

WALK IT. RIDE IT.



Susan's story Middleton

Susan chooses to walk every week with Gayle, a Walking Engagement Worker at Health for All in Leeds. The weekly walks have helped her to manage her many health conditions, including Fibromyalgia Syndrome, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. She has grown in confidence, settled into her forever home, and her favourite part of the walks are putting the world to rights with Gayle.

I have various issues with my health, which has left me feeling very frustrated with my body, and at times, my mental health has really suffered. In 2021, I was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS), which is a long-term condition that causes pain all over my body. Last year, I was diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) so I have trouble breathing. I also have Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) in my wrists, inflammation in my knees, asthma and I'm pre diabetic. So there's a lot going on physically and mentally for me, which can be extremely exhausting and has been very debilitating for a long time.

I had a couple of falls due to my illnesses, and I was really worried I'd need to move house as my current home didn't accommodate my needs. I'd moved around all my life, because I was in care when I was younger.

I realised more than anything through all of this that I needed to feel settled, build up my confidence and to have a good routine in place. My weekly walks with Gayle are a large part of this.

They started when I was referred by my GP to a health worker called Ryan from Linking Leeds (an integrated, free city-wide Social Prescribing service for people in Leeds). Ryan then looked at what activities would suit me, taking into account all of my physical and mental health issues. Gayle's walking activities (both group walks and one on one walks) were nearby, and Ryan asked Gayle to get in contact with me to tell me more about them.

Gayle initially texted me so that I had her number, she didn't cold call which I really appreciated, as she knows that can sometimes put people off if they don't know whose number it is. She introduced herself and asked on the text if it would be okay to call for a nice friendly chat when it was convenient for me. I felt in good hands right away. Gayle was friendly, warm, patient and didn't push me too hard but just enough, which was exactly what I needed.

Because of my mobility issues I didn't feel comfortable enough to join the walking group right away, so I opted for a one on one walk with Gayle, to ease me into it.



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With the group walks I was concerned that I might not be able to keep up and that there might be a lot of people there, which can be overwhelming for me.

For the weekly walk Gayle comes to my house in Middleton, and we usually do a few laps around where I live. I walk with a crutch, so being able to just take my time and enjoy our chats means the world to me. We really put the world to rights when we meet and I always look forward to seeing Gayle and catching up.

I've been doing the weekly walks now for 18 weeks and my confidence has really started to grow. Walking is so good for my health and it's also low impact, which means I can go at my own pace and enjoy the fresh air whilst saying hello to people in my community along the way. It's lovely to be able to be really open and honest with Gayle, whether I'm feeling a little better, or a little lower from one week to the next.

It doesn't matter where I am or how I'm feeling - Gayle always meets me where I need her to and gives me that extra nudge to keep going. I've even started to go to a group exercise class and tried a sound therapy session that Gayle introduced me to. One week I walked to the exercise class, did the class, and then walked back home. This was a big thing for me, to realise I could do so much and that all those small steps together make a big impact.

If somebody was thinking about wanting to walk but not necessarily by joining a walking group, I would say just try a few laps as a one on one walk, like I have done with Gayle. If you like it you can carry on, build up your confidence, and you never know, you may even join a group walk further down the line!

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