INCLUSION GLOUCESTERSHIRE

MHELO

MENTAL HEALTH EXPERIENCE LED OPPORTUNITIES











Autumn Newsletter 2026

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Seasonal Change

With less sunshine and the day light hours starting to reduce, we can feel the drop in serotonin in our bodies. The darker mornings and evenings, increasing melatonin making us feel sleepier and like we want to hibernate! Added to this the pressure of going back to work, school, Uni, the idea of a busier season just around the corner can trigger some worry and seasonal anxiety.

Some Simple Ways to Protect Your Wellbeing:

- Find Daylight: Get outside for a 15-to-20-minute walk during the morning light to help anchor your body clock. Also, the added oxygen creates more serotonin and calms your nervous system.
- Keep a Routine: Try to maintain consistent sleep and wake times rather than trying to drastically change your habits all at once.
- Stay Active: Do light physical activity, like stretching, yoga, or a short walk, to boost your energy and mood.
- Maintain Contact: Keep in touch with friends and family to avoid the isolation that shorter days can bring. A phone call or meeting up for a coffee.
- Create Cosy Rituals: Give yourself comforting things to look forward to, like reading, comfortable clothes, a warm drink in the evening. Make your home feel like a sanctuary to return to.

By Amy, MHELO Project Worker

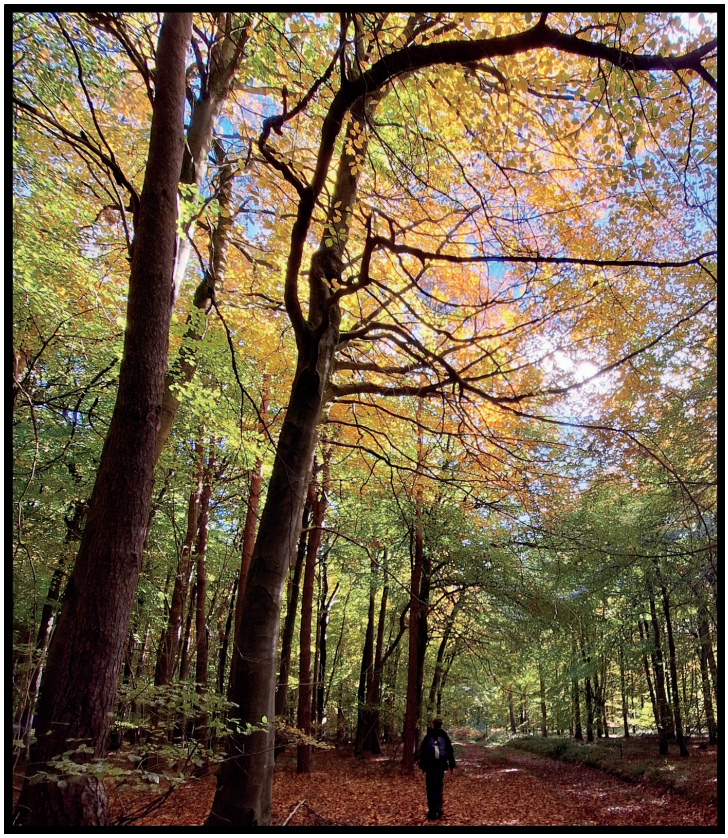


Photo credits: Amy

Introducing Ellie

Hey everyone, I'm Ellie.

I'm excited to be a recent addition to the team running the MHELO social media accounts. I've also newly joined the Community Listener team for Gloucester, and the Cotswolds, I can't wait to get started.

As a neurodivergent with lived experience of mental ill health I'm glad to find such a great and accommodating place to work, and amongst lovely people.

In my spare time I find a lot of comfort in art, and nature. I enjoy being creative and find myself usually with several projects on the go at once (Living up to the ADHD stereotype) - I especially love building with wood, and experimenting with different crafts and mediums.

Above everything else my life revolves around and is surrounded by animals, here are some photos I took.

By Ellie, MHELO Social Media Volunteer

Facebook: www.facebook.com/mhelogloucestershire

Instagram: @mhelo_glos











Finding Freedom Through Sailing

Denise is Chair of MHELO. Mental Health Experience-Led Opportunities.

