

The fantastic work by Amanda and everyone involved in the Northfield Avenue allotments has been key in learning what's needed to support people living with long term health conditions to be active.



By working with Mansfield CVS, Amanda has made connections to a number of groups and statutory organisations. Link workers using the allotments to meet clients allows for a less formal meeting environment but also gives the clients the opportunity to see the community allotment in action. One of the biggest concerns for people in trying something new is having confidence to even turn up in the first place. Using this area as a meeting space, where a client knows they will be meeting someone for an 'appointment', you take away that concern. Amanda and others at the allotment can then use this opportunity to talk to the client and show them what the allotment is about in a risk free (for the client) way.

A knock-on effect of this is that those clients move away from needing those statutory services and ultimately this takes pressure away from the health services and supports people to live healthier and more active lives.

The allotments have allowed an easy collaboration with services, at a time when the unprecedented had been happening. How could services meet with people safely? They were able to cut through bureaucracy which may have existed in the past and as a result have created strong relationships.

Amanda approaches the allotment as someone with lived experience. She knows how people feel to live with something so huge. She has the benefit of experience to understand how activity levels can have a profound effect on her own health but also that it's not as easy to move more without support.

Amanda works with people living with long term health conditions to make sure facilities and opportunity work for them, rather than the other way around. Her mindset is refreshing, showing a flexibility to let people do what they want to do,

rather than try to prescribe a 'session' of activity. Sometimes the first step (or two) is being an ear to listen. It takes the pressure of expectations away. However, she also considers those who prefer more structure by keeping a board of jobs to be done in the allotment for people to pick from if they wish to.

The Northfield Avenue Community Allotments received a small amount of money from the We Are Undefeatable work – around £300 to buy soil for the raised beds. This is a relatively small amount but was important in developing connections and also to show the group that there was belief and value in what they were doing. This can be a really good confidence boost for a group just starting out.

The plans for the future include a polytunnel for use in the winter months. We know that activity levels go down when it's colder and having considered how the allotments could be sustained during that period is really important for outdoor activities. Again, Amanda uses her lived experience of fibromyalgia to understand how the cold can affect people with long term conditions more and what we can do to combat that barrier.

As ever, being local is important. Amanda knows the people she's trying to connect with, she went to school with them, had children at the same time, knows those children. She understands what they might struggle with and supports them without judgement. A community allotment wouldn't work everywhere but Amanda lives on Northfield Avenue and that has been pivotal in the amount that's happened in such a short space of time. If she wasn't local, she wouldn't know who had bits of garden equipment she could borrow, how she could spread the word about volunteering and who to speak to make things happen.