

TANDEM MENTAL HEALTH BEFRIENDING



Tandem is a small, Oxford-based charity that sets up one-to-one befriending partnerships between volunteers and people living with mental ill-health. Tandem received £6,000 from Well Together to support coordination of their befriending partnerships and social activities.



Both the befriending partnerships and the social group are aimed at increasing confidence and social engagement, and challenging feelings of stigma following mental illness. Tandem do this by encouraging the people they support to get 'out and about', becoming involved in whatever leisure activities they enjoy, increasing physical activity, and raising aspirations for future training or employment. Meeting weekly, both the partnerships and the social group set their targets and activities themselves – there is no set programme. The most popular activities are sports, arts and crafts, walks, visits to museums and colleges, and exhibitions in Oxford.

“Our grant from Well Together was a huge boost to enabling our relatively small charity to develop and grow in 2024.”



BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Tandem supports up to 24 befriending partnerships, and a separate weekly social group with attendance varying from 10 to 18, of adults of all ages. Partnerships and the social group engage in a wide variety of activities in the local community.





TANDEM SOCIAL GROUP

The group was originally started 18 years ago as a result of a growing waiting list for partnerships – it is offered to all awaiting partnerships and those whose partnerships have ended but who welcome continuing support. Until last autumn it was organised by the Tandem co-ordinator in collaboration with members of the group, but since then a steering group of four members have taken over its organisation, planning and arranging the weekly meetings, organising outings, welcoming new members, and encouraging the friendly and supportive ethos.



Members send the monthly programme to the co-ordinator, who circulates to the group, and maintains records of numbers and expenditure. Careful budgeting ensures that no-one is excluded due to a lack of funds.

The current programme has included visits to Thame museum, a winter walk in Christ Church meadows, 10-pin bowling, and a visit to the Ashmolean museum.

“Having a befriender is the only sustained help I have received over the last year and it has really made all the difference to me. Somebody actually bothers to keep trying to help – they don’t give up so I can’t either.”

“Every other psychiatric service I have been referred to has focused on my illness – Tandem is the first service that emphasises and encourages my wellness.”

