

England

www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

bigtimes



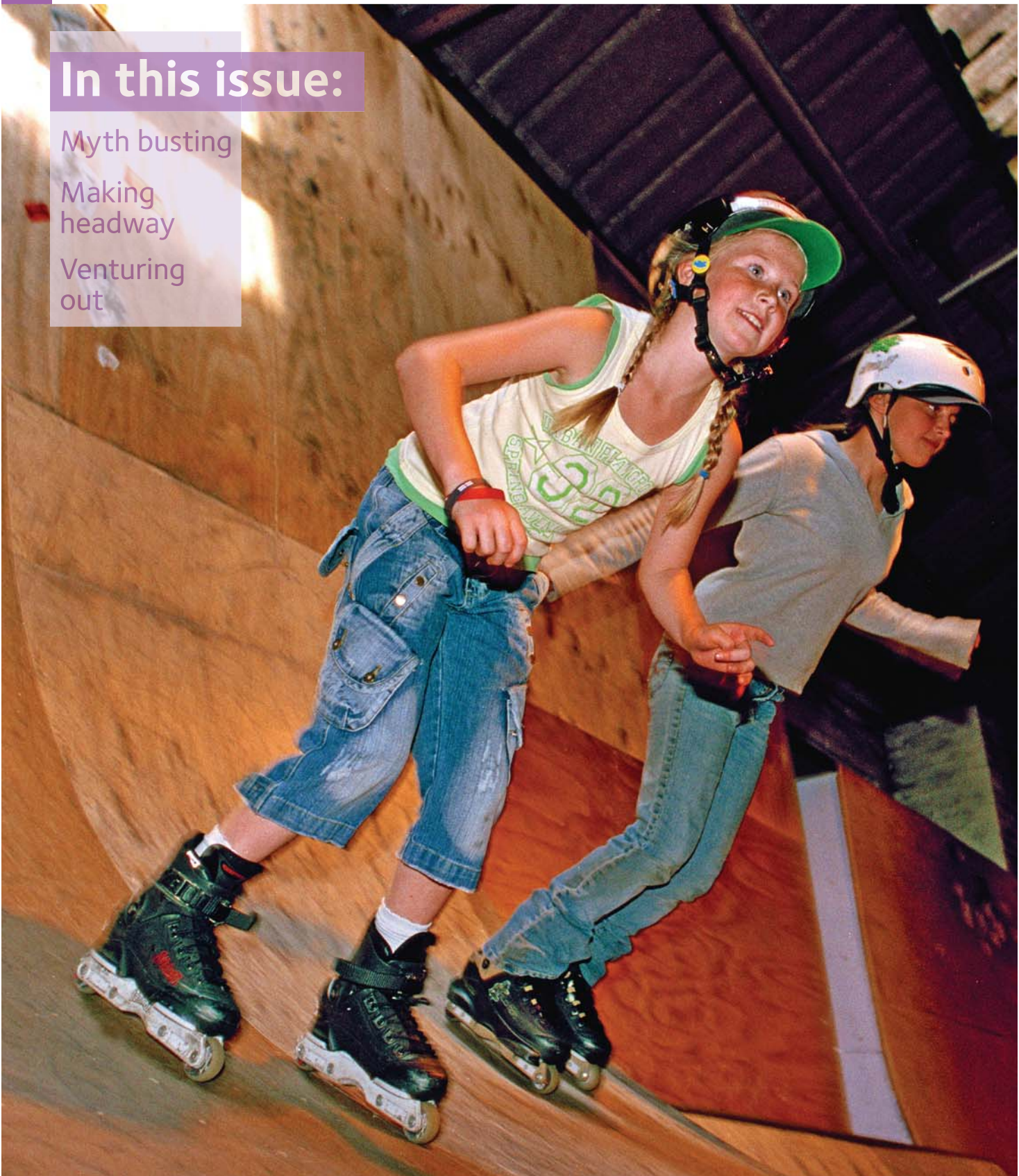
How your Lottery money is transforming people's lives

In this issue:

Myth busting

Making headway

Venturing out



Bigtimes England

Stock code BIG-BTENG02
 Print Burlington Press
 Photography Kevin Clifford, Alan Fletcher, Julian Hawkins, Hickes Photography, Simon McComb, Ged Murray, Adam Pope, Dan Tuffs and Simon Veit-Wilson

Further copies available from:

Email general.enquiries@biglotteryfund.org.uk
 Phone 0845 4 10 20 30
 Textphone 0845 6 02 16 59
 Our website www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

Accessibility

Also available upon request in other formats including large print.

