

Knitting for Health?

You are probably wondering what on earth knitting has to do with health, or better still, what it has to do with an NHS Library service.

Our Library & Knowledge Service team consists of 6 members of staff, 3 of whom knit and crochet. For the last 2 years the 3 of us would meet in the morning before work and knit/crochet/craft together. Over the years, people would spot us knitting/crocheting and we have had many people from all over the trust join us for advice, learning to knit, or just to share the fact that they too are “knitters”.

Wirral University Teaching Hospital held 2 “Health & Well-Being” days, to “perk your life up”, on the 24th April and 30th July 2015. The organiser of the event, being a knitter herself, recognised the benefits of knitting and, as a frequent visitor to our knitting/crochet group, asked us to come along and demonstrate our skills. The event and the Library & Knowledge Service display links to important Trust priorities including:

- ensuring that Trust staff make good, evidence based decisions
- supporting staff when they are undertaking staff development
- enhancing staff satisfaction

How could we say no? So knitting needles and crochet hooks at the ready we agreed to spread the word about knitting and crochet, while of course letting people know how the Library & Knowledge Service can help with their health and well-being.

We used the opportunity to advertise our Library services, by promoting the lesser known aspects of our Library & Knowledge Service; the health and wellbeing book stock, the “Read & Relax” fiction collection and the evidence alerts service, whilst also capturing staff who were either unaware of the service or who thought that they were not allowed to use it.

Jennifer Perestrelo (Library Assistant), Rebecca Roylance (Library Assistant) and Linda Taylor (Outreach Services Librarian) organised the display and stall, staffed the display and Jennifer even modelled one of her creations, a crochet waistcoat. We couldn't possibly put anyone else through the arduous task of sitting and knitting now could we? We were “evidence based” as Linda carried out Literature searches to find evidence for the health benefits of both knitting and reading and put this on the display.

 **Knit..... by yourself, with friends or in a group**

 **Knit..... clothes, accessories, blankets, toys, decorations**

 **Knit..... for yourself, a gift, for charity**

 **Knit..... to relax, socialise, stimulate your mind, be calm***

 **Knit.....for stress relief, creativity, happiness, therapy***

*Riley et al (2013) *The benefits of knitting for personal and social wellbeing in adulthood: findings from an international study.* British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 76 (2) pp 50-57.

Of course, we already knew the benefits of knitting/crochet as we had witnessed these for ourselves. Firstly there is the social side as a hobby that can be enjoyed whilst talking, we found that not only did it allow us to bond as a team, but also got other people talking to us, it has even brought some of these people in to the Library (how's that for boosting your usage stats). Linda has knitted for many years before starting a day at work saying “it's almost a

form of meditation, it gets my head in the right place". Whilst Rebecca finds "it extremely satisfying to have produced something that I can be proud of, and it gets the creativity flowing" and Jennifer enjoys "the satisfaction of finishing a project".

Over the 2 days we discovered many "secret knitters" who we didn't even know existed, but we also found a "knitter" who doesn't own a cat, a stereotype we had previously found to be true. We have known "young knitters" and "male knitters" (even Russell Crowe knits!), and "people who don't work in a library knitters", but never a "non-cat owning knitter".



Reflecting on the 2 events, we found them to be very different in that they actually captured people who didn't know they could use the Library or that we had a fiction collection. We even had people borrow fiction books and some who became members. The knitting caused quite a stir, and we have since had many enquiries about coming to our knitting/crochet group. The survey from both events found; 99% of people who attended the event thought the educational materials (leaflets and information) were relevant and 92% thought those people delivering advice were helpful/effective.

Looking to the future, we are working on publicising our group through various promotional activities, so watch this space. We also would certainly like to have more "stealth marketing opportunity" events like this, not just to knit, but to spread the word about the Library & Knowledge Service people didn't know they had.

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