

Coalition News

Spring 2022

Photo description: A gentleman in a wheelchair is enjoying a sunny day in an allotment. There is another man with him handing him a small plant.

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Have your say

Take part in our member survey to help us to shape the way we work and to demonstrate our impact to our funders. You can complete the member [survey here](#) (or by returning the enclosed survey to our freepost address – for those receiving this on paper)

Welcome from Clare

Photo description: Clare smiling, wearing a black blouse that has white spots

I hope you have all stayed safe and well over the last few months, as hard as they have been with coronavirus still impacting all of our lives.

At the time of writing, government restrictions are beginning to be lifted and we are aware that this is a really difficult time for everyone who is more at risk from the virus to manage their own safety in the context of fewer preventative measures being taken in the community. You can keep up to date with the latest information and advice here if you are online, and we also include key changes in our weekly updates which can be accessed by phone for those who are not online.

Of course, if you are ever unsure and would like more information you are always welcome to contact us directly and we will get you the information you need.

I hope you will enjoy reading about what coalition members have been up to over the last few months, including lots of co-production activity for new strategies and services with both Surrey County Council and the two health and care systems ('Integrated Care Systems'), the sharing of your concerns and action taken off the back of these and other projects coalition members and board directors have been involved in. We have seen the projects we started last year continuing to grow, including the physical activity work we have been leading with SILC (Surrey Independent Living Council) called 'Get More Active'.

I am sure you will enjoy reading Jane's blog on her experience with Get More Active in the physical activity update! I'm looking forward to seeing how this service evolves to help more disabled people get and stay active over the next year.

Photo description: A pair of muddy trainers

It is always a pleasure to see many of you at our social and peer support groups, including the virtual dog walk on Christmas Day – the value of peer support and friendship on all of our lives really can't be underestimated.

Thank you to all of you who volunteer your time in so many ways to support the coalition, and more generally to support disabled people in Surrey. Finally, I would like to thank our funders, new and old, for enabling us to do all we can to achieve our vision for disabled people. As always, please do feel free to get in touch with us if there is anything you would like to hear more about.

Photo description: A blackboard with the word 'Thank you' on it in chalk. Surrounding the 'thank you' is lots of bright coloured ice lolly sticks.

Very best wishes, Clare

Have you been affected by long covid? Please share your experience of long Covid with us.

[Read one member's story here](#) on our website

News

Photo description: Three wooden cubes with the letters A, G and M on them. The blocks have a green plant blurred in the background.

Arrangements for the 2022 Annual General Meeting (AGM) and annual event Please hold the date for our virtual AGM on Wednesday 26th October 2022 (times to be confirmed). The board will meet in May to decide if we are able to go ahead with our plans for a summer outdoor event as our annual event for this year, so keep an eye out for the summer newsletter with all the details!

Recruitment News

We have just finished advertising for four new posts including a Social Media and Digital Officer, a Community Champions Coordinator, an Involvement Officer and a Health Technology Officer. We will also very shortly be advertising for two mental health peer-research trainees (a very exciting role, with an opportunity to gain a research accreditation).

Photo description: A cartoon of a person struggling to hold all of the social media logos

New Website

We're going to be building a new website - we want to hear your views on what you'd like to see on our new website – [click here](#) or get in touch with the office.

Board Changes

Photo description: A head shot of Nick Marwick wearing a dark red jumper and a head shot of Cliff Bush wearing a light yellow shirt.

In December 2021, Nick Marwick let us know that after many years of services as a Co-Chair, he wanted to step down from the post.

In early January, the Coalition Board voted for the board official roles for the year ahead and elected Jonathan Fisher as our new Chair and Anna Sartori as our Vice Chair. We would like to thank Cliff Bush OBE and Nick Markwick for the excellent contribution they have both made over many years as Co-Chairs of the organisation.

Photo description: Head shot of Jonathan Fisher wearing a dark blue jumper and a head shot of Anna Sartori wearing a coral coloured jacket.

Happily, both Nick and Cliff have agreed to stay on the Coalition Board as Board Directors.

Want to join our board?

At the moment, we are particularly hoping to attract Board Directors from black or minoritized backgrounds, young people (18 – 25 year old) and those with a background in communications, fundraising and/or strategy.

In recognition of how quickly the organisation had grown, the board decided to start two new sub-committees last year – the strategy sub-committee and the finance sub-committee.

Both sub-committees have progressed work on our new organisational strategy which we hope to launch later this year. Would you like to be involved in one of the sub-committees? If so, please get in touch.

New Staff Members

Photo description: A man on a video call on his mobile phone waving happily.