Our equality principles

Promoting accessibility; valuing cultural diversity; promoting participation; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting inclusive communities; reducing disadvantage and exclusion. Please visit our website for more information.

We care about the environment

The Big Lottery Fund seeks to minimise its negative environmental impact and only uses proper sustainable resources.

Our mission

We are committed to bringing real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need.

Our values

We have identified seven values that underpin our work: fairness; accessibility; strategic focus; involving people; innovation; enabling; additional to government.

The Big Lottery Fund is committed to valuing diversity and promoting equality of opportunity, both as a grantmaker and employer. The Big Lottery Fund will aim to adopt an inclusive approach to ensure grant applicants and recipients, stakeholders, job applicants and employees are treated fairly.

Big Lottery Fund is the joint operating name of the New Opportunities Fund and the National Lottery Charities Board (which made grants under the name of Community Fund).

© Big Lottery Fund, September 2006

Awarding funds from
The National Lottery[®]



Racing at Aintree: A Big Lottery Fund grant to Rampworx paid for coaching for girls' in-line skating in an inner city area of Liverpool. To Find out more about our funding for young people see pages 8-9.

In this issue...

The National Lottery inspires a great deal of public debate. Key to this debate is the question of what the Lottery should or should not fund. This is a healthy debate, and it is one that the Big Lottery Fund engaged in when it agreed its current funding programmes. It suggests that people are interested in having a greater say over where Lottery money should go. The Big Lottery Fund is addressing these questions by exploring a number of methods to increase public involvement in Lottery funding decision-making.

The debate however, is often clouded by a number of myths and misinformation about what the Big Lottery Fund and its predecessor bodies have or have not funded. On pages 8 and 9 of this edition of Big Times we look at some of those myths and reveal the truth behind them.

All the stories in Big Times focus on people whose lives have changed for the better because of Lottery

funding. Cindy Buxton from Manchester and Neil Batty from Yorkshire describe how learning arts and crafts has helped them to defeat depression. Amy Dowd from Basildon in Essex reveals how losing her sight in one eye gave her the chance to learn new skills and meet new friends. Gene Martin from west London tells how organising a Lottery funded club for older people has brought happiness and fulfillment to her retirement.

At the other end of the age scale 18-year-old Donna Jones from an isolated village in Devon has used the loan of a Lottery funded scooter to get her to work, and a grant to the brain injury charity Headway has helped Neil Dickson from Leicester find new direction after a brain tumour which shattered his dreams and ambitions.

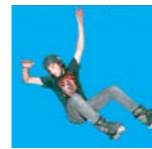
We celebrate the courage and determination of these remarkable people.



4-5 Amy finds the path



6-7 Making headway



8-9 Myth busting



10-11 Out of the darkness, into the sun



12-13 Venturing out



14 A wheelie good idea



15 An open door

Amy finds the path

Amy Dowd (right) helps with the washing up after lunch



“Going blind is the most frightening experience imaginable,” said Amy Dowd, who knew she was losing her sight when she did not recognise her daughter in the Basildon car park where she working as an attendant.

It was back in 1989 when Amy was only in her forties that she lost the sight in one eye.

“As well as losing your sight you’re afraid of losing your independence,” she said. “People start trying to run your life for you. They don’t realise that you only want help if you ask for it. They feel sorry for you.”

Amy did not want sympathy: what she wanted was a way of carrying on life as normally as possible. She had to give up her job working for Basildon council and was fed up and frustrated, despite having a husband and seven children. But when Carol Alexander from Social Services suggested to her that she might try out the Pathfinders Blind Group, Amy was not too keen.

“My immediate reaction was ‘No thank you, this isn’t for me,’” said Amy, now 72. “I’ve never been one for joining clubs. And the idea of sitting around a table with other blind people talking about our problems didn’t appeal to me. Little did I realise that this club would end up being my life.”

