



# Happiness Habits for Older People

Wisdom in Practice, July 2015

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## What we did

Last year Outside the Box worked with groups of older people and talked about mental health and wellbeing for older people as part of the Wisdom in Practice project. From this, we produced a Discussion Paper, to raise the issues that affect older people and show what groups can do to support people's wellbeing.

This year, we decided to link into the Mental Health Awareness Week in May. This is led by Mental Health Foundation and draws in thousands of people, community groups and bigger organisations across the UK.

We took their publication *Ten Ways to look after your mental health* as our starting point.

1. Talk about your feelings
2. Keep active
3. Eat well
4. Drink sensibly
5. Keep in touch
6. Ask for help
7. Take a break
8. Do something you're good at
9. Accept who you are
10. Care for others

Mental Health Foundation: ['Ten Ways to look after your mental health'](#)

The Make it Happen Forum in Falkirk helped us plan how we could best raise the topic of looking after your mental health and wellbeing with older people. We came up with the title of Happiness Habits from these conversations.

We sent an invitation out to as many people as we could:

- Members of the Make It Happen Forum in Falkirk and district
- Their other contacts in the area
- Sending it through Outside the Box and other newsletters
- Other older people's groups we know through Wisdom in Practice and Equalities contacts.

Some groups and services asked their members and people they know. People talked about it with their friends and in their groups – which is what we wanted.

People sent responses back to us.

- People told us they had enjoyed the conversations.

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- They sent examples of them doing all sorts of activities that supported their wellbeing – choirs, gardens and outdoors, and people just enjoying being together.
- Other people sent us detailed comments and suggestions on ways older people can support their own mental health and wellbeing and look out for each other.

We want to thank everyone who contributed to the discussions and to these examples.

These are photos from WOOP – Wider Opportunities for Older People in Inverclyde – who helped us get things started. They bring together lots of Happiness Habits.



### Our Wisdom in Practice Happiness Habits

These are our additional Tips. They are linked to the Mental Health Foundation's list but cover points that reflect the lives of older people

- There's no 'one size fits all' when it comes to tips for happiness. You need to figure out what works for you. As we get older, things that once made us happy may not be possible or have the same impact. We need to keep working at it and find new sources of happiness in our lives as well as continuing to enjoy the old ones.
- Do things that you are not good at, as well as the ones you are good at. Learning new things in older age has a huge impact on our wellbeing as well as other aspects of a healthy mind. It isn't about becoming an expert, or even being very good, it is just giving something new a try.
- Include music in your life. For many people it is a great way to look after your mental wellbeing as well as helping people enjoy and hold on to memories.
- If you're feeling low, don't wait until you're better to do things. Doing things may help you feel better.
- Accept who you are. You have a lifetime's experience and wisdom and knowledge. There may be other changes in your life that can be hard to accept, but there are also sources of happiness that you can hold on to.
- Celebrate and share your wisdom. Make a contribution and give something to others, even if they are not expecting it (some people would say especially if they are not expecting it).



### Examples and quotes from people

#### A bit of everything

“I’ve kept in touch with a group of pals – we all did teacher training together a long time ago. We see each other every month for a walk in the park and then tea and cakes, and talk the whole time. That’s keeping active, talking about our feelings and caring for others as well. We’re even better at this than we realised!”

“Jackie from **Seniors Together in South Lanarkshire** attended our Active Tuesday group this morning and put out a letter box with small cards next to it and ask people if they could share what makes them happy.

Here’s what folk said:

- Meeting other older people for activities
- Grandchildren
- Being healthy and mobile
- Music
- Gardening, shopping & family
- Dancing - from 5 of us!
- Meeting other people
- Exercising
- Walking
- Badminton”

“I have a long-term depressive illness which won't go away but which I try to make a conscious effort to manage. Mental well-being is about our thoughts & attitudes as well as what we do. I find it's best to have a number of approaches & interests to try to prevent a downward spiral.”

