

**YOU HAVE TO LIVE  
IT TO LEAD IT**

**well  
together**

**If you are looking for something, if you can't get it, you can create a space for it to make it happen.**



When I lived in Nigeria, I learned to sew at the school of fashion there, so when I moved here, I started doing alterations for African people - our attire is different, so it helped me keep my skills up. That helped me to meet some other African people - and then I realised six of the women also had children with special needs.

My daughter has autism and is very hyper, she couldn't sit still, and it's 24 hours a day - she hardly slept, and so I hardly slept. She was always climbing, jumping, crying, it was so hard. We had tried going to some groups, like a morning coffee group, but other parents were talking about taking their children horse-riding and going on holiday - those were things we didn't do, so I had nothing to contribute to those conversations. After that, I rarely went out.

So when I met these African women, I would call them or they would call me and I would say, 'How are you doing?' and they said, 'I know if I call you, you always have the right words to say!' and that made me feel, 'Oh wow, I'm making an impact.' It's not easy if you are living with a child with special needs, your heart is beating all the time, and you don't have friends who can understand you or relate to what you are saying. But these people, we are connected. I said to them, 'How do you feel if we make time for ourselves to meet together on a regular basis, because I have six of you now and we are talking and phoning all the time,' and they all said, 'That is a good idea, yes we can do that.' I said, 'OK, how about my house?' and they were happy with that.

The first time, we had a barbeque in my garden and they came with their husbands and the rest of their children, and it was so amazing, I said, 'Wow, this is good' and that is how we started. My daughter loves dancing, and she danced for us. And that little thing became this, all of us as a group. That was what gave me confidence to want to continue. We parents with children with special needs don't usually go to parties, we know our children will be all over the place, and people will be looking at us, like that. One of the boys who was 8 years old was in my kitchen the whole time just playing with tap water. The parent said sorry but I said, 'Leave him, there is no danger, my house is safe for autistic children.' I see all children as mine, so it made it easy for me to let them be free.

So we started meeting in 2018, every last Friday of the month. Then we were looking for a hall or a place to meet. A friend said, 'You know, this thing you are doing, you are doing amazing, you know you could set up a proper way so you can do more? I can help you.' She told me about Makespace, and we came to see it, and it was lovely and safe too, and I said, 'Whoa, this is what we were looking for!' So that is how our group came about. We would sit and we would talk, if it's somebody's birthday we go out and celebrate with her, if somebody passed away, we put money together and contribute, if somebody has a baby, we buy all the baby stuff and go and see them, that is how we are doing it.

I thought to myself, 'Wow, if we can do this, anything is possible.' And I believe that, if you are looking for something, if you can't get it, you can create a space for it to make it happen. For example, I wanted to learn the UK sewing system, because it is different from Africa. Then someone came to me and said a local organisation was looking for a place to do their sewing, I was like, 'Yes! This is what I've been looking for, wow!' It was like a dream come true for me! The organisation helped me and opened doors for me, I admire them so much, they are always positive.

I feel I am making an impact. One of the women in my support group was depressed and said she wanted to end her life. I spoke to her, and she told me about her life, and I said, 'Come and spend time with me here, we can be sisters and work together, I'll teach you how to sew, at least you are not alone in the house', and she said, 'Really?' And she started coming. Sometimes we just need someone to listen to us. Then she was having leg problems, sometimes she would fall. That was when I thought – dancing! My daughter also loves dancing. So I found an instructor and we have been doing the Afro Dance for over a year. The woman has not fallen since, and she has not been to the doctor for a long time.

Last year I started a children's activities group every Saturday. They learn crafts, sewing, playing, dancing, singing, African games... And one of the ladies who comes to my sewing class plays the guitar, and so I asked if she would come and teach the children – and now the children are learning guitar! I have bought some children's guitars from Facebook marketplace, and you should have seen the children's faces! They are so happy.

In my brain I now think like a leader - I am a different person. I could have decided to stay in the house and do nothing; I had to change my mindset, I had to change everything. Being with people with special needs has changed me, I've learned a lot, you walk in a different world, and the key to be able to walk with everybody is love. That's all. A kind heart, love, patience, and you can overcome everything. I'm doing what I am doing because I was once there, lonely. Now that I'm out and I'm able, I want to give back. It's all about, what do you have to give?

Now our group is registered as a CIC. Our first session we had after that, we all cried! Outside there was no one meeting our needs, and somebody has to push forward for that. You have to know what you need. One person can't move much. It's togetherness that can, it's the unity in community. Before the group was doing things just for ourselves - now we are a CIC, we can do more for others.

There is a reason for all of the things I am doing - there are many people out there who are at home and lonely like I was. I don't want to do it by myself, I want to work together - but you have to live it to lead it.





*To help us understand the impact of Well Together, for organisers and attendees of funded activities, we have used storytelling as a component of our evaluation framework. Storytelling is an approach based on the Most Significant Change technique that has been used by the Old Fire Station since 2017, who now offer training and support to partners across Oxfordshire.*

*The Well Together stories are being gathered from organisers volunteering or working for a range of groups and organisations, and from the people who take part in the activities provided by groups. They are being collected in 2025 by the Well Together programme team who have been trained as story collectors.*

*By telling their stories, participants taking part in this approach, have the chance to reflect on what has changed for them through their involvement in providing activities and / or participating in them. How has it affected their life? Why has it been important to them?*

*The stories were recorded, transcribed and then edited down to two pages each - aiming to use the teller's own words, retaining their "voice" and reflecting the teller's insights into the impacts and the significance for them.*

*For more information about this methodology, and to read stories collected from a range of other projects visit the Old Fire Station's website dedicated to this approach:  
[Storytelling: Human-friendly evaluation](#)*

*With thanks to our story tellers*

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**Community First  
Oxfordshire**

