

Oomph! – Touchbase Pears, March 2019

For the past 5 months, Sense in partnership with Oomph! have been running exercise and wellbeing classes for people aged 50+, at our flagship community building in Selly Oak, Birmingham.

The classes involve both seated and standing exercises to music. They also include fun games using props, as well as some group discussion. This allows participants to talk about their week, share any challenges they have faced, and celebrate any positive things that have happened to them.



Over this period, the number of participants has steadily increased, and to date we have welcomed a total of 17 different individuals into the programme. Some of these participants are fairly active, many reporting that walking is a big part of their weekly routine. The Oomph! classes however are a great addition to this, supporting participants to develop the strength and flexibility required in later life, but which is so often ignored.



One of the participants, Val, notes the importance of including Oomph! within her weekly schedule, and how it supports her with other areas of her life. *“The exercises are fun, and varied, as well as helping me to become more flexible in my body and in carrying out everyday tasks”,* she describes. *“Whilst some of the exercises are the same, they are not done in exactly the same way each time, nor same time, nor the same pace, and not always the same ones each week. I’m sure this variety keeps interest and enthusiasm alive. Well, it certainly does for me.”*

A key reason for the participants’ enjoyment is the approach taken by Oomph! class Instructor, Natasha. Having a background in working with older people, some with sight, hearing impairments or other additional needs, Natasha is considerate of each individual’s needs, and creates a class



which is fun and engaging for everyone who attends. The participants describe how: *“Natasha is a great session leader, has good humour, clear, straightforward instructions, always watchful for potential pitfalls or people struggling, and helps or guides individually where necessary”.*

Her previous experience working with such groups helps Natasha understand that as we get older, we can tire more quickly, and participants might be intimidated or put off by a class which forces them to push to their limits. Lyn, who has recently taken up Oomph! acknowledges this, and believes that *“the sessions are manageable, you can do as much or as little as you want”.* Val adds, *“Frequent reminders to do only what we can but to keep going if we can, for as long as we can.”*

Although it’s vitally important we maintain our fitness, strength and flexibility as we get older, perhaps the most significant benefit of the Oomph! class is the social interaction it provides. With loneliness a growing issue in modern society, the classes give participants the regular contact with others which is so vital to maintaining mental wellbeing. One participant notes that *“The sessions are more than simply exercises for me. They provide much-needed social contact that was*

missing from my life. Sometimes I could go a whole week or more, and not speak to anyone, except maybe hello, or thank you, with a checkout operator once or twice. Isolation and aloneness can creep up, and I know it was leading to some depression and becoming very sedentary (winter makes it worse). The sessions and the people I have met there have helped me gain a bit more confidence, my shyness is less than it was, and I feel happier and more hopeful. I've made personal progress that means I have been able to do several challenges that I set for myself this year, including attending the Oomph sessions. All of which has lightened my mood and makes me feel really positive for the future”.

Willemina, who has been attending regularly since the start of the year, shares Val's sentiments about the importance of this social interaction, describing how *“we do have social time which I greatly value, and we share our week in a positive way. It does help my social and mental happiness”.*

The impact of the sessions is clear for everyone to see, including Instructor Natasha. Bursting with pride at the progress the participants have made, she describes how she feels about running these weekly classes. *“Delivering Oomph sessions gives me great pleasure. I love seeing the positive contribution it can make to individuals lives, not only a physical improvement but also an emotional and mental improvement. Individuals that attend Oomph! would otherwise be at home feeling isolated, participates have made great friends through Oomph! and share stories and information in our sessions whilst also working up a sweat. I couldn't ask for more from the sessions.”*

Gill, who has been attending sessions right from the very beginning, aims to summarise the sessions in one sentence, *“a mixture of exercise and companionship, no pressure to succeed, but gradually gaining confidence and strength.”*