“Top of my Happiness Habits list is Be kind to yourself and nurture yourself as you would for someone you care about. (Some of us think this is wrong or we are good at caring for others but not ourselves.) Try to do/look for something which gives you pleasure every day - this can be as simple as watching flowers grow.”

“I can’t do as much as I used to and accepting tis can be hard. But I do lots of the other things on the list and you’re right they do make me feel better. My new happiness habit is going to be making sure I d a couple of these every day.”

“If you are feeling down or suffering from depression or anxiety, don't wait until you feel better before you "do" things. You will have to do things in order to feel better. This will take effort when you really don't feel like it, but it's worth it. Equally, set yourself small steps and tasks towards recovery and recognise your achievements.”

“Our group had a right good discussion about this. We had a laugh at some of the things we do – I’ve known someone for years and never knew she was such an Elvis fan. We all have lots of ways of keeping happy and feeling well but some times we have a bad patch and forget. This has reminded us that you can need a bit of help from friends to keep taking those positive steps.”

### Talk about how you feel

“This isn't just about talking to professionals. If we share our experience & knowledge where appropriate, we can help each other & increasingly find that we are not alone - everyone struggles with mental well-being at times & some people continuously. Perhaps some day, we won't feel ashamed of this!”

“We enjoyed talking about the idea and the list of tips. Just talking about that got us on to talking about how we feel some days.”

### Keep active

“My first happiness habit is definitely to keep dancing as long as I am mobile. I currently do 4 nights per week which includes ballroom, Latin American, sequence and Ceroc (jive). I meet people in their 80s who are still dancing. It's good for the memory, balance, motor skills, making the effort to get dressed up and go out into a social setting and talk to people, keeping the chemistry and physical closeness going in a partnership, and for fun and laughter. All perfect ingredients in a Happiness Habit recipe!”

**Green Shoes Arts by Community Catalysts:** this is a community micro-enterprise delivering a dance/fitness/movement session for older people. Watch and feel happy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lm6OHo9Snr8>

“Our weekly walking group – keeping active, meeting new people. I always feel better after it, even in the dark miserable winter weather.”

“The Mental Health Foundation website focuses on exercise etc. But I'd like to point out that everything counts - walking around, housework and gardening. It's also been shown that half an hour's exercise a day significantly protects us against dementia. If it involves socialising, that's even better, but I've found I need to make exercise a habit and enjoy it or I give up. I always found going to the gym boring, but I would leave the house on a cold winter's night to go to Scottish Country dancing.”

“I feel that "keeping active" is also about staying curious & learning, whether this is through reading/TV/using computers or going to classes. Strathclyde University has an excellent programme for over 50's called "Learning in Later Life". I particularly enjoy "Health and Well-being through Song".

## Music – doing what we are good at and keeping in touch

**Horsecross Voices** at Perth Concert Hall is a community drop-in singing group for people of all abilities- from those who read music to those who like to just sing in the shower. Learning songs from lots of genres - Motown, classical, pop, Scottish and music theatre.

The most popular night so far was the Dolly Parton session! (Photo: thanks to Fraser Brand)



A large proportion of the people who attend are older adults who appreciate the informal and social nature of the group.

They also run to outreach Voices groups at Kinross Parish Church (Leven Voices) and at Errol Community Centre. These groups enable adults in rural locations to access the sessions without having to travel to Perth to take part.

<http://www.horsecross.co.uk/whats-on/horsecross-voices>

**Blow and Blast at Perth Concert Hall** is easy and intermediate level ensemble playing opportunities for adult learners, those returning to a wind instrument after a long gap, or anyone who would like to take part in group music-making in a friendly and supportive context. Maggie Robertson is a member, and her research ‘How does learning music help the ageing brain?’ has fed into the tutors’ planning of sessions.

“Singing along to the radio when no-one else is listening.”

“Weekly choir at the church hall. We started practicing for a carol concert 5 years ago and loved it so much we’ve kept going.”

