



**COMMUNITY HEALTH CHAMPION**

**FACTFILE**

**NAME**

MANDY HODGSON

**ALTOGETHER BETTER PROJECT**

LEADING THE WAY TO ACTIVE LIVES, NORTH AND NORTH-EAST LINCOLNSHIRE

**WHAT SHE DID**

Took a two-day course in Tai Chi and used the skills she learned to run classes for a variety of age groups in the community on a voluntary basis.

**WHAT DIFFERENCE DID SHE MAKE?**

Helped to pass on the therapeutic benefits of Tai Chi on to a wide range of people. Provided a social outlet in isolated communities.

**ABOUT THE PROJECT**

Leading the Way to Active Lives is training key people from target groups across North and North-East Lincolnshire, empowering them to work directly in their own communities, engaging with and motivating the most needy to lead healthier lifestyles.

**‘THROUGHOUT MY CAREER I HAVE TRIED TO MAKE PEOPLE FEEL BETTER AND TAI CHI IS AN EXTENSION OF THAT. IF I CAN HELP ONE PERSON TO FEEL BETTER, I’VE DONE WHAT I SET OUT TO ACHIEVE’**

**Mandy Hodgson had tried Tai Chi before. But it took a challenge from the Leading The Way To Active Lives project for her to take her involvement with the traditional Chinese system of exercise and relaxation to the next level as a community health champion.**

“I said: ‘If you start up classes again, I’ll come along.’ That was how it came about. The project got funding and I was asked if I would be interested in becoming an instructor. How could I refuse?”

Since becoming a community health champion with the Leading The Way To Active Lives project, Mandy has become convinced of the beneficial effects of Tai Chi on health and well-being.

“I absolutely love it,” she said. “Tai Chi helps loads of different people. It’s for all ages and abilities unlike running or going to the gym.”

Mandy took a two-day course with Tai Chi master Lesley Roberts, which qualified her to work as an

▶ instructor and began running her first classes in June. Volunteering for four hours per week plus travel and set-up time, Mandy has run sessions for young children as well as intergenerational groups. However, the benefits of Tai Chi have perhaps been most noticeable in the older people she works with.

Group members have reported reduced pain from arthritis and muscle complaints and better mobility and balance.

“When she started, one lady couldn’t move her knee off the ground,” said Mandy “After a few weeks, she could do it. It’s also led to people reducing their medication.”

Tai Chi has four elements: relaxation and visualisation, concentration on breathing, ambient music and the 18 movements required to create a meditative state.

“It’s great for relaxation because it makes people less stressed,” said Mandy. “It’s a means for meditation through movement.”

The classes also provide a social outlet for people who may feel depressed or isolated.

“Classes are very popular in rural areas that don’t have many facilities. When something new is introduced it gets a big take-up. It’s very positive for these communities.”

In her ‘day job’, Mandy helps disengaged 13 to 19 year olds to overcome a diverse range of barriers to learning.

With her well-developed connections to community networks, she is typical of the kind of community health champion that the Leading The Way To Active Lives team is trying to attract to tackle health inequalities across North and North-east Lincolnshire.

As well as providing the initial training, the project

**‘IT’S GREAT FOR RELAXATION BECAUSE IT MAKES PEOPLE LESS STRESSED’**

gives Mandy ongoing support, as well as providing liability insurance, music, first aid and travel expenses for the classes.

For her part, Mandy says that becoming a community health champion and a Tai Chi instructor has benefited her both professionally and personally.

“My youngest son has just gone off to university which would otherwise have left a big hole,” she said. “But, as he’s starting a new chapter in his life, so am I in mine. I have a stressful job and it’s helped me in my day-to-day life.”

“Throughout my career I have tried to make people feel better and Tai Chi is an extension of that. If I can help one person to feel better, I’ve done what I set out to achieve. I really am enjoying meeting people and helping to improve their lives.”

**CONTACT:**

**Emma Howard-Drake**  
[emma.howard-drake@northlincs.gov.uk](mailto:emma.howard-drake@northlincs.gov.uk)  
 01724 297616

Altogether Better was founded on the firm belief that community health champions have the potential to make a significant impact on health inequalities. In 2008, we were awarded £6.8m from the BIG Lottery Well-being Fund to run our innovative, five-year programme in Yorkshire and the Humber. We have 16 locally-delivered flagship projects across the region, testing out different community health champion approaches in a range of settings.

