

Hope and Support: celebrating our wonderful volunteers



As we approach Volunteers Week, we wanted to express our heartfelt gratitude to all our incredible volunteers at the College. Their dedication and support are the backbone of our community, and without them, we simply would not be able to function.

Our volunteers (aka ‘friends of’ / Ambassadors) bring a wealth of lived experience and peer support that is invaluable to our learners. This unique perspective is one of the most important aspects of our College. It allows our learners to connect on a deeper level, knowing that they are not alone in their journey. The stories and experiences shared by our volunteers provide a sense of relatability and, more importantly, hope.

Hope is a key element in the recovery process. It is the light that guides us through challenging times and motivates us to keep moving forward. Our volunteers embody this, offering encouragement and inspiration to everyone they interact with. Their presence is a constant reminder that recovery is possible and that there is always a reason to keep striving for a better tomorrow.

We want to celebrate and honour the contributions of all our supporters. Their commitment, generosity and honesty make such a positive difference to the lives of our learners. So thank you to all our volunteers for being the heart and soul of the College. Your efforts genuinely are appreciated and we are truly fortunate to have you as part of our team.

Courses that changed my life

It's a bold statement, but many of our learners have had their lives changed for the better by attending Recovery College courses. This is just a little of what they had to say...

Living Well with ADHD: "I've known about my ADHD for many years now, but received little or no support. Previously, everything I'd learnt about my condition came from the Internet, so I found this six-week course amazing! I learned so much more about my condition - it was a real eye opener. I also learned different strategies and coping skills, plus why I do certain things or react in particular situations. The 3 Facilitators were wonderful and the course was very interactive and supportive, none of the group wanted the course to end, as it was so good. This course definitely changed my life and has helped me so much." *By Wendy*

A Plan for Living Well: "I learnt that self-care is important and to take things slow and to not feel guilty on the days I'm not 100%. The facilitators taught me how to deal with my mental health and how to recover from my bad days. I discovered how to lead a life worth living." *By Jana*

A Plan for Living Well: "This course lived up to it's name! It's by far the most helpful course I've done; it changed my life. I learned tools which work for me and I apply them daily. They help me monitor myself, evaluate my mood and to stop and take stock. I can recognise the signs before things get out of hand. I have learned to love life." *By Geraldine*

Mosaics: "I did this course about 7 years ago and was immediately hooked and I've been doing mosaics ever since. I've actually just grouted a tray today for my Mum for her birthday. I've got an array of tools, as I'm now a bit obsessed with mosaics! I've learnt lots of new skills at the College but learning how to mosaic has been my fave." *By Joy*

Peer Mentoring: "What changed my life was Recovery College itself, not one particular course. The College induced a different outlook and a new lease of life into me. All the staff, volunteers and learners I've met have been brilliant, warm, welcoming, and extremely friendly. All the courses have been exceptional, but if I were to highlight one it would be Peer Mentoring. Should anyone be unsure about attending RC courses., don't think too long about it, just do it. I'm convinced you'll not regret attending." *By Mark*

Someone Like Me

We are so grateful to learner, Valerie for her reflections from her recent trip away and how she used this time to practice some of the skills she has learnt at the College.

“I’ve just arrived home after a week in a wonderful old Welsh cottage located by a river in a hidden valley. Limited mod cons, but all I needed – including wi-fi so as not to miss my current Recovery College Doodling session.

Although I had planned to visit some of the castles in the area, the ‘heat-wave’ encouraged me to spend most of the week just sitting close to the river, listening to the running water and watching the sun shimmer on the ripples. And the chatter of numerous unidentifiable birds flying around the wild garden.



I truly enjoyed this unexpected gift of reflective time – particularly putting into practice things learnt with the Recovery College, specifically writing and doodling skills. As a recently bereaved 24/7 ex-carer, I had unwittingly become isolated – COVID’s stay at home restrictions were already the norm for us. I was also protective of my immune-compromised body, slowly becoming more reluctant to venture out into a much more dangerous world. Confidence in life outside my lovely home and garden had quietly disappeared without warning me.

I returned home energised and peaceful, with several pages of poetry and doodle drawings reflecting the natural world I was in. The trip allowed me to express myself in creative ways that are new to me. This boost to both self-esteem and confidence is entirely thanks to the wonderful work and safe environment offered to all by those of the Recovery College. Thank you for all you do.”