“People start trying to run your life for you. They don’t realise that you only want help if you ask for it”

Over the last 16 years that Amy has been a member Pathfinders has used her energy, talent for organisation and boundless enthusiasm to turn the club from a small group of eight people to more than 40, who range in age from 30 to 94.

Pathfinders runs two clubs a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays. Members pitch up in the morning,

have lunch and play board games, cards and bingo.

Once people come to Pathfinders they stay. “We only lose people when they die,” said Amy. The club is clearly a happy and fun place to go twice a week, and the people who come form close friendships, a few even finding partners there. “We look out for each other,” said Amy. “If someone doesn’t turn up because they’re ill, we make sure that they’re all right.”

Pathfinders may even have saved one of its member’s lives. Amy tells the story of one man who was so depressed by losing his sight that he wanted to kill himself. Joining Pathfinders helped him realise that his life was still worth living.

“Losing your sight is like losing a partner,” said Amy. “And you



Mark (left) is Pathfinders’ youngest member. Amy hopes that more like him will join the club

go through all the emotions associated with bereavement – grief, despair and anger. You ask: Why has this happened to me? But even though you never think you will, you get used to being blind. No one believes this, but it’s true: you can still have a happy and rewarding life.”

“I would love to win the Lottery. But only so that I could buy Pathfinders their own centre”

Despite chronic problems with her remaining sight – she has to cope with glaucoma as well as the macular degeneration and cataracts that are common to getting older – Amy remains unflinching in her determination to get the most of out of life and to give her all to the club. This, as well as devoting considerable care and attention to her huge family – she has 25 grandchildren and eight

great-grandchildren.

For the last 13 years Amy has been the club’s treasurer. Undaunted by her lack of financial experience she set about acquiring the skills that have helped her to become a formidable administrator and fundraiser. She taught herself to type, took a City and Guilds course in computer skills and learnt bookkeeping.

It is Amy who organises the group’s annual holiday, collecting the money from members and doing the bookings. One of these – “a wonderful week in Great Yarmouth” – was paid for by money from Awards for All.

As treasurer, Amy was of course heavily involved in the club’s four successful applications for Lottery money. A grant of £12,500 paid for volunteers’ expenses so that the club could expand its activities for members and run more frequently. And particularly useful is the specialist equipment, also paid for by Lottery money, that help members to be more independent. The talking kettle

and microwave are invaluable for preparing lunch and making refreshments. It is also thanks to the Lottery that the group was able to install a computer programme called JAWS, which reads text from the screen out loud, and for Braille machines. Amy has just passed her Braille exams and plans to use the machines to translate Pathfinders’ leaflets.

Amy’s work for the club has led to her getting the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service, which she received from Prince Charles at Buckingham Palace in July this year. She has also received a Rotary Club award for exceptional services for the community of Basildon.

Amy is one of those optimistic people who radiate warmth and life. Pathfinders is her extended family, and you feel club members love her. But Amy is not the kind of person to rest on her success.

“I would love to win the Lottery,” she said. “But only so that I could buy Pathfinders their own centre. Five million pounds ought to be enough, don’t you think?”

Making headway

Ben Dickson from Leicester was 18 and studying for his A Levels, when his life changed forever. Taken into hospital with hydrocephalus (water on the brain), doctors realised that something else was wrong. A scan confirmed that Ben had a brain tumour, and he was operated on immediately.

"I wanted to study medicine at university," Ben said. "After the operation I re-did my A Levels and then started an extended science degree at De Montfort University". He was about to start achieving his life's ambition to be a doctor.

But Ben's health deteriorated, and he had to have further surgery, which left him blind, epileptic and a prey to constant headaches. He has difficulty concentrating. Staying on for further studies was no longer an option, but Ben was determined to lead an independent and active life.

Ben gets out and about as much as he can – attending

classes for people with brain injuries at his local college, and also going to the Headway Activity Centre one day a week.

Headway is a national organisation with branches throughout the UK, which helps people to recover from head injuries or brain diseases so that they can return to as normal a life as possible. The Leicestershire and Rutland branch offers support to its members in a variety of ways: it has five outreach workers, who visit members at home, an education service, which has close

A brain tumour at 18 left Ben Dickson blind and epileptic. But he is determined to lead an independent and active life.

links to local colleges, and the Activity Centre based in Leicester, where members can meet and socialise.