The staff team has continued to grow to meet the needs of the organisation and our commissioned work. We would like to say a huge welcome to Nikki Roberts, Megan Siarey and Wendy Smith and they have introduced themselves on the next couple of pages. We are very much looking forward to Helen Anjomshoaa joining us in March as our new Operations Manager.

Meet Wendy

Photo description: A headshot of Wendy. She is smiling wearing a royal blue top.

I'm Wendy Smith, Project Officer on the collaborative mental health project team. It's a joint project with Healthwatch Surrey, SMEF, SABP and the Coalition.

I've had depression and anxiety for most of my life and I'm autistic, so it's really important to me that people with lived experience are heard, valued and involved in their care.

I also deliver courses on mental health and wellbeing for the Recovery College, to help empower people on their recovery journey.

Meet Megan

I'm Megan and I've recently joined Surrey Coalition as a Project Officer for the collaborative mental health project.

I believe education and centring lived experiences are vital to removing stigma. I'm looking forward to actioning change that will benefit staff, service users, and carers, throughout Surrey and the surrounding areas.

A bookworm at heart, my prized possessions are the books I've accumulated over the years. Outside of work, I'm a podcast host and blogger; volunteer for my local Riding for the Disabled Association; and train at Hillcroft Lacrosse Club after picking up the sport at university.

Photo description: Lots of hands waving across the bottom of the page.

Meet Nikki

Photo description: A head shot of Nikki smiling, wearing a white dress with a floral pattern.

Wow, how lucky am I to be given the opportunity to take on this brand new role!

I'm excited to help build on Surrey Coalition of Disabled People's amazing work by helping to reach and help even more people in Surrey with a disability.

Outside of work, I'm a Mum to two boys, one has special needs – he was my inspiration behind setting up a local support group for parents of children with special needs.

Good News!

Deaf people around the UK have been celebrating a fantastic win with a step towards the legal recognition of British Sign Language (BSL), after the BSL Bill passed its second reading unanimously in the House of Commons in January. You can find out more [here](#)

Technology Update

Photo description: A lady in her home sitting in front of a laptop. There is man beside her pointing at the laptop screen.

Tech to Community Connect, a collaborative effort between the Coalition, Action for Carers Surrey and other partners to tackle digital

exclusion and loneliness, keeps supporting more and more people across Surrey.

In case you haven't heard about it yet, the service can loan you a tablet, smart phone, or smart home device and a sim card with data on it for those who don't have WiFi. We can match you up with a volunteer Tech Angel, who will teach you anything you need to know to use your device, and will then support you as and when you need it.

The numbers of people involved in the project and Tech Angel volunteers have been growing steadily, and everyone is working hard!

Photo description: Man sitting in front of a bright blue bricked wall. The man is wearing a bright red jumper and is looking at a laptop.

This is a quote from one of the people that have used the service:

“I cannot tell you enough how grateful I am for what you've taught me today, and I'm excited about the things I will now be able to do. My life feels brighter and more hopeful now”

Photo description: A group of ladies sitting at a table looking at various different electronic devices – this includes a tablet, a mobile and a laptop.

During Get Online Week the tech team visited numerous food banks, day centres and shelters for homeless people. Thanks to the project and the work of lots of other agencies, several people experiencing homelessness, along with mental ill-health, were able to find accommodation and are now able to use tablets from their own homes!

Many of them feel that being able to go online helps them to fully participate in the community. In December 2021, to overcome language and cultural barriers, we organised our first group session for digitally excluded women in Woking.

The women involved are now confident using their devices, and of course they can get further support from a Tech Angel volunteer in the future should they need to. The session was so popular that we have more planned throughout the year ahead.

Get in Touch

If you don't have access to the internet, or feel a bit scared of technology and don't know where to start, get in touch and we will be more than happy to help you and support you and walk you through it step by step.

If you have some IT knowledge and a couple of free hours a week to spare, you could become a volunteer Tech Angel and help people who need you!

Photo description: Zoomed in photo of hands typing on a keyboard.

Photo description: Two ladies looking at a mobile phone. One lady is holding a blue mug.

People with long term health conditions, as well as disabled people and carers are also benefiting from the project.

Someone we have been working with lives with a life-limiting condition and is dependent on a large array of medications and not able to get out very much. Requesting her medication each month required a very difficult and painful visit to the GP surgery, and the anxiety of not knowing whether she would have a good enough day to manage this visit before her previous month's supply ran out. After one session with a Tech Angel she learned the basics of her new tablet. By the end of this first session she had managed to log into her GP website and request her next month's medications!

