

Get Better Together!

What is Get Better Together?

You may have heard about this program or seen it promoted in various forms throughout the regional health authority, but what is it?



Promotional information tells us it is a series of 6 classes which helps people with ongoing health conditions learn to better manage and take control of their health. The group talks about things like healthy eating, being active, and how to manage pain. They share ideas about goal setting and problem solving, and how to cope better with difficult feelings.

We also know from the brochure that Get Better Together is similar to and based on a program that was created at Stanford University. People that took the Stanford program spent fewer days in hospital and had overall better health status. ***These changes lasted well beyond the end of the program.***

But what is it really??? And why is it so effective? To answer these questions, I went straight to the source, that is, people who have participated in the program and could tell us about their own experiences.

Meet Ray Walker, resident of the Warren area. The program he attended was offered by the RHA but hosted by a local community group in that area called, “Health On Wheels.” (They coordinate a number of health programs and speakers for their residents).

“I learned a lot. I have arthritis in one hip and two degenerative disc issues. Bothered me a whole lot. It got me down and I felt like quitting. I just didn’t want to do anything. It was wintertime when I took this program. I like to make furniture – I was almost going to give up – but I actually built three pieces during that time frame!”

When asked about how the program has impacted his life in the long run, he said, “I’ve learned how to deal with the pain, and changed my mindset so I could get on with things. I’m not just sitting and letting it hurt; getting up and doing things helps. Not thinking about it, it doesn’t hurt quite so much.”

He also states, “I am much more successful in talking to people about my problems, and listening and offering support to others – I refer people to this program. I learned how to support other people – listening, offering support.”

Jim and Maureen Malcolm also attended this program, and reported similar benefits. “Very informative. Used simple terms that we could understand. Gained quite a bit; with me being diabetic, it helped us with our meals.” In referring to the weekly goal setting activity, Maureen said, “One of our goals was to eat better for breakfast. We didn’t – so the group got together and gave us different suggestions of what we could do – that’s where it helped us and got us thinking about what we could do.”

When asked about the long term benefits, both had this to say, “We’re still using things we learned in the class. We still set a goal and realize it won’t be completed today, but we can set a goal and work towards it. It’s been a plus. It was a good thing to go to and we would go to it again if it were offered!”

From the far reaches of the region on the other side, Get Better Together was also held in the Vic Beach area. Participants found the classes so helpful, that they have continued to meet on a regular basis, long after the six classes were over. “It’s a very safe place, and a very welcoming place. We are all so different, but this is the one thing we all jell at.”

On the benefit of peer support, she said, “We still do our goal setting, review where everyone is at, talk about our lives, and problem solve together any difficulties. When we close that door and start giggling, we lift each other up!”

This individual talked about how the program gave them the tools they needed to cope. “We would not have been able to manage without the program. We can’t say enough about the program!”

As the writer of this article, I’d like to add that, on a personal note, I’ve experienced first-hand the benefits this program has to offer. I attended the program and participated in the activities through the Leader Training Program back in 2007. I was juggling three jobs at the time, raising a small child, and struggling with long term, chronic pain issues. At the time of my training, the chronic pain issues were taking a toll on my health. I realized that I was struggling and that my mental outlook was suffering.

I attended the program for work related purposes, not really expecting much in the way of personal benefit. However, by the fourth day, I found I had a renewed sense of confidence and control. Yes, I still had pain, but I was reminded that there were many things that I still had control over that could help with my overall health – how much physical activity and what type, what types of food I bought and prepared, whether or not I engaged with my social networks, whether or not I asked for help when I needed it.

The support and encouragement I received from the group helped me to brainstorm and problem-solve “solutions” for some of the challenges I was dealing with, and helped me to focus on what I could do, not what I couldn’t.

Listening to the stories of individuals from the group program I attended in 2007, (and from the personal stories shared in this article), I realized that others, often with “invisible” conditions such as myself, struggle too. What a relief it is to know that we are not alone!

The Get Better Together program is FREE for *any* individual living with any type of chronic health condition who want to take charge of their health. It can benefit people with a wide range of health conditions such as:

- Anxiety
- Arthritis
- Asthma
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Chronic back pain
- Fibromyalgia
- Heart disease
- MS
- Stroke
- **And many more**

For more information:

- To inquire about this program or to register, please contact the Community Wellness Program at wellness@ierha.ca or call 1-877-979-WELL (9355). You can also register a spouse or significant person to come with you for support. Or, if you belong to a group or club and would like this opportunity brought to your group, that can be arranged as well.
- You can also check out this link to see if and where there are classes running: <https://www.ierha.ca/default.aspx?cid=22934&lang=1> If there isn't a class scheduled for your area, you can phone anyway and have your name put on a waiting list. (Classes are offered throughout the region, pending sufficient registration).

Thank-you to the individuals who have shared their own personal experiences with this program and how it has benefitted them. We appreciate the assistance in getting the word out about this program and how it might benefit people who are needing assistance learning to manage challenging health conditions. Where there is help and hope, we are not alone. As Ray stated, “Go out and try it. You won't know unless you try!”

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