"The centre offers a range of activities," said Day Centre Manager, Marietta Sharp. "We have places for up to 12 members a day, and we do all kinds of practical things, such as arts and crafts, computer skills, as well as cookery and woodwork. The important thing is that members choose what they want to do."

Woodworking is one of the most

popular activities, and thanks to a recent Lottery grant of nearly £50,000 it is now on offer everyday of the week.

"I really like doing the woodwork here," says Ben. "Our teacher, Margaret, gives us all a great deal of support, so that we can make the things we want to. I did a bit of woodwork when I was at school, but I didn't think I was any good at it. But I have learnt so much since I have been coming here."

Ben has already made a saucepan and utensil rack for his flat – so that he can hang his cooking paraphernalia where he can see it. Because he suffers from short-term memory loss, he likes to put things back where they are easy to find. He is keen to develop his newly acquired skills and is already planning his next project – to make a holder for all his spices.

Margaret works closely with the members of Headway to make sure that they are involved in their woodworking project right from the start.

"Everything we make here is their choice: we design it together, decide how big it's going to be, what type of joints are needed, and how we are going to approach it," she said.

"I have learnt so much since I have been coming here"

"It means that members are learning communication as well as woodworking skills."

Ben Dickson varnishing a spice rack



Projects range from the very simple to more ambitious ideas. Items made at the centre include bird boxes, toy boxes, planters, and even delicate jewellery boxes.

"Woodwork is creative and practical at the same time," Margaret said. "People like to make things that are useful in their daily lives. The best thing for me is, when they have finished making their project, they can see what they can do and it gives them the

confidence to then tackle things at home and to be more independent.

Coming to Headway once a week has changed Ben's life around.

"A day like this, at Headway, means that I am out of the house, meeting other people, socialising and doing something positive," he said. "I don't want to get to 40 or 50 and then be afraid to go out of the house."

FURTHER INFORMATION

Every year, more than a million people attend hospital accident and emergency departments in the UK following a head injury.

- ▶ The major causes of head injury are road traffic accidents, accidents during leisure pursuits or at work, falls, and assaults.
- ▶ Road traffic accidents account for 40 to 50 per cent of all injuries.
- ▶ The age group most at risk of head injury is 15 to 29.
- ▶ Males are two or three times more likely to have a brain injury than females.

- ▶ Motorbikes form one per cent of road traffic, but motorcyclists account for 20 per cent of road deaths and serious injuries.

Headway believes that the only cure for head injury is prevention and actively pursues this objective.

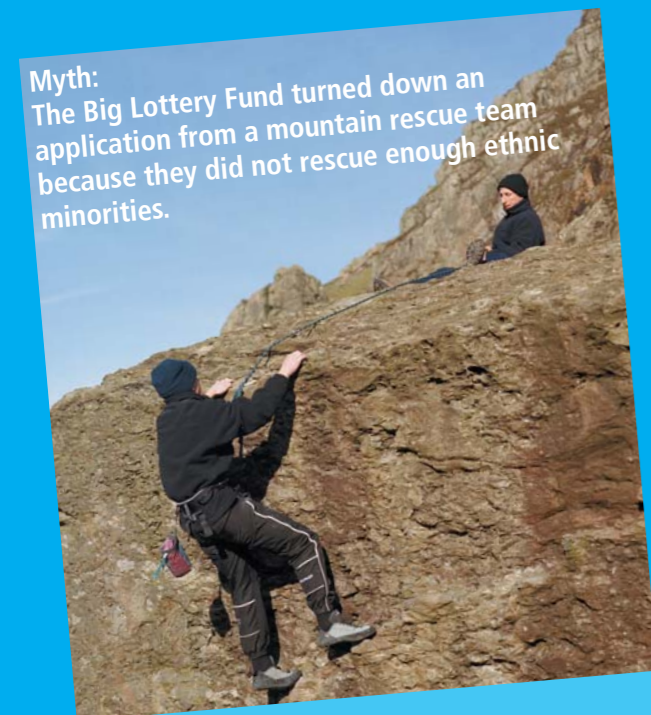
- Prevention:
- ▶ Be aware of potential dangers.
 - ▶ Wear protective headgear when riding motorbikes or when playing contact sports.
 - ▶ When riding a motorbike adopt "defensive riding" strategies.