In her second session, we taught her how to use Zoom so she can attend online pain classes, and contact her friends. She had been feeling extremely isolated due to both her ill health and the pandemic, and she is so excited at the prospect of now being able to speak to friends and family as often as she likes.

'I think mainly it's feeling included in things I can't physically get to. Also face timing my family – I didn't see my sister for months on end. Even now it helps me to keep in touch with my daughter as she has moved away. When you have mental health issues and you can't get out, the tablet means that you're not isolated – you can reach out in other ways'.

Photo description: Lady in a striped blouse waving and smiling at a mobile phone.

Kevin shares his thoughts about the Google sound amplifier app.

Photo description: Hands using a mobile phone. There are 5 stars on the image too.

I have been testing out the Google "Sound Amplifier" app which is designed to allow smart phone and tablet users to hear more clearly. It's to help with sounds around you and sounds coming out of your device. The app provides a really simple set of controls to switch between listening to the world around you through the microphone on your smartphone or to the other sources of sound on your phone, such as telephone calls or movies.

It works like a super tone control using two on-screen sliders; one to boost the overall volume and the other to control the bass and treble quality of the sound.

I am pleased to report that it seems to work superbly well, allowing me to pick out clearly the words that are being spoken on otherwise muffled TV broadcasts or for conducting one to one conversations in noisy environments.

The app is simple and easy to use, best of all, it is free!

You can find out more and download it on your smartphone or tablet [here](#): (only available on Android currently)

Ease of use? 4*

Value for money? 5*

Quality? 5*

Overall rating? 4.5*

Thanks to Kevin for this review. If you fancy reviewing an app for us, please let us know!

If you would like to make use of the sound amplifier app and need some help with setting it up, or for us to supply you with a smartphone to use the app, then please get in touch! You can contact getconnected@surreycoalition.org.uk, or call the office on 01483 456 558 or send us an SMS text to 07563 997 932.

Mental Health

Photo description: three faces all showing different expressions.

The Independent Mental Health Network has been busy since our last newsletter.

At the start of autumn, the network members elected a new meeting Chair and Vice Chair, David Muir and Megan Siarey respectively. The two have been working hard with the coordinator for the network since and we are grateful to have them to represent our members throughout Surrey and in leading the bimonthly IMHN Coordinating Group meeting.

In December, Surrey held its second annual Mental Health Summit. The IMHN and Coalition were involved in providing service user experience videos for the virtual event and the stories shared were impactful and memorable. The summit updated on progress in mental health over the last year and refreshed commitment and momentum to continue the improvement of emotional wellbeing and mental health services in Surrey during 2022.

Recently, the IMHN members and staff have been working with the Surrey system on the Mental Health Improvement Programme, an all-encompassing transformation programme looking at all aspects of how Surrey's mental health services are delivered and what innovation and improvements could be made to better serve the needs our population. The first workshop happened in January, with two more planned to follow March.

We want to hear about your experience of using mental health services (good or bad) Get in touch with Guy Hill guy.hill@surreycoalition.org.uk or phone/SMS 07305 009869.

Welcome Salem

Photo description: Healthcare professional talking to another person in a healthcare setting.

We have a new staff member who has joined our team, Salem Sabur. Salem is working on engagement with Surrey's Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and has launched the IMHN's Black and minoritised ethnic groups mental health stakeholder group.

At our stakeholder meetings we listen to people's experiences of using mental health services and learn what is working well and what isn't to feedback to services and commissioners. This first meeting was well attended and the discussion lively and full of interesting insight and suggestions of how services could better support people.

Other key areas we have been focusing work on with our members over the last few months include improving the quality and uptake of annual physical health checks for people living with a significant mental illness. The transformation of Adult Social Care mental health services, and working with SABP on the transformation of community mental health services to improve what is available at GP practices within Surrey for people with mental health support needs.

Become a member of IMHN

You can join online [here](#) or by contacting Guy Hill.

Time to Talk Day

Photo description: A cartoon image of two people playing scrabble. The words meet, listen and talk are on the scrabble board.

February 3rd was Time to Talk Day, the nation's biggest mental health conversation. Happening every year, it's a day for friends, families, communities, and workplaces to come together to talk, listen and change lives.

This year we shared two blogs from IMHN members, one from Megan around how to start a conversation around mental health with a friend or family member and one from parents who care for their adult daughter with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and how useful attending a local carers support group has been to them.

You can check out the blogs on the IMHN website [here](#).

FoCUS

FoCUS is the Forum of Carers & people who Use Services from Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SABP). Anyone who has used services from SABP in Surrey or Northeast Hampshire can join the forum.

We hold monthly area-based meetings where we discuss the experiences of services people have had and discuss which issues are most common and should be taken forward to SABP to respond to at FoCUS Committee meetings every three months.

