

Pushing my boundaries

Mary Downes, Pathways support worker

Two years ago I visited my family doctor. He asked what I did for exercise. I opened my mouth to answer with a list of interesting and energetic activities... and I couldn't think of a single thing! I used to do a lot. But he didn't ask what I did in my younger years, he meant now. The only thing I could think of was running around the building and up and down the stairs during my working day. But that wasn't something I did for exercise, it was just part of work.

The doctor's question got me thinking. In the previous year I'd had subtle influence from Pathways' Healthy Lifestyles Programme. I'd started eating walnuts daily, plain yoghurt for supper (something about Tryptophan helping one to sleep) and more greens for dinner. I decided I'd like to do something for exercise.

I'm not a fan of exercise machines, so the gym was out. Team sport was out too as the necessary time commitment wouldn't fit with my work roster. As for my history of jogging... that doesn't bear going into! Then I thought of ice skating. I like to dance, so how hard could it be to dance on ice?

I toyed with the idea of ice skating for quite a while before my first tentative visit to an ice skating rink. The visit wasn't for a lesson, but just to test the water. Frozen water. Hard and slippery frozen water! During that visit I didn't venture further than arms length from the fence. I spent two hours making my way around the edge, hanging on grimly. Even holding on to the fence I managed to fall to my knees! That 'involuntary dance' was painful and embarrassing - I nearly fainted! Despite it all, I returned the next week and did the same. But that time I managed not to fall.

After two solo sessions I felt ready for a beginner's class. After all, I could stand on the ice and take a few steps! The 'half-my-age' receptionist told me about the Coffee Club which offered adult lessons and a free coffee afterwards. It was a comfort to hear one lady in my class was in her 60's and trying ice skating for the first time.

I've been ice skating for more than a term now. I've learnt some tricky little figure skating moves and I seem to be at the same level as my classmates. I'm able to glide around the rink with some control. We've even been taught how to fall in a way that minimises injury! I still can't believe I thought it would be like dancing... at least there is music playing!

When I skate I feel relaxed and happy for the rest of the day. I enjoy the companionship of the other skaters too. Ice skating takes my full concentration. There's no room for worrying about any outside issues! So, not only does my body get a work out, my brain gets a break from all the little things that occupy it too.

Pathways' Healthy Lifestyles Programme helped me out financially by paying for the first few lessons and everyone has been encouraging me to keep it up. It's been great! I intend to continue enjoying the two hours exercising on the ice each week. Many thanks to the Pathways Healthy Lifestyles Programme team for the inspiration and support!