Woodwork classes at Headway have given Ben the chance to do something positive

Myth busting

The Big Lottery Fund has made more than 63,000 awards across the UK worth over £6.3 billion, but it is just a few 'old Lottery tales' that continue to grab the headlines. Here we set the record straight by tackling some of these 'old Lottery tales' and giving you the story of how Lottery money is really spent.



Myth: The Big Lottery Fund turned down an application from a mountain rescue team because they did not rescue enough ethnic minorities.

Fact: We have given 27 grants to mountain rescue teams with a total of £1,180,593. We do not reject any project because they do not target enough ethnic minorities.



Myth: Too much money goes to asylum seekers.

Fact: In 2003 asylum organisations received 2.5 per cent of the £285 million allocated to charities by the Community Fund, while projects for the disabled got 22 per cent and projects for older people received 11 per cent. Asylum groups on average receive around one per cent of all Lottery funding.



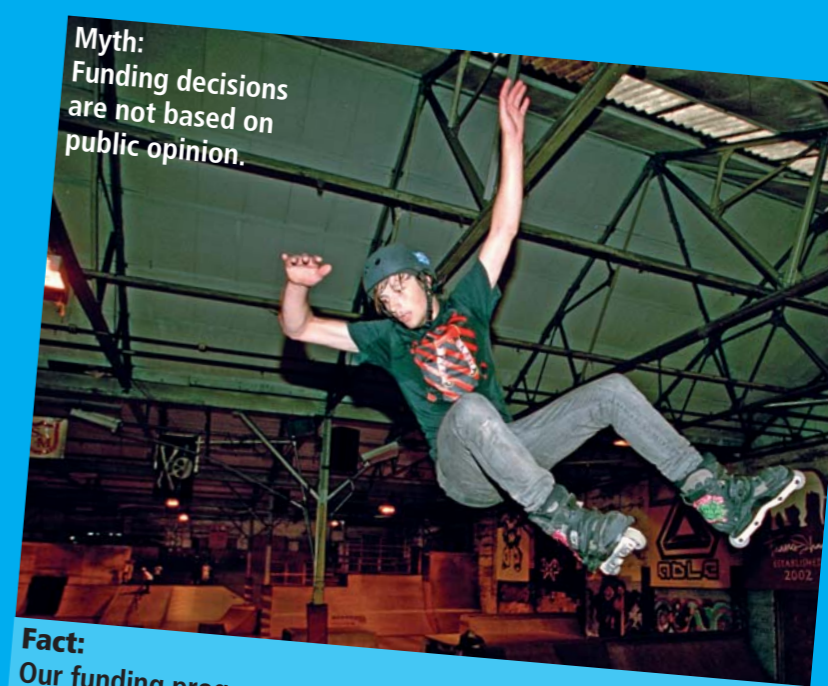
Myth: Small projects miss out on Big Lottery Fund awards.

Fact: The Big Lottery Fund has made over 30,000 awards for less than £10,000. Under the joint Awards for All programme small community groups can apply for grants from £300 up to £10,000.



Myth: Big Lottery Fund awards only go to unusual or unpopular causes.

Fact: The Big Lottery Fund has made more than 63,000 awards worth over £6.3 billion. Good causes that have benefited include veterans, village halls, disabled people and the local environment.



Myth: Funding decisions are not based on public opinion.

Fact: Our funding programmes are based on a full public consultation. Young people are now involved on decision-making panels for the Young People's Fund and the public has a chance to vote for projects to receive funding from our People's Millions programme.



Myth: The creation of the Big Lottery Fund means less Lottery money going to the voluntary and community sector.

Fact: 60-70 per cent of our funding will go to the voluntary and community section – a bigger percentage of Lottery money than ever.

For information about BIG's Lottery funding visit our website:
www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

Out of the darkness, into the sun

One in five people suffer from depression in their lifetime. Joining a self-help group is an increasingly popular form of treatment. In the next four pages we meet Neil Batty and Cindy Buxton, who used self-help to break out of their depression and learn to enjoy life again. On page 13 there is an information box on depression and where to go for help.

If you asked Neil Batty to describe his life 18 months ago he would tell you it was “like being in a black tunnel with no light whatsoever”. A series of catastrophic events had driven him to the edge of despair.