February's FoCUS group discussed:

- Building programme for the new hospitals in East Surrey
- Issues with medication reviews when being discharged from one service and being picked up by another
- The Trust's LGBTQIA+ policy and their new service called In Reach. The service supports people at the point of discharge from mental health hospital wards to up to 3 weeks beyond discharge with the practicalities of returning home with an aim to reduce readmissions to hospital.

This month we will also be finding out from FoCUS members what they would like FoCUS to look like in the future, we are excited to hear all their excellent ideas!

If you would like to find out more about FoCUS including how to join, please click [here](#).

Blog by Salem, Mental Health Outreach and Engagement Officer.

Salem Sabur is the new Mental Health Outreach and Engagement Officer. This is a joint role working for both Surrey Coalition of Disabled People (through the Independent Mental Health Network) and Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum (SMEF), who are a charity representing the needs and aspirations of a growing ethnic minority population in Surrey.

Salem's role is focussed on engaging with people from these diverse ethnic communities and amplifying their experiences back to 'the system'. Recently Salem has been doing some work with the Nepalese and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Salem has over four years of hands-on experience working within the health care services, supporting individuals from Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority communities with mental health challenges including stress, anxiety, and depression.

In December we held a joint mental health awareness event with the IMHN, SMEF and an organisation called Be My Hope, who work with individuals from the Black-African community across Surrey and their work has a focus on improving mental wellbeing.

Salem met Annah there, she has both a physical disability and mental ill-health and has been campaigning for better services for Black and minoritized groups within Surrey. Annah has been experiencing deteriorating physical health and mobility for some time which has left her lonely and isolated. Annah feels the local authority assessment team has failed her by not recognising and addressing her needs and that this

has had a mental health impact. Annah told Salem that she has “been feeling depressed, anxious and under stress”, and shared that her current circumstances have made her feel irritable and emotional.

During the Covid-19 pandemic Annah has struggled with her weight which she had previously shed after undergoing a sleeve gastrointestinal reduction. Her weight has returned and she feels this is directly due to her mental health struggles.

Annah has ideas and initiatives to assist and support the Black African community within Woking to improve wellbeing and mental health. One example of this would be to support leading figures in the Black community by creating a buddying system where young adults can open up and seek help for their mental health. She would like the idea of community ‘aunties and uncles’ to become a reality, she feels that having older and respected individuals in the community to talk through mental health challenges will benefit the whole Black community. She feels that when we get this kind of mental health support our families also benefit too, even if they don’t know it. Annah is disappointed that the Surrey health services have not really been supportive of her ideas to improve wellbeing in her community.

Independence is important to Annah to support her mental health. She has a need for financial support to assist her, currently she would like to pass her theory and practical driving test but does not have the financial means to make this a reality. Being able to drive would allow her to be able to lead a more active life and do things she wants to without inconvenience to her children, who she feels should be leading fully independent lives without her feeling like a burden on them.

She continues to show great resilience despite her physical mobility and mental health challenges. She has been attending the University of Roehampton for a degree in the field of Psychology and Counselling. This has been made possible by Student Finance England’s Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA) providing finance for a taxi service to let her to attend classes. This has made it possible for Annah to attend without the stress and anxiety she feels about using public transport.

She strongly believes that with more support from her local council and other services her quality of life & her mental health would improve, and that if some of her ideas around wellbeing in the Black African

communities could become reality others mental health would benefit also.

Get Involved

Photo description: Man wearing a grey tracksuit in a wheelchair waving and smiling at his phone while on a video call.

The Disability Empowerment Network (DENS) Groups met in November 2021. All DENS groups and our special interest groups were given the opportunity to feedback on the draft Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment (PDSI) Strategy.

The draft strategy has been finalised and all DENS groups will contribute to the action plan and implementation. The East DENS submitted a response to a planning application for a supermarket in Horley.

The North DENS group were given a presentation on the new Leisure Centre in Camberley and a member of the group, who helps to run the Egham Constellations swimming group, agreed to visit the centre to look at the swimming pool pods which help make the pool accessible.

David, the Chair of the South West DENS spoke at the Guildford Committee that is looking at the review of public toilets in Guildford.

Members were able to give their views on Direct Payments and some members took the opportunity to discuss this further in a one-to-one session. DENS members discussed access issues in the local area and members were encouraged to join their local access group.

The DENS groups will meet again in March 2022 and the focus will be on access. Each group will discuss issues and agree actions to try and tackle some of the issues in their local area.

The Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey will attend the virtual Surrey Wide DENS group on Monday 14th March at 6pm. All DENS members are encouraged to attend to raise any concerns about crime and policing in the local area.

