

WALK IT. RIDE IT.



Iqra's story Harehills

Iqra chooses to walk every Friday with a walking group in Harehills. Years ago she was in a car accident and lost her husband. Through the weekly walks, she has grown in confidence and has been able to work her way through the difficult process of grief. Her favourite parts of the walks are the fresh air, meeting nice people from different cultures and their shared experiences of joy and sorrow.

My family members and my auntie told me to come out to the Give a Gift charity in Harehills, where they provide social needs, especially for women and young people who can be more isolated. So I tried the weekly walking group near where I live in Harehills, and I thought 'Okay, I'll join, and if I like it, I can keep going.'

This was a real turning point for me, because years ago I was in a car accident. My son, who was at home at the time, was only 14 months old. My husband died on impact, and I had serious multiple injuries such as a bone fracture in my arm, (where I now have a metal rod inside) and my lungs, kidneys and ribs were crushed. I also have a leg injury, and I couldn't walk for one year after the accident, so I can only walk for so long and for a certain distance now. At the time, they really weren't sure if I would survive or not.

Since losing my husband I had not done anything on my own without my son or my mother in law being there. I used to just stay inside the house and I'd lost all confidence in myself. If you would have seen me back in January, you wouldn't believe I was the same person. At the start I kept thinking things like "what are other people going to think about me when I talk about myself and my life? Will they judge me?", so I'd stand back a bit, and listen to what other people would say in the group and stay a bit quiet.

But as the weeks went on, my confidence really started to grow. There are so many things that I love about walking. It's the fresh air, meeting nice people, the strengthening of my body and meeting different people from different cultures. You really listen to their stories and you know inside, I'm not alone. I'm going through this, but they're going through the same or worse.

There's something about being able to be really open and honest with the group, including the lovely leader Emma (Walk it Ride it Activator) who introduced me to the group and made me feel safe and heard. I can talk about things I can't talk to my own family about, and that provides a different kind of relief and a sense of ongoing contentment.



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It's really about your mental health. When you listen to different people, you laugh together, you share experiences and learn a lot about yourself and others along the way. You're not sitting in one place, thinking about the same things going around in your head, keeping you down in a hole. We all have different holes we need to climb out of in life. And now I feel like I have to do it. In my case, I have my son. He's the one I do everything for, and I'm getting more and more independent for the both of us.

If somebody was thinking about joining a walking group and they felt unsure and unconfident, I would say just try a walk for 5 minutes and see how it feels with a group. And if you like it try 10 minutes then 20 - just allow your confidence to build and grow. It really is baby steps, and about helping those in need by taking their hand and leading the way - this is what Emma and the group have done for me. I wouldn't have done it alone, but I held the hand that was put out to me.

Because of this walking group, I was able to tell my four year old son about his father dying when he was just two years old. I also started accessing bereavement classes and other sessions with Give a Gift, that have given me the confidence to speak with my son about everything that happened.

Speaking to people helped me to feel 'ready' to move forward. I thank Emma and all the women in the group, for listening and caring personally about me without judgement. Coming on these weekly walks means so much more to me than just the health benefits. It's really helped me to become more independent and confident. It's also giving me some time away from the family home, with other people, who are there to listen to one another's stories and experiences and share in their joys and sorrows.

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