Neil, 62, had always been confident and full of life. Three years ago he was happily married with two daughters and two grandsons and was working as a toolmaker. However his world was about to fall apart.

In 2003 Neil was diagnosed with skin cancer. It was caught quite early and the cancer was successfully removed. Five weeks after being given the all clear, Neil was made redundant after 19 years employment. His chances of finding employment at 60 were limited, which was another huge blow.

Life did not improve and five months later Neil suffered a massive heart attack, which almost killed him. “I came home

from the hospital and felt dreadful, I was just sinking lower and lower and lower,” he said.

A few months later, Neil’s wife of 11 years walked out on him, leaving Neil desolate.

The once confident and positive man had reached an all time low. “My confidence totally went. I stopped going out. I wouldn’t get a shower or a shave – I did absolutely nothing,” he said.

“I got used to spending my days in bed – it was what I was good at. It got to the point where it wouldn’t have bothered me if I hadn’t woken up the next morning – I knew then that this was serious.”

He went to see his doctor, who put him on a course of medication, but this seemed to have little effect. His doctor referred him to a psychiatrist who during the course of their sessions recommended the Batley Self-help Depression Group.

In November 2005, Neil

attended his first session with the group.

“Joining the group was the best thing I had done in a long time. As good as doctors are – they haven’t experienced it and you have got to have been there and got the T-shirt to fully understand depression.”

Batley Self-Help Depression Group was formed in 1997 by Marion Dixon to offer mutual support and encouragement for sufferers of depression and related illnesses. The group holds drop-in sessions where users can talk and support each other. They run various therapy sessions and also offer one to one counselling.

The group was awarded £215,297 under Big Lottery Fund’s voluntary and community sector programme. The grant has paid for additional staff, which means more time can be focused on supporting people who come to the group.

Neil goes to the group at least once or twice a week. “I would still say that coming to the group on a Monday is the highlight of my week,” he said. “I just find it a nice safe environment to be in. Depression is not like having a broken leg, there are no visible signs and people think you are fine and you are not. You can be among people who 100 per cent genuinely know how you feel.”

“Without a doubt joining Batley Self-Help has been a big turning point for me, it has definitely been the first big step on the ladder back to normality and it has



Arts and crafts have helped to lift Neil Batty’s mood and enhance his self-esteem

inspired me to do a lot of other things.”

Neil now goes to the gym practically everyday, cycles with his grandson and takes his three dogs for long walks. He is especially delighted that some members of Batley Self-Help Depression Group have started their own walking club on a

“Without a doubt joining Batley Self-Help has been a big turning point for me”

Sunday, as walking is his main hobby.

Three months ago Neil felt strong enough to come off anti-depressants. “I thought I am going

to take a gamble as I could have easily sunk back but I really thought I had come far enough to go forward and fortunately, I made the right decision”.

Neil is truly an inspiration to new members of the group. “I just tell them to come to the group and give it your best shot and it will come good for you. It worked for me”.

Looking at Neil it is hard to believe that this confident, happy man was once in the deep, dark depths of despair. With the help and support of Batley Self-Help Depression Group, Neil has managed to put his life back on track. When asked to describe his life now he would tell you “Life is good and I am enjoying it again. I have come out of the darkness, into the sun.”

Venturing out

Eight years ago Cindy Buxton who suffers from long-term depression, got to such a low point that she was referred to a psychiatrist, who put her on anti-depressants. She could no longer live with her father who suffered from bad arthritis and had to give up her job in a bakery so she moved to The Gables, sheltered accommodation in Wythenshawe in Manchester.

Now 41, Cindy first heard about Venture Arts six years ago from one of the carers at The Gables.

Venture Arts, which received a grant of £157,000 from the Big Lottery Fund, offers arts and crafts workshops for adults with learning difficulties, enabling them to have a more independent and stimulating life and build their confidence and self-esteem.

At first Cindy was very shy, rarely talked to anyone and just sat in the corner and drew circles. "I felt sad, lonely and very miserable," she said. "I suffered with panic attacks and tended

to get very nervous, especially around other people. I do have a problem with my nerves: I panic a bit and when I panic I shake, people don't understand what it is."