Join us! If you would like to attend any of the DENS Group meetings, please contact Yasmin.

Special Interest Groups

Photo description

A lady smiling using sign language to talk to another person

Long Term Neurological Conditions Group

The Long Term Neurological Conditions (LTNC) group met in November and raised issues with representatives from Surrey Heartlands about variations in services across the county for people with a LTNC. As a result of the concerns raised by the group, some actions had already been taken to reduce service variation across the county.

As with all of our specialist interest groups, the group were given an update on the Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment (PDSI) Strategy which they have been working on for some time.

Hard of Hearing Forum

Members of the Hard of Hearing Forum met online in December 2021. Karen, the Interim Diversity and Inclusion Programme Manager from Surrey County Council (SCC) asked for feedback from the group on the Surrey Equality and Inclusion Plan. Prior to the meeting most members had not heard of this. Members gave feedback on the accessibility of SCC services and whether they think Surrey is a fair place to live and work.

Surrey Vision Action Group

The Surrey Vision Action Group (SVAG) met in January 2022 and discussed the impact of rainbow/colourful crossings on those with a visual impairment. Surrey Coalition and Guide Dogs UK are working with SCC on a review of the policy to install these crossings at different locations across the County. The Mayor of London has paused the installation of rainbow/colourful crossings whilst TfL carry out more thorough research to identify if these crossings present mobility issues for members of any community. If you have experienced issues with this type of crossing, or have suggestions for alternatives, please let Yasmin know.

The group also discussed the slow process of the installation of tactile strips on the platforms of all train stations across the UK.

Virtual trips

Photo description: Hever castle looking splendid in beautiful gardens on a sunny day

The Coalition held the last virtual trip of 2021 on Christmas Day! Members were able to join a virtual dog walk with Inca and Jessie. Inca walked on the beach at Eastleigh and Jessie walked in her local park. It was fun to see so many people going for a swim in the freezing cold sea which is a Christmas tradition for many. It was even better for members to watch this from the comfort and warmth of their own homes!

We have already planned three trips for 2022 and we aim to have one every month thanks to support from the Community Foundation for Surrey.

On 21st February members were given a talk/virtual tour of Painshill Park. In March we are being treated to a virtual trip to Brooklands Museum and in April a bespoke tour of Hever Castle. BSL interpreting is available on all our trips.

If you would like to join us, please contact Yasmin and she will send you the link. If you have an idea or suggestion of somewhere we can visit (virtually) in the future, please let us know!

Vocational Skills Programmes

The Coalition has undertaken some work on behalf of Surrey County Council to map vocational skills programmes in Surrey. Following on from this work providers of vocational skills programmes in Surrey will meet to discuss branding which will be used to publicise the services to residents in Surrey.

Direct payments strategy

Surrey Coalition has been working with Surrey County Council (SCC) and an organisation called We Coproduce on an all-age strategy for Direct Payments in Surrey. Over the last few months engagement has taken place with many different groups and individuals at group meetings or in one-to-one conversations. A short survey was sent out and the key themes will be used to begin to structure the strategy.

A new special interest group will be set up to continue work on the strategy. The group will meet monthly online from April 2022. If you would like to be part of this group, please contact Yasmin.

Social Programme

Photo description: Person in a pink jumper working with a piece of thread, some felt and other craft materials.

Our social programme started as a response to the first lockdown in 2020 and continues to go from strength to strength. We offer a virtual activity everyday Monday- Friday. We recently sent a survey to members to ask for feedback on how this is going. We had fantastic feedback on the programme and how it has benefitted those attending. We will use the feedback to plan our social programme for the coming year. Watch this space for more news.

Did you know you do not need to be online to access our social activities? It is possible to join by telephone (and many people do!). If you would like more information on how to join our social programme, please let us know.

Photo description: Lady in her home smiling and waving at a tablet.

Book Club Review by Coalition Member Claire Bellinger

Photo description: Somebody looking very warm and cosy with a grey blanket wrapped around them and a cup of tea in one hand, a book in the other.

Would you like to join our book club? Everyone is welcome, just contact Yasmin yasmin.broome@surreycoalition.org.uk or phone 01483 456558 or send an SMS to 07780 933053

Over the past few months our book club have read books from different genres that members have suggested and Angie has managed to download into different formats so we could all enjoy.

Many of the books I probably wouldn't have chosen myself but I'm glad I read them, The Salt Path, Touching the Void and most recently a book by Terry Pratchett called "The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents".

