

My Time Bank experience

Convalescing from a long-term illness, I was at my lowest ebb in the spring of 2005. I had been home for several months and really getting bored, unable to return to work because I was still weak. Until this illness, I had been very active and always on the go. Therefore, I felt very incapacitated by the illness and “no longer useful or employable”. The possibility of early retirement also loomed. Unable to walk a long distance I felt very housebound. I became frustrated out of boredom and was determined to return to work knowing fully well I was not strong enough to do so and against medical advice.

This was my state of mind when I visited my GP who had a long discussion with me, and eventually suggested that I join the TIME BANK. “What is the Time Bank” I asked? This then, was the beginning of a wonderful and exciting experience for me. I was introduced to a whole new world which had always been there at my doorstep, but I had been too busy to recognise or engage in.

I joined the “Tuesday Walking club” – We walk around Ladywell Park (about 1 mile round trip) and the stronger ones encourage and support the slower, there is no age limit. I have made friends through this. I also joined the crotchet & knitting club. We have made baby shawls, cardigans, hats, and many more for other members. Our itchy fingers are always busy while we watch T.V. In 2007, I was also involved in setting a crochet group for the local primary school.

I also attend the monthly coffee mornings and weekly ‘Tea and Chat’ events which offer an opportunity to meet other members, catch up with the news, discuss and plan new time bank projects, and chat over cups of coffee & tea. I am able to spend my time credits in various ways, for example, I attend the weekly ‘chair-based’ exercises. They are ideal for people who have had a fall and are unstable, people like myself with heart illness that makes them weak, those who have had stroke, those suffering from osteoarthritis or any muscle wasting disease. I have had a member assist with my garden; a member with DIY skills put shelves up for me; and I go on the annual sea-side trip organised by the Time Bank at a cost of a few time credits!

I have also had the opportunity to meet members from the wider London Time Bank Network. I have participated in various training programmes and seminars, including project management course, taster workshop on “Being a trustee “. Thus, through the Time Bank, I am gaining these various continuous life-learning and transferable skills. As a trustee on another charity, these have been beneficial.

In May 2009, I attended the national Time-Bank conference, which was attended by UK and international representatives. The various workshops at the conference provided exposed me to the benefit of time-banking in the different communities represented. This summer (2009) I have been involved in ‘Time To Grow’ a new time bank project working with a partner organisation to grow local food in what used to be a disused and overgrown garden. I am acquiring gardening skills through this project which I find useful in my garden.

Time banking has restored in me the confidence that I am useful to the community. This has given me the impetus of taking responsibility for getting involved in the various activities of the time-bank. As a result, I feel a lot better, stronger, healthier and happier than before the illness. Indeed, every time bank member has a skill that is useful to others. I love the fact that in time banking, all services are rendered at the members’ convenience; no-one is forced to provide a service if they feel unable to do so. In my view, the mission of Time-banking is for a community where every member is valued and respected, and every member has something to contribute to the community. This is positive for the well-being of the individuals and the community.

Hamida Bote-Kwame – Time Bank member