Cindy now comes to the classes and workshops at Venture Arts twice a week. She is full of praise for what venture arts has done for her. "Since I have been coming here, I've discovered that I enjoy drawing and making mosaics. It gives me a sense of purpose. My artwork helps me to feel different

"I was so lucky to find the centre. Coming here has solved many of my problems"

things and different emotions, it makes me feel happy and I enjoy producing artwork that other people can look at. It makes me proud."



Cindy at work on a mosaic

The art workers at the centre help Cindy to put together her mosaics by helping her to cut the tiles up. But Cindy chooses the colours and puts them together.

Some of her mosaic art work was exhibited recently along with other artists from the group at the Pump House People's Museum in Manchester as part of the "Different Strokes – Venture Arts" exhibition.

Since her time at Venture Arts Cindy has blossomed. "I now have a wide circle of friends and I've become a much happier balanced person." Cindy takes a yoga class every Friday because it makes her feel relaxed and plays tag rugby every Saturday morning. She has even got involved with voluntary work at a charity shop for the Children's Society. These are major achievements for someone who used to have no confidence and feared being around people. "I've come out of my shell now, I feel bubbly, I love talking to people, I have confidence when I meet

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about Venture Arts visit their website at:

www.venture-arts.com
or call them on
0161 232 1223.

Venture Arts
43 Old Birley Street
Manchester
M15 5RF

other people. I love getting out and doing different things."

"Coming here has helped build my confidence," she said. "I never feel sad anymore. That feeling of being down has lifted. I appreciate the things I have got and I try to keep on top of it. When I feel a bit down I just think about all my friends and how much I enjoy my life now compared with how it was before."

Cindy's short-term ambition is to get more involved with Venture Arts and to expand on what she has already achieved. Venture Arts have recently been running a pottery class and Cindy is keen to get involved in this as she thinks she will like trying her hand at something different.

Cindy is slowly coming off the medication but realises that she has to be completely happy before she is able to achieve her long-term goal of living independently. But she is optimistic. "I have got to look on the bright side of life and I want to focus on all the good things I have achieved."

FEELING DEPRESSED?

We all feel sad or fed up from time to time. It is a normal reaction to experiences that are upsetting, stressful or difficult.

Usually those feelings will pass, but for some people like Neil and Cindy they persist. People can feel hopeless, helpless and suicidal.

If you are affected by depression, you are not 'just' sad or upset. You have a condition where intense sadness is accompanied by physical symptoms such as sleeplessness, loss of energy and pain.

Sometimes people may not realise how depressed they are, especially if they have been feeling the same for a long time, if they have been trying to cope with unhappiness by keeping themselves busy, or if their depressive symptoms are more physical than emotional.

Here is a list of the most common symptoms of depression. If you have experienced four or more of these symptoms, for most of the day nearly every day, for more than two weeks, you should seek help:

- tiredness and loss of energy
- persistent sadness
- loss of self-confidence and self-esteem
- having difficulty concentrating
- being unable to enjoy things that you usually find interesting or pleasurable
- undue feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- feelings of helplessness and hopelessness

- sleeping problems – difficulties in getting off to sleep or waking up much earlier than usual
- avoiding other people, even your close friends
- finding it hard to function at work, college or school
- loss of appetite or eating more than usual
- loss of sex drive or other sexual problems, such as promiscuity
- aches and pains
- thinking about suicide and death
- self-harm.

Where to go

For more information about what depression is and where to find help visit the Depression Alliance website at www.depressionalliance.org (BIG is not responsible for the content of external websites.) This website also contains information on treatments for depression and how to cope with it.

Are you feeling desperate?

If you are in crisis you can visit your local Accident and Emergency department and ask to see the duty psychiatrist. NHS Direct (0845 46 47) can also give you medical advice at any time of the day or night. Samaritans (08457 909090) offer 24 hour emotional support and Saneline (0845 767 8000) gives information and crisis support. Saneline operates between 1pm to 11pm every day.

A wheelie good idea



Based in the market town of Holsworthy in Devon, Wheels to Work is operated by the North Tamar Community Transport Association Ltd, which also runs a successful Ring and Ride scheme in the North Tamar and Torridge area, a particularly isolated part of Devon where public transport is almost non-existent.

Wheels to Work is a scheme which loans low powered scooters to young people to help them find work or to get training which will equip them for work.

