



‘Connect with Nature’ this Mental Health Awareness Week in Kent

The theme of this year’s Mental Health Awareness Week (10-16 May) - ‘Connect with Nature’ - is being supported by services across the county including Live Well Kent, One You Kent and Explore Kent.

Information is available at www.kent.gov.uk/wellbeing on these services, plus many more, which can help you try to improve your mental and physical health and wellbeing.

You can find healthy walks and activities with One You Kent which is commissioned by Kent County Council to support healthy lifestyle changes, and Live Well Kent which is a network of community mental health and wellbeing support services, managed by charities Porchlight and Shaw Trust for KCC and the Kent and Medway CCG. Explore Kent, supported by the Everyday Active campaign, can also help you find ways to get outside and enjoy the wonderful Kent countryside.

Julie has been supported with feelings of depression and loneliness during the lockdown by Live Well Kent. “For years, I felt cut off from the world and missed speaking to people but lacked confidence to do so,” she explains. “I wanted to be able to go into a coffee shop but didn’t have the confidence.”

NHS professionals referred Julie to the Live Well Kent and she first started receiving support from Swale Your Way with weekly craft sessions – one of the activities it

runs to help people meet others, build confidence and improve their mental health. She now receives weekly video check-ins from her Porchlight support worker Holly. Julie adds: “I have somebody to turn to about what I’m going through and we can work it out together. I might have ups and downs, but it really helps knowing that Holly will be checking in. And I know that when Holly says she will do something it will get done.”

Julia Hargreaves from Porchlight said: “We understand that when problems are mounting up it can feel difficult to take the first step and reach out for support, but you don’t have to cope alone. We can open the door to a range of organisations, workshops and activities – from mental health meet-ups to arts and crafts groups – that will help you improve your emotional wellbeing and feel more confident.”

Craig Atkins from Shaw Trust said: “Live Well Kent delivers outdoor activities for clients throughout Kent and the relaxation of lockdown restrictions have enabled providers to get back to what they love doing, working face-to-face with clients. “This week will see the Live Well Kent team delivering several online workshops focusing on nature, covering a range of topics from the Six Ways to Wellbeing to 'environmental jobs'. Projects include 'Into the Wild' woodland bushcraft, gardening, stained glass, craft, wood workshop, and cooking groups. A range of new activities are already in motion but it isn’t too late to express an interest and take part during Mental Health Awareness Week and beyond.”

Another way to get active is with the Step by Step Kent Sheds programme. Set up to combat loneliness, social isolation and mental health problems, Kent Sheds has now expanded to include physical health promotion and there are currently 31 groups across the county which are always encouraging new members to join. Steve Potts from the Shedkwik shed in Ashford said: “We help people bring their ideas to life through woodworking, giving them a sense of purpose and the satisfaction of completing a project. Our mission is to ultimately show people in our community that they can take on anything they put their mind to.”

Kent County Council Public Health Consultant, Jess Mookherjee said: “The past year with Covid-19 has been incredibly stressful and challenging for many people, and

those anxieties and worries about jobs, relationships, family and home life, and concerns about the future continue.

“Organisations across Kent and nationally have pulled together to support people and you can find a wealth of information plus online tips and advice including the Every Mind Matters online tool at www.kent.gov.uk/wellbeing”

Dr Jihad Malasi, a GP in Ramsgate and clinical lead for mental health at NHS Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group, said: “Being in the great outdoors is valuable for all of us. I love walking and climbing, and I hope that you can reconnect nature during Mental Health Awareness Week. However, it’s important that you know we’re here for you if you need us. There are lots services available to help you manage your mental health, improve your confidence and empower you to do the things that you really want to do in life.”

You can find information on the services mentioned above at:

- **One You Kent** - healthy walks, Active 10 app, Everyday Active and countryside parks www.oneyoukent.org.uk and www.kent.gov.uk/getmoving
- **Live Well Kent** community mental health support services. Info at www.kent.gov.uk/wellbeing and www.livewellkent.org.uk
- **Kent Sheds** – info at www.kent.gov.uk/wellbeing and www.kentsheds.org
- **Every Mind Matters** online tool at www.kent.gov.uk/everymindmatters
- **Explore Kent** (walking, cycling and connecting with nature) at www.explorekent.org
- **Everyday Active** – take that first step to being physically active with the Kent Sport led activities site at www.everydayactivekent.org.uk