



Abingdon Herald Civic Pride article

by Dave Butterworth of Healthy Abingdon

Civic pride is more than just about our history and buildings but it is also about the people of Abingdon today. In particular we should celebrate that we have more than 200 community and voluntary groups based in, or with major presence in, the town.

These groups cover a wide range of activities including sports, fitness, music, drama, history, nature, conservation, healthy eating, helping people with problems and much more. Their activities are aimed at children, the elderly, young people, those with chronic health problems or mental health and learning difficulties, and lonely people. You can find most of these groups listed on the town web site.

One common theme that unites these diverse groups is that they help to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Abingdon. Over the last year, another charitable group has been created called Healthy Abingdon whose aim is to bring these groups together to find ways of doing more by collaborating. In addition, and very importantly, Healthy Abingdon brings together the community groups with the NHS and local government services so that by working together they should be able to achieve much more than working in isolation. Also we can see where the gaps are and find ways to fill them.

One thing that became clear from the start is that Abingdon is not doing as much as it should to make life easier for people with dementia. Indeed, some towns in Oxfordshire are doing much more than we are. Healthy Abingdon has therefore brought a team of people together to develop ways to make the town more dementia friendly. The Alzheimer's Society is helping with this.

A main aim of the dementia initiative is to sign up as many people as possible as Dementia Friends. This includes those that work directly with the public such as café and shop staff, police and fire fighters. Dementia Action week was on 21st to 27th of May and Healthy Abingdon used the Community Free Space in the shopping centre to raise awareness about dementia. During the week various groups talked to the public about what they offer. These groups included The Alzheimer's Society, Dementia Oxfordshire, Soha Housing, Abingdon Court and Stowford House Care Homes, Daybreak, Oxfordshire Carers and Fiddle-Finger Quilts.

Another new initiative in Abingdon is to provide safe spaces for people who feel under threat or are just lost. This is mainly aimed at those with learning difficulties who, sadly, are sometimes the target of unprovoked abuse when out and about. This initiative is being led by the Oxfordshire Family Support Network in collaboration with South and Vale District Councils. A launch event is planned for Thursday 26th July.

So Abingdon is not just a pretty and historic town but one that takes pride in helping its people to experience happier, more-fulfilling and fun lives.