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***Singing for the Brain*** is a partnership between East Renfrewshire Community Health and Care Partnership Kirkton Service and The Richmond Fellowship Scotland Dementia service that has been going since 2014. It builds on a great group that was started by NHS staff a good few years ago.

The project was to develop a group activity for older people and service users with dementia. It aims to provide an activity which would ensure older people in East Renfrewshire are valued, their voices are heard and they are supported to enjoy full and positive lives for longer.

Research has proven that singing brings people together in a friendly and stimulating social environment. Singing is not only an enjoyable activity, it can also provide a way for people with dementia, along with their carers, to express themselves and socialise with others in a fun and supportive group.

Hidden in the fun are activities which build on the well-known preserved memory for song and music in the brain. Even when many memories are hard to retrieve, music is especially easy for all to recall.

“Definitely singing. Can you include something you’re not good at but really enjoy? If I keep going I might get better, although it’s not very likely and I’m happy the way I am.”

“Singing along to the radio. I do that every day.”



### Keep in touch

“Getting out each day and saying hello to someone – neighbours, folk in the village shop or our lovely post lady. My family live a distance away so we keep in touch by phone. That’s good for keeping me well and happy too.”

“Getting along to the Thursday Group. You hear the laughter from the bottom of the path and you’re feeling happy before you get your coat off.”

“I started arranging that a few neighbours and I have tea/coffee in each other’s houses once a month. Leaving aside any contact in between, we make this a definite date. One of my neighbours whose husband died and who is quite shy now seems more confident because of this.”

“Socialising is so important. That’s my route to happiness and keeping well.’

“As we get older we may lose our friends and family members through children moving away, illness, reduced mobility and death. If you already feel isolated, I would recommend getting in touch with a befrienders group or carers’ group in your area.”

“If you find yourself making excuses not to meet or phone friends & family you do have, perhaps keep the contact brief, but as they say "just do it".

“Playing with my grandchildren who live near by and through skype with the grandchildren on the other side of the world!!”

“My second Happiness Habit is to spend time with family and friends who love us and appreciate us so that there are plenty of good positive vibes of laughter and love surrounding us.”

**‘Craft Café** is a creative solution to reducing isolation and loneliness amongst older people aged 60+. It offers members a safe, social and creative environment where they can learn new skills, renew social networks and reconnect with their communities.

Since first opening its doors in 2009 Craft Café has engaged with over 600 people aged between 60 and 90 years old. Through getting involved in Craft Café members have become active in their community once more; this is particularly relevant as The Scottish Government initiative See the Person Not the Age highlighted that 97% of older people are still living within the community with a staggering 73% of people living independently at the age of 97.

Craft Café is open from 10am to 4pm, 3 days per week offering a range of creative activities supported by a professional artist. Craft Café members attend for free and are encouraged to take the lead on their own learning with a constant supply of materials and access to expertise. Craft Café encourages a social entrepreneurial approach through the selling of specially created works at local craft sales and art exhibitions.’

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**Contact the Elderly** organise monthly Sunday afternoon tea parties for people aged 75 and over, who live alone with little or no support from friends, family or statutory services. The afternoons are full of fun and laughter and make a real difference to the lives of our older guests.

Here's a photo from one of our Sunday teas. Smiles!



**Men in Museums:** Museum Visits for Men aged 75+. Contact the Elderly and Glasgow Museums have launched a new Sunday afternoon group for men aged 75+ who live alone and enjoy museums and art. A male volunteer will drive participants to and from home and remain at the museum for the visit. This is a free service.

We have a few tenants at **Trust Housing Association** in North Lanarkshire who are keen gardeners. Some of our tenants take part in Friday afternoon exercise classes, bingo on Thursday nights and there is one person who takes guitar lessons. All of our tenants come together every day for lunch and dinner.

