

The Changing System Series

Welcome to The Changing System Series by Move Northamptonshire and the University of Northampton. In this series, we hear stories from people in who are making healthy active lifestyles integral to ALL people's lives in Northamptonshire. *Read, Be Inspired, and Be Part of the Movement.*

EASY AS ABCD – ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TO HELP OLDER ADULTS ACCESS COMMUNITY GROUPS

Say 'Hi' to Rachel, formerly of South Northants Volunteer Bureau and now a member of Action for Happiness. In April 2024, Rachel attended the Healthy Active Ageing Activation Event, where attendees identified new opportunities to support physical activity for older adults.



At the event, Rachel met Frank from West Northamptonshire Council's Public Health team. A few weeks later, Frank brought Rachel and other stakeholders together, including the Local Area Partnership lead and NHS representatives, to discuss the key issues and challenges affecting older adults' access to physical activity in Brackley.

That meeting inspired Rachel to apply for and secure £7,500 in funding from Connect Northamptonshire. With this funding, she delivered an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) project that strengthened physical activity opportunities for older adults in Brackley.

Rachel's attendance at the Activation Event led to outcomes and opportunities that align with the four key aims of Move Northamptonshire's Healthy Active Ageing Enabler. Her experience demonstrates the positive impact these events can have on residents. We have mapped Rachel's journey against the four aims of the Healthy Active Ageing Enabler to inspire new ways to support your local community.

Aim 1: Embed physical activity into whole-system community approaches that support improved outcomes for older adults, including models of social prescribing across the country.

- Through Connect Northamptonshire funding, Rachel delivered a pilot Healthy Active Ageing project in Brackley. Using the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, she mapped community over 120 spaces, activities, opportunities, and the needs of older adults in Brackley. Before the project, residents lacked a simple way to find information about local groups, activities, meeting places, or facilities available for hire.
- Rachel's work established a localised social prescribing approach. Community groups and facilities promoted activities and opportunities to one another through advertisements and guest visits. The project introduced a monthly calendar for older adults, creating a central source of information on local opportunities, events, and services while giving organisations the confidence to promote activities across the town.

- The calendar was used during face-to-face interactions with older adults in community settings. Rachel and her partners chose this approach because many older adults experienced challenges with digital literacy.
- Through stronger promotion, networking, and resource-sharing among community groups and facilities, several existing activities attracted significantly more participants, including:
 - Brackley Dippers swimming sessions
 - Walking Rugby and Football sessions
 - Steady Steps classes at Brackley Leisure Centre

Aim 2: Create stronger connections with health and adult social care providers to build an integrated offer for older adults.

- Rachel produced a project report that shared key learning with stakeholders and encouraged them to adopt an Asset-Based Community Development approach in their communities. West Northamptonshire Council featured the project in the Director of Public Health's Annual Report and the Public Health team now uses the report to promote a scalable ABCD blueprint across the county.
- Since the Activation Event and the formation of the Healthy Active Ageing Working Group, Rachel has seen significant growth in preventative work across the health and care sector. Stakeholders who support older adults increasingly prioritise prevention rather than responding to issues after they arise. However, organisations still face challenges when seeking funding for preventative work.
- As a member of Action for Happiness, Rachel combined her ABCD expertise with the organisation's 10 Keys to Happier Living. Together, Rachel and the Action for Happiness team created an Asset-Based Community Development model that aligns with the 10 Keys Calendar and helps Town and Parish Councils support older adults in their communities.
- Moulton Parish Council adopted and implemented the model to maximise the impact of its facilities. In Brackley, Rachel transformed her pilot project into a long-term initiative by launching Happy Brackley in June 2026, ensuring continued support for older adults. Watch out for our next case study to learn more about Action for Happiness' 'Active, Happier, Together' model.



Aim 3: Apply insight and person-centred approaches to better understand older adults and provide opportunities and activities that benefit them.

- Rachel spoke with more than 150 older adults through Community Conversations. These discussions ensured that older adults shaped the project's design. During the conversations, Rachel discovered that many older adults were unaware of activities and services already available in their neighbourhood. This insight prompted efforts to improve the promotion of local groups and helped Rachel identify the most effective ways to communicate with older adults.
- Older adults also highlighted gaps in the local offer. Rachel shared these insights with local groups and organisations, which responded by introducing:
 - Two additional iCAN Get Up and Go Falls Prevention classes coordinated by Northamptonshire Sport, both of which quickly sold out.
 - Chair-Based Exercise classes within Brackley Town FC's Saints Community Project. The Saints Community Trust regularly invites Brackley Leisure Centre to deliver these sessions to its 140 members as part of its programme of activities for older adults.
 - Chair-Based Exercise sessions in four care homes for residents.
- Building on the success of the Brackley project, Rachel now applies lessons from the 12-month programme through South Northants Youth Engagement (SNYE). She supports efforts to make better use of facilities in Towcester and Brackley to help more young people become physically active. This work highlights the value of sharing learning and sustaining the long-term impact of short-term funded projects.

Aim 4: Collectively promote and advocate the benefits of maintaining an active lifestyle, including strength and balance, into later life.

- Rachel described the Healthy Active Ageing Activation Event as the most valuable element of this work. The event energised stakeholders across the system, encouraging them to focus their efforts and collaborate more effectively to improve outcomes for older adults across the county.
- Many stakeholders work across the county-wide system. These Activation Events allow them to step away from day-to-day service delivery, reflect on their work, and identify opportunities to achieve greater impact through collaboration rather than working in isolation.

Get Involved

To learn more about Happy Brackley, visit:

<https://www.happy-brackley.co.uk/>

If Rachel's story has inspired you and your organisation supports older adults, consider joining the Healthy Active Ageing Working Group. For more information, contact Jackie Browne at **jackie.browne@northamptonshiresport.org**.

Thank you to Rachel for agreeing to share her research interview as a case study. If you have your own experiences of the Healthy Active Ageing Activation Event or Working Group that you would like to share, please contact Associate Professor Declan Ryan at **Declan.Ryan@northampton.ac.uk** to arrange an interview.

To learn more about Move Northamptonshire, visit:

<https://movenorthamptonshire.org/>

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