Amy: How did you get involved with Sailability?

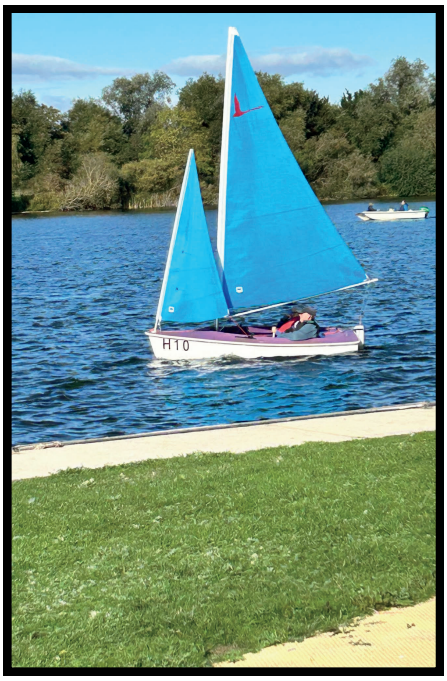
Denise: I tried it a few years ago. I wanted to go again but getting there is a big barrier. I got a friend to take me. Ive been 4 times this year. There's a Sailability website. It's run from Whitefriars at South Cerney.

I rang up and asked if I could come for a trial. Afterwards they asked whether I was interested in continuing. Once you're signed up, you get a regular slot each week throughout the season, from April to October. I specifically asked whether it was available for people with mental health difficulties because I knew I'd be talking to you. They said yes, people come for that reason as well. There are lots of people with physical and learning disabilities, but people definitely come for the mental health benefits too.

Amy: What was it like the first time you went?

Denise: I was excited about it. I got in the boat fine and had a wonderful time going out. The instructor got me pulling the two ropes that direct





the sails. He was directing me and I was quite happy. He asked, "Do you want to go gentle?" and I said, "No."

Amy: You wanted the full experience!

Denise: Yes!

Amy: Were there any challenges?

Denise: Getting there is my barrier, really, and having the energy to do it. The only problem I had was getting out of the boat,



which I hadn't thought about until it happened. I've got no strength in my arms because of ME. When it came to getting out, I realised I couldn't actually do anything. They said, "Don't panic, don't get stressed. We'll look after you." They got the hoist and lifted me out. Now that's part of my plan. Whenever I get out, I use a hoist. The other thing is that I go out with a different person every time. Feeling comfortable with a man can be quite

I difficult for me. I went out with one young woman and she was lovely. I realised how much more relaxed I felt with her. Then last week I went out with her dad and, because there was that connection, I relaxed a bit more.

Amy: Did needing the hoist put you off?

Denise: No. They treated it like something they deal with all the time. They just said, "Don't worry about it."

Amy: Has there been a moment when you realised sailing was really working for you?

Denise: Last time, the instructor was explaining how to read the wind. I didn't think I was really getting it. Then there came a point where I was steering and he said, "You're doing it." It had happened without me realising. I expected it to be something I'd have to consciously learn, but it became almost

automatic. About three quarters of the way through the session he said, "Do you realise you're doing it?" And I didn't.

Amy: So it was happening naturally?

Denise: Exactly. I thought, "I can do this."

Amy: Does being out on the water help you switch off from everyday worries?

Denise: Yes. I relax, and I find it very difficult to relax generally. I struggled through Covid, I lost my parents, my daughter moved away. Before that I had a system for looking after myself, it all collapsed. I'm seeing a counsellor and she's trying to help me find something for the winter when sailing stops. I do a lot of craft activities, but they can be very busy and noisy and it’s all indoors.

Amy: Have you found anything else that gives you that feeling?
Denise: Most things I've done have been indoor activities. I prefer being outside. It's the freedom.
I go to church and they do flag worship. I used to do it years ago and recently started again. The other day I was sitting in my chair waving the flag during worship. There are lots more people doing it now and they've bought new flags. I get that same feeling of freedom from it. It's calming.
Amