

Why did I start the DiscoveryAward?

Having suffered a life changing illness, I was gutted to find I could not return to my rewarding teaching career nor to my interests of cycling and archery. I recognised I was in a rut and a new approach was needed.

I searched the local U3A groups for a Tai Chi class as I thought this might be something I would still be able to do. The same U3A also ran a Discovery Award Group. As I had completed the Duke of Edinburgh's scheme in my youth, I was already familiar with the format of the different sections and I really liked the way it had been adapted. My children were on the point of leaving home and the Discovery Award seemed like a good idea.

What I did for my Bronze Award

Physical- Tai Chi- learnt 108 moves of the Taoist form- this was quite a challenge as I don't have a lot of sensation in my limbs so to move all four in different ways was quite a work-out for my brain!

Service- I helped out with running the community workshops and marshalling the parades for the Newcastle-under-Lyme Lantern Parade (a Community Arts Project). A lovely activity where all ages and people from different backgrounds worked together.

Journey- researching the history of my paternal grandfather-I got to ride on the light railway my great, great grandfather had helped construct and found two Yorkshire farms where the family had lived.

Interest- joined the Stone Revellations choir who performed concerts for local Stroke and Alzheimers clubs as well as fundraising concerts for local charities.

What did I get out of it?

- Wishing to maintain a regular weekly number of hours engaged in an activity has helped me in many ways- first in terms of saying yes to myself and no to others which was a major hurdle for me initially. Once I had completed the hours, I carried some activities on purely for the fulfilment or enjoyment they brought to my life.
- Undertaking voluntary work outside the home has widened my social contacts and improved my confidence. I get a real buzz from helping others and feel so much more energised now.
- I have found forms of exercise that I really enjoy, and which have brought profound health benefits: I have improved my balance, and coordination which has reduced the number of falls.

Rising to each challenge has helped build my resilience and self-belief, helping me to cope better when life throws me a curved ball. As my life is better balanced, I always have activities I look forward to each week.

I would recommend the Discovery Award to everyone- trying something completely different and challenging yourself is great fun and comes with a raft of benefits. I can't wait to start my Silver

Linda, Stone U3A Group