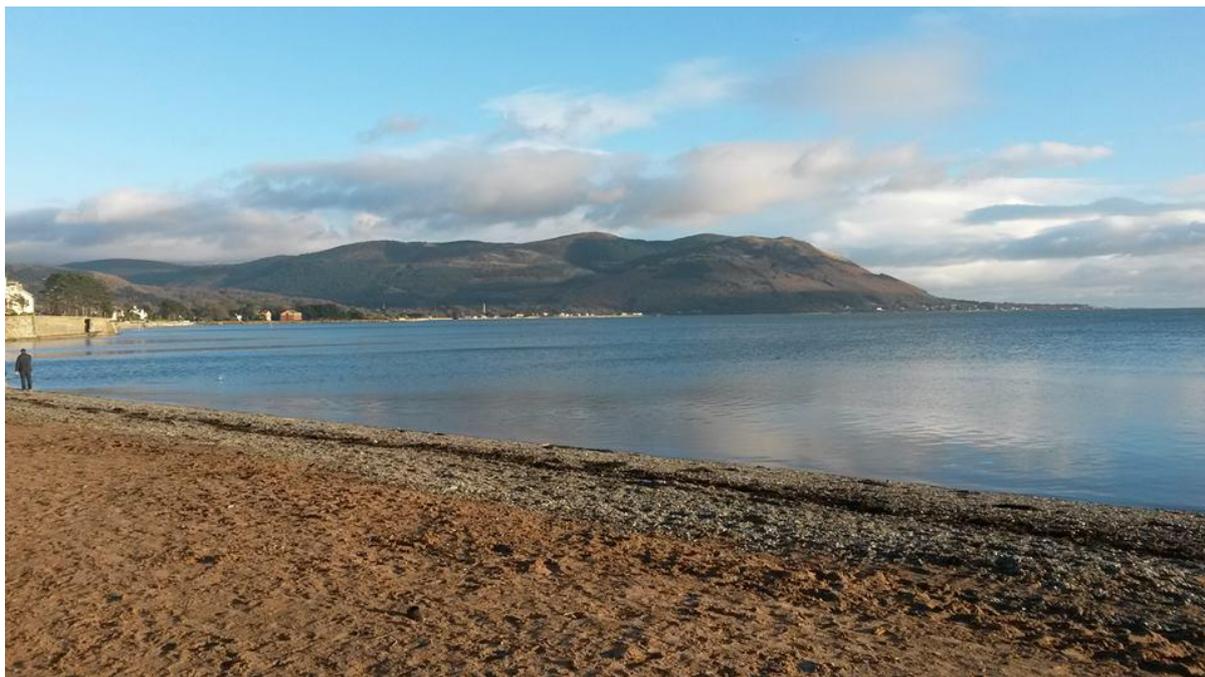
### Have a break

“Getting out for the day, even just going to the park.”

“Heading off with my free bus pass and going to museums, art galleries – lots of great stuff that is free for pensioners.”

“Spending a day by the seaside. Smell of the sea, ice cream, walk along the sea front, fish and chips.”

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**Falkirk Short Breaks Bureau** is developing more flexible ways for older people who need more support to get a break. Here are some stories.

An older man went for a short visit to a care home in the north of Scotland so that he could have his short break near where some of his family lived. This worked well as his carer had a break and he had the care and support that he needed within the care home while allowing him to spend time with his family that lived nearby – so keeping in touch and being with people we care for as well as getting a break.

An elderly couple have taken a break together staying in a hotel. The Short Breaks Bureau arranged to local care providers to come into the hotel to provide additional support to assist in the mornings and in the evenings. This provided a good break, as the couple were able to go away together and not worry about the other person being on their own.

We're looking at how to arrange a bus tour for an older person with support at each overnight stay.

“Happiness is a lovely time away together.”

“Happiness is getting a break from your usual routine and seeing new places and people.”

“Going for a walk together and looking at neighbours' gardens.”



### Do something you are good at (and learn something new)

“I bake every week.”

“Photography – I’ve been able to indulge my hobby since I retired. I get out on walks to take photographs and have joined a photography group where I keep learning new skills as well as being with people who share the interest.”