Let's Get Physical:

Start Small: The Power of the Plank

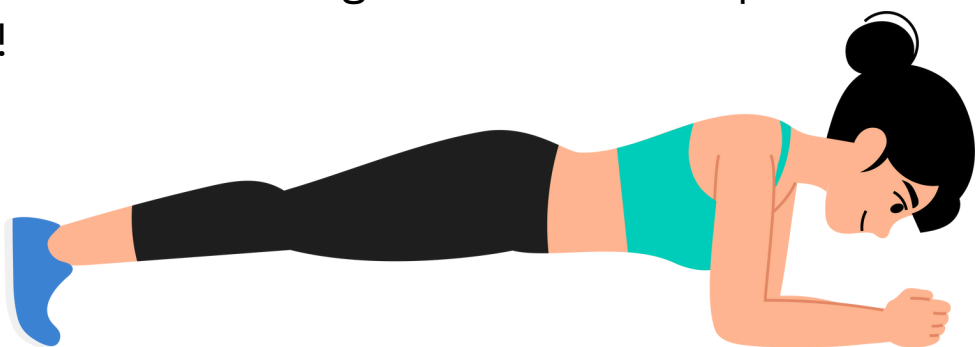
Embarking on a journey to improve our physical health can feel overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. Starting small with a simple exercise for just 30 seconds a day can make a significant difference. The plank is a great way to start. A plank is when you hold your body in a straight and in-line position like a plank of wood. This fantastic exercise targets our core muscles, which can reduce common back issues and build our overall body strength and stability as it engages muscles in our arms, shoulders, back and legs. It can also improve our posture and enhance our balance and co-ordination.

Consistency is key. When we commit to this short daily exercise, we may begin to feel better about ourselves, we might notice reduced pain, increased strength which may encourage us to do a little more. However, even if we stick with just the plank, we're still doing our bodies a favour. If 30 seconds feels too challenging at first, don't worry. Start with a duration you can manage and gradually increase your time as your strength improves.

How to do a plank:

- Begin in a push-up position with your arms straight and hands (or elbows) directly under your shoulders.
- Engage your core by tightening your abdominal muscles.
- Keep your body in a straight line from head to heels, avoiding sagging or arching your back (imagine balancing a glass of water on your back)
- Hold this position for as long as you can, aiming to build up to 30 seconds or more.

For more details visit: <https://www.wellandgood.com/fitness/plank-for-beginners>. Happy planking!



Bring Me Sunshine!



With the recent good weather (at the time of writing!) it has been noticeable how sunny days can help lift our mood. Whether it's the feeling of warmth on our skin, seeing blue skies above or just being able to head outside for a walk in the park without having to wrap up or take a brolly, whatever the reason, sunshine can certainly put a spring in our step.

In fact, research has shown that moderate exposure to sunlight triggers the production of Vitamin D in our skin, which is crucial for bone health, immune function and reducing inflammation.

Sunlight also stimulates the release of serotonin (the happy hormone) giving our mood a good ol' boost - although we've all probably figured that last one out for ourselves!

Here in the UK where warm weather is limited, it's especially important to make the most of sunny days. Regular exposure to sunlight can help regulate our circadian rhythms, improving sleep quality and overall wellbeing. About 15 minutes a day is all that's needed to reap the benefits.

Perhaps this information shouldn't be surprising, after all, life on Earth wouldn't exist without that big yellow ball in the sky! Sunlight is fundamental to all living things, providing energy and supporting ecosystems. However, it is vital to balance sun exposure with skin protection to avoid sunburn and long-term skin damage. So please remember to enjoy the benefits of sunlight safely by using sunscreen, wearing protective clothing and seeking shade during peak hours.

So, let's enjoy the sunshine and allow it's rays to bring us warmth, joy and wellbeing - and please remember to stay sun safe.



Valerie (learner and author of this month's 'Someone Like Me' article) has kindly shared with us, one of her poems - and we love it! We hope you do too!

REFLECTIONS



What do I see
Water running free
The river unrestrained
Just follows its course
Rocks in its path
No matter, they're passed,
The water continues
It holds to its path.

And yet this is me
My heart yearns to be free
A person confined
Life's route once defined
The rocks in my path
Yes, they will be passed,
My life does continue
I will find a new path.



Valerie has added a little note: "Water erodes rocks – it just takes time! Gentle but regular support may take time but is part of the process."

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