

Why am I doing this sponsored swim?

Firstly, to raise additional funds for Herts Mind Network. I have benefited personally from the provision they offer and if doing this enables more people to participate then I would be delighted.

Secondly, to challenge myself and give myself an incentive to swim further and more often, both of which benefit my own mental health and well being. I definitely feel good both whilst swimming and afterwards (and may even shed a few unwanted pounds!!)



What attending Mind in Hemel Hempstead done for me?

Having suffered a completely shattering breakdown 3 years ago and being diagnosed with bi-polar affective disorder, recovery has been a long and sometimes painful process. I am hugely indebted to all the NHS services involved in my 6 months in various hospitals-The Royal Edinburgh (where I was taken when sectioned), Hemel General Hospital, and finally Albany Lodge.

Also, I have had wonderful ongoing support from Dr. Sadler, my psychiatrist, and particularly my Psychiatric Community Nurse, Caroline McBrien. Without her help, support, and encouragement I would not have made the progress and begun to rediscover the person I originally was in periods of wellness. I really was like a battered little seedling with very few roots when Caroline first met up with me in Albany Lodge. Those who know me now will probably agree that the seedling now has substantial roots and is a sturdy bush, frequently flowering.

A year ago I was encouraged to get my guitar out of the loft (it had been up there some 30 years¹) for and join the Music Group at MIND. At that time, despite doing some other voluntary work, I was still suffering from depression and quite socially isolated. The few chords I knew were still in the memory banks and over the months I enjoyed both playing and joining in the singing at the group which was ably led by a very accomplished tutor. Eventually doing a song solo was a great thrill and gradually my playing was improving. Not only was a new hobby emerging but I was forging more friendships in a positive and encouraging atmosphere. At the same time I became a volunteer helper at the Creative Writing Group. Although not really a 'creative writer' the group is really vibrant with some very talented pieces being written. There is



often much laughter, and again I have met some many lovely and people of all ages and backgrounds.

Over the year, I have seen people grow in confidence, some becoming more confident in a social environment that once would have caused anxiety. There are times when some are going through a bad patch but they still come along, knowing there are friendly and supportive people to be with. I'm sure that many are putting down deeper roots to help mitigate the social isolation, increasing their self-esteem and blossoming in so many areas.

I am now on my second 'Digital Photography' course, as a service user, gaining skills I can hopefully use both for my own enjoyment and to impart to others at my local community centre's Computer Club at Grovehill which I am involved with. Having a structure to my week, with stimulating groups to attend, in a friendly and non judgemental atmosphere has helped me become and remain more stable. Bi-polar is a 'severe and enduring' illness and, after three hospitalisations in my lifetime, I intend never to end up there again.

Volunteering has helped improve my self esteem and I am now also involved with MIND's 'Stepping Stones' project to assist people who are ready or nearly ready to leave hospital offering support in the transition between hospital and home.

I hope that by doing this 'swim' I can also show my gratitude in a practical way and if it means that even more people suffering mental distress can benefit from the many services offered by MIND, I shall be very pleased.

I have been impressed by the staff at MIND, who are extremely professional, forward thinking, very hard working, and very, very caring.

I do hope that this will encourage you and anyone you know to sponsor me. I have achieved 120 lengths in practice so far but will now have to push the date forward to **Monday 9th November** as a nasty cold has set me back and I want to be fully



recovered before making the attempt for **200 lengths** which is 4km or **2.5 miles**. I will be doing it at the Esporta Health Club, which has a 20m pool. Please look on this site from Tues 10th to see if I was successful!!! Look at a

later date to see how much is raised. You can donate safely online at www.hertsmindnetwork.org and if anyone is a taxpayer, there is the opportunity to make use of 'gift-aid'.

Anyone can avail themselves of MIND services. You don't need a referral from a health professional.

Wish me luck!
Alison Dodd