A strange but funny tale of Rats who can talk and read, although reading is limited due to their poor eyesight. Each has a name taken from things they have read on litter, Dangerous Beans, Fresh, who sadly gets killed and eaten, Peaches, Hamnpork, Darktan and others. They live with a cat, Maurice who travels with the group to various villages and has agreed not to eat them if they can talk.

Physical Activity News

Photo description: 4 people walking in a sunny woodland area

Would you like to Get More Active but are struggling to find someone to go with, or having difficulty travelling to an organised activity? The Disabled community have told us that there are two main reasons why some of us are not as active as we would like to be:

- You need or want somebody to go with to provide physical or moral support.
- You don't have the transport to get to organised activities, or it takes too long or is too expensive.

Later this year, in partnership with SILC, we are aiming to launch an "Active Buddy" scheme where we pair you up with somebody who can support you to be active the way you want to. Whether that's going for a swim or a wheel or walk, playing a team sport or joining a dance class - whatever you enjoy!

Come and join us on Saturday 5th March for the first of our monthly 'Get More Active' events!

Photo description: Lady in a wheelchair in a grassy, woodland area.

Though we are meeting at Nonsuch parkrun, you can participate in lots of different ways – walking around the course (or some of it!), volunteering in a parkrun role or being a brilliant cheerleader, or a conversation starter for the social afterwards!

Join us for some fresh air and lots of fun - meet up with old friends, meet new people in the community and enjoy some time (and cake!) together. For those who need it, we can assist with transport.

If you'd like to get involved, please contact Katy. Phone or SMS text on 07434 865062

email katy.hubbard@surreycoalition.org.uk

Did you know, you don't have to run at parkrun?

Photo description: The backs of Parkrun volunteers wearing different bright coloured high vis volunteer vests

You can walk, you can use a manual or power chair, you can volunteer or you can spectate. Truth be told parkrun really isn't about running at all! It's all about community – that strength of human connection and feeling of belonging. I wanted to use this opportunity to give you a bit of a background into parkrun and how it has grown into the global phenomenon it is today.

In 2004, Paul Sinton-Hewitt was an experienced club runner, when he picked up an injury which meant he could not run. At the same time, he was fired from his job and his mental health began to deteriorate. He wanted to find a way to stay connected with his friends and so one Saturday morning in October he organised a timed 5km run for his friends.

This is the event that became parkrun – free, weekly community events at 9am on a Saturday. Paul says that from the beginning his aim was for it to be community events, available for all to join in with whenever they wanted to.

The events are free in every sense of the word – it's not just that you don't have to pay, but you are free to join in whenever and however you want, there are no time limits and nobody finishes last.

From 2004 to 2007 the Bushy Park event grew in size with more and more people from the local community turning up to join in and asking about having an event near them. By the end of 2007 there were 5 events – today there are parkruns in 20 countries worldwide and 1097 locations in the UK. All events are run entirely by volunteers and are free to attend.

As parkrun grew so did the realisation that these weekly events were making a real difference to many people in communities. Parkrun began actively working to encourage participation in disadvantaged or minoritized communities because of the mental health impact they were having.

What does this mean for disabled people and those with long term health conditions?

In April 2016, parkrun UK was awarded a grant from the Department of Health and Social Care to undertake a three-year project to increase physical activity and social engagement at parkrun amongst people living with disabilities and long-term health conditions.

This led to the PROVE project (parkrun, Running or Volunteering for Everyone). Research in 2013 had shown that 4.3% of UK parkrunners who were surveyed reported having a disability or illness. People with disabilities and long-term health conditions were clearly underrepresented at parkrun.

This provided the motivation for the PROVE project, to make the parkrun population more representative of the whole population. The project was spearheaded by a team of volunteer Outreach Ambassadors for Disabilities and Long-Term Health Conditions. They were all seasoned parkrunners with real-world experience of disabilities or long-term health conditions.

The project has now finished but many of the initiatives created remain to support and encourage participation.

- BSL information videos and recognition of the volunteer role 'sign support'. You can watch the videos [here](#)
- Producing accessible language parkrun leaflets
- Providing online training on accessibility for all event teams.
- Creating virtual meeting places for parkrunners using closed Facebook groups.
- Publishing blog stories from parkrunners with disabilities or long term health conditions. You can read some [here](#)

Over the next few weeks we will be looking at the different ways you can get involved with parkrun but in the meantime if you are keen to get started please contact Katy

or [read our blog](#) on getting involved with park run volunteering

Email: getactive@surreycoalition.org.uk phone or SMS text: 07434 865062

Jane's first Parkrun

Photo description: Jane standing behind the parkrun Ifield Mill Pond sign.

