should continue: “I think it’d be very sad to lose something like this.” She hopes that the group will grow. “It’s one of these things that a lot of people can benefit from, I’d recommend it to anyone.” “When you’re at the Artwalks you can be almost in a meditative state, particularly when you’re out in the countryside. It sidetracks you from your life, you’re suddenly not in it. It gives you a chance to take a couple of hours of time out. Looking after someone in a wheelchair means that you are limited as to where you can go, sometimes I find that I don’t know the walks on my own doorstep as they are not accessible to wheelchairs.” In this way the Artwalks have helped fill in some of these gaps. She also enjoys being able to access green spaces with confidence, within a group setting. “When you’ve been ill you have more fear of something happening to you, you feel more vulnerable, but on the Artwalks you feel safe because you’re in a group.”