The Wheels to Work project means that young people do not have to move away from home to find work. The project aims to bolster their self-confidence and develop their skills. It also offers ongoing support once they have left the scheme.

The original scheme started in 2003 and received a Big Lottery Fund grant of £53,222 to pay for the salary of a project co-ordinator, as well as buying scooters and protective clothing and equipment for the young riders.

But Wheels to Work is not just about loaning scooters to young

people. It is also about motivation and support as Wheels to Work manager Malcolm Ruston explains. "We encourage young people to find permanent solutions to their transport problems, pass their driving tests and go on to buy their own vehicles," he said.

One young person that the scheme has helped is 18-year-old Donna Clarke (pictured above) from Chilsworthy. "I couldn't get work because Holsworthy, my nearest town, is miles away and the only way I could get there and find work was to have my own transport."

Donna had one of the project's 50cc scooters for two months after which she was helped by the project to apply for the finance to buy her own. The help she initially received from Wheels to Work meant that Donna was able to start her own cleaning business, which has been so successful that now she has her sights set on getting her own premises and employing staff.

"Without the help of Wheels to Work I wouldn't have work at the moment, so the scheme has really made an enormous difference to my life."

These sentiments are echoed by 21-year-old Victoria Griffiths, who heard about Wheels to Work through her employment co-ordinator.

Victoria's mother had to go into hospital for an operation and it became very difficult for Victoria to travel the four miles to her work at Halwill Manor nursing home, a job that she has been doing for two years. So she applied to the project for help.

"It's given me real independence"

"I got a scooter and am now able to go to and from work, go shopping and see my friends. Had it not been for Wheels to Work I would have had to rely on other people to run me around. It's given me real independence."

As with many projects that the Big Lottery Fund has given Lottery cash to, it is amazing how such a comparatively small amount of money, such as the grant that the Wheels to Work project received, can make such an enormous difference to and have such a lasting impact on people's lives.

Retirement can be a frightening experience. Without work people can feel that they have lost their purpose in life. However, Gene Martin, co-founder of Pepperpot in west London, shows that with a bit of get up and go, older people can have a happy and fulfilling retirement.



Gene Martin leads gospel singing at Pepperpot

An open door

Pepperpot is a day centre in Ladbroke Grove where older Afro-Caribbean people can get together to enjoy arts and crafts, music and dance therapy, bingo, Gospel singing, day trips to museums and yoga classes. The centre has 180 members and runs five days a week from Monday to Friday.

One of the leading lights of the centre, Gene Martin, 84, came over to England from Jamaica in 1960 and has lived here ever since, raising six children.

Gene, who was a nurse at Charing Cross Hospital, got involved in Pepperpot when she retired in 1982 because she needed an outlet for her energies and wanted to do something useful in her leisure time. "I didn't want to be part of the wallpaper at home. The minute the door closed I felt locked out from the world."

Voluntary work seemed the ideal

solution. "I needed something that would involve both my heart and my head," she said. "And I wanted to share with other people."

Gene and three other women started Pepperpot from scratch in two rooms in Notting Hill Gate 25 years ago. "We were walking on one another's feet," said Gene.

Since then an endless stream of fundraising plus support from the local authority and the Lottery has allowed Pepperpot to grow from a small club of like-minded people to a day centre. The centre is a lifeline for disabled people and people with dementia referred by the health authority.

Gene loves to share and pass on stories about what life was like when she was a child in Jamaica. She feels that so much of this cultural heritage is in danger of being lost forever, because hers is the last generation of people who were born in the Caribbean and came to Britain.

So she is enthusiastic about the reminiscence classes that Pepperpot has taken into schools.

Back at the day centre, Gene is the hub of all activity. She is a brilliant needlewoman and loves to show people of all ages how to knit, sew and crochet. She also leads the Gospel singing and the Bible class. About 15 people take part in the half-hour session in the main common room. Their worship is a mixture of hymn singing, "entertainable" secular songs – many in Jamaican dialect – Bible study and prayer.

"This place is a refuge for many people," said Gene. "It's a place people can come and talk their own language and eat the kind of food they like. We were so joyful to get the Lottery grant because it means that our future is secure for the time being."

"I hope the doors never close or someone will be left out."