I first started thinking about doing Parkrun at the end of January. My new agenda for this year is to get fit and ditch unhealthy foods and after hearing about Parkrun in the Friday Cafe and the Get More Active weekly update, I thought this would be a good thing to start doing. I was pleased to hear that you don't have to run - walking is fine!

The first thing to do was register with Parkrun to get my barcode. This means I get given a time every time I complete a Parkrun and when you have completed 25 events you get a milestone t-shirt. You can register for free on the website [here](#).

Katy helped me with that as there was one really long drop down menu which doesn't work very well with a screen reader. Once I was registered, I got an email with a link to my barcode – you can either print the barcode off or use it on your phone. This was a bit of a problem again for someone who is visually impaired. Fortunately, Ted helped me with printing off the sheet and we have a few suggestions for parkrun to make their events even more accessible.

I bought myself some new trainers and comfy trousers and I was all set to go! Katy told me that there were two Parkruns near me - Tilgate Park and Ifield Mill Pond. We decided on Ifield as that is the closest one and it's also all on tarmac and flat. We arranged that Katy would come with me on the 12th February and be a sighted guide for me. She picked me up in her car and we arrived before 9am at Ifield Mill Pond.

There is a small car park next to the start with one blue badge space which we were able to park in. We were greeted by two lovely ladies, Patricia and Fiona, who are volunteers and walked behind Katy and I.

There were a few announcements from the run director and then we were off. It was a cold but dry day and we soon warmed up as we walked. The course is 1 short lap and 2 bigger laps around the paths at the Mill Ponds and it would be suitable for most people in a wheelchair as it wasn't too hilly and quite flat. Because of the laps you pass the other walkers and runners a lot and can encourage each other to keep going.

Photo description: Swan and two ducks on a green coloured pond

We also passed the mill pond twice with lots of ducks and swans on it.

We were chatting as we walked and before we knew it had finished 1k, then 1 mile and then 2k. I was really pleased as it's been years since I walked that far. By the time we got to 3k I was starting to feel a bit tired and since we were near the end of the 2nd lap it was a good place to stop. We went back to the car and I relaxed while Katy did another 2k to get her run credit.

Jane said 'I really enjoyed Ifield Parkrun and I can't wait to do it again - next time I want to finish the 5k'. 'I've recently met one of my neighbours who would like to walk more and she is going to register too and come with me to Ifield – so I have a new parkrun buddy. I'm also looking forward to going to Nonsuch parkrun on the 5th March with the Coalition and completing the 5k there'.

Events March

Tuesday 1st March 12:00 – 13:00 Craft group

Wednesday 2nd March 13:00 – 14:30 South West FoCUS

Wednesday 2nd March 14:30 – 15:30 Book chat

Thursday 3rd March 14:30 – 15:30 Quiz

Friday 4th March – 11:30 – 12:30 Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group

Monday 7th March 11:00 – 12:00 East and mid FoCUS

Monday 7th March 13:00 – 14:00 North DENS

Monday 7th March 14:30 – 15:30 Rhythm and rhymes discussion group

Tuesday 8th March 14:30 – 15:30 Craft group

Tuesday 8th March 12:00 – 13:00 Virtual trip to Brookland museum

Wednesday 9th March 14:30 – 15:30 Book chat

Thursday 10th March 14:30 – 15:30 Quiz

Thursday 10th March 13:00 – 14:30 West FoCUS

Friday 11th March 11:30 – 12:30 Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group

Monday 14th March 13:00 - 14:30 NW FoCUS

Monday 14th March 11:00 - 12:00 Virtual cafe

Monday 14th March 14:30 - 15:30 Rhythm and rhymes discussion group

Monday 14th March	18:00 - 19:00	Surrey wide DENs
Tuesday 15th March	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group
Wednesday 16th March	10:30 - 11:30	South West DENs
Wednesday 16th March	14:30 - 15:30	Book chat
Thursday 17th March	14:30 - 15:30	Quiz
Friday 18th March	11:30 - 12:30	Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group
Monday 21st March	11:00 - 12:00	Virtual cafe
Monday 21st March	13:00 - 14:00	East DENs
Monday 21st March	14:30- 15:30	Rhythm and rhymes discussion group
Tuesday 22nd March	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group
Wednesday 23rd March	14:30 - 15:30	Book chat
Thursday 24th March	10:30 - 12:30	Hard of hearing forum
Thursday 24th March	14:30 - 15:30	Quiz
Friday 25th March	11:30 - 12:30	Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group
Friday 25th March	13:00 - 14:30	IMHN Coordinating Group
Monday 28th March	14:30 - 15:30	Rhythm and rhymes discussion group
Tuesday 29th March	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group
Wednesday 30th March	14:30 - 15:30	Book chat
Thursday 31st March	14:30 - 15:30	Quiz