“Knitting. I’m doing wee Arran jumpers for my great-grandchildren at the moment.”

**Aberdeen University of the Third Age** has 220 members who get a lot of happiness from learning something new every day.

We have about 25 different groups and the Group Leaders are all volunteers who get great happiness from sharing their knowledge and skills and in learning new things all the time. We provide a lot of social interaction and keep our minds and bodies active and are happy to be part of a world-wide organisation. (U3As are the fastest growing organisation for the over 50's in the UK).

<http://u3asites.org.uk/code/u3asite.php?site=85&page=1>

“You are never too old to learn.”

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### ***Micro-markets in Dumfries and Galloway is supported by Community Catalysts***

One example is David Coe who is proving that retirement is for living life to the full and he's loving every minute of it. A graphic designer by profession and with a passion for art, David decided to set up an arts group in his local community in Whithorn in Dumfries and Galloway.

The project is aimed at local people who are aged 50 + and is very much about fun and providing the chance to take part in a new activity, share experience, contribute to positive physical and mental health, whilst helping to reduce social isolation.



The group is going from strength to strength and now has 27 members. Catering for all abilities from beginners to more experienced artists there are two sessions a week to allow members to develop and progress their skills and also the opportunity to attend events and exhibitions where some of their artwork can be sold to the public. The social aspect of the group is something that David couldn't have predicted. He said, "Everyone is very supportive of one another. One of our members is a wheelchair user and had not been out socially for many, many years but now she has found a whole new lease of life by coming to the group."

## Accept who you are

"One of our Happiness Habits is sharing tips on how to make life easier as we are all getting older. We swap news on ways to use the internet and wee gadgets we've discovered."

"Find new ways to enjoy the old passions in your life."

"Remember people who have inspired you. My aunt, who was blind, and my father who lived happily well into his nineties. They both embodied a positive spirit and also set me an example."

"For me, happiness comes from remembering people who have passed away and the good times we shared."

"Get photographs of the good times in your life – your achievements, places you enjoyed and the people you cared about. We all get such pleasure from hearing each other's stories. The things we got up to when we were young!"

### Care for others

“I heartily agree that "caring for others" promotes well-being, but I would simply call this "giving to others", as it extends from giving someone a smile right along the spectrum to being a full-time carer.”

“Caring can have a negative context for many of us as we get older. When my wife was diagnosed with dementia I became her ‘carer’ instead of her husband. But yes, we both care about and for each other, and that makes both of us happy.”

“Volunteering in a charity shop and at adult literacy classes gives me a sense of purpose and makes me feel good.”

“The elderly (more elderly than I am) lady I befriend through a local project thinks I'm giving to her, but it's a two-way street because it's a pleasure to visit her.”

“Our craft group has been making Linus Quilts for years. Now we're knitting for tiny premature babies and for children in families who don't have much. We're happy knitting and sewing, happy in each other's company and happy that we are helping babies and children even if we don't know who they are.”

“My caring for others happiness habit? Caring for my cat and watching how he takes life as it comes.”



## Contact us

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## Some useful resources and websites

This is the **Discussion Paper that Wisdom in Practice** published:  
<http://www.wisdominpractice.org.uk/mental-wellbeing-2/>

**Older people and alcohol:** Outside the Box is working with older people to develop tips to enable people to continue to enjoy alcohol safely as they get older. You can find these at:

<http://www.otbds.org/olderpeoplealcohol/>

**Moodjuice** is a website that helps you explore your feelings and thoughts. It is developed by Choose Life Falkirk and the Adult Clinical Psychology Service, NHS Forth Valley.

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk>

**Doc Ready** is a useful website to help you prepare for talking to your doctor about your mental health.

<http://www.docready.org/static/client/index.html#/home>

**Breathing Space** is a website and phonenumber for times of difficulty to provide a safe and supportive space by listening, offering advice and providing information.

**Telephone 0800 838 587**

<http://breathingspace.scot>