Events April

Friday 1st April	11:30 - 12:30	Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group
Monday 4th April	11:00 - 12:00	Virtual cafe
Monday 4th April	13:00 - 14:30	East and Mid FoCUS

Monday 4th April	14:00 - 15:30	Rhythm and rhymes discussion group
Tuesday 5th April	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group
Wednesday 6th April	13:00 - 14:30	SW FoCUS
Wednesday 6th April	14:30 - 15:30	Book chat
Wednesday 6th April	10:00 - 11:00	NW Mental Health Stakeholder Group
Thursday 7th April	18:00 - 19:30	Surrey wide FoCUS
Thursday 7th April	14:30 - 15:30	Quiz
Thursday 7th April	10:00 - 11:00	East and Mid Mental Health Stakeholder Group
Friday 8th April	11:30 - 12:30	Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group
Monday 11th April	11:00 - 12:00	Virtual café
Monday 11th April	13:00 - 14:30	NW FoCUS
Monday 11th April	14:00 - 15:30	Rhythm and rhymes discussion group
Tuesday 12th April	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group
Wednesday 13th April	10:30 - 11:30	DENS Chairs
Wednesday 13th April	10:30 - 11:30	Book chat
Thursday 14th April	14:30 - 15:30	Quiz
Friday 15th April	GOOD FRIDAY	GOOD FRIDAY
Monday 18th April	EASTER MONDAY	EASTER MONDAY
Tuesday 19th April	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group
Wednesday 20th April	14:30 - 15:30	Book chat
Thursday 21st April	10:30 - 12:00	Surrey Vision Action Group
Thursday 21st April	14:30 - 15:30	Quiz
Friday 22nd April	11:30 - 12:30	Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group

Monday 25th April	11:00 - 12:00	Virtual cafe
Monday 25th April	14:30 - 15:30	Rhythm and rhymes discussion group
Tuesday 26th April	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group
Wednesday 27th April	14:30 - 15:30	Book chat
Thursday 28th April	14:30 - 15:30	Quiz
Friday 29th April	11:30 - 12:30	Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group

Events May

Monday 2nd May	11:00 - 12:00	Virtual cafe
Monday 2nd May	14:30 - 15:30	Rhythm and rhymes discussion group
Tuesday 3rd May	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group
Wednesday 4th May	14:30 - 15:30	Book chat
Thursday 5th May	14:30 - 15:30	Quiz
Friday 6th May	11:30 - 12:30	Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group
Monday 9th May	11:00 - 12:00	Virtual cafe
Monday 9th May	13:00 - 14:00	North DENS
Monday 9th May	14:30 - 15:30	Rhythm and rhymes discussion group
Tuesday 10th May	14:30 - 16:00	FoCUS Committee
Tuesday 10th May	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group
Wednesday 11th May	14:30 - 15:30	Book chat
Thursday 12th May	14:30 - 15:30	Quiz
Friday 13th May	11:30 - 12:30	Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group
Monday 16th May	11:00 - 12:00	Virtual cafe

Monday 16th May	14:30 - 15:30	Rhythm and rhymes discussion group
Monday 16th May	18:00 - 19:00	Surrey wide DENS
Tuesday 17th May	10:30 - 12:30	Long term neurological conditions group
Tuesday 17th May	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group
Wednesday 18th May	10:30 - 11:30	South West DENS
Wednesday 18th May	14:30 - 15:30	Book chat
Thursday 19th May	14:30 - 15:30	Quiz
Friday 20th May	11:30 - 12:30	Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group
Monday 23rd May	11:00 - 12:00	Virtual cafe
Monday 23rd May	13:00 - 14:00	East DENS
Monday 23rd May	13:30 - 14:30	Rhythm and rhymes discussion group
Tuesday 24th May	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group
Wednesday 25th May	14:30 - 15:30	Book chat
Thursday 26th May	14:30 - 15:30	Quiz
Friday 27th May	11:30 - 12:30	Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group
Monday 30th May	11:00 - 12:00	Virtual cafe
Monday 30th May	14:30 - 15:30	Rhythm and rhymes discussion group
Tuesday 31st May	12:00 - 13:00	Craft group

Key: IMHN Independent Mental Health Network FoCUS Forum of Carers and people who Use our Services (this is a forum for people who use, or have used, or care for someone who has used, services from Surrey and Borders NHS Partnership Trust). DENS: Disability Empowerment Network

Contact us

Photo description: Bright coloured post it notes spelling contact us on a bright teal background

We always love to hear from you!

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Join Us! It's FREE to join us. Register online [here](#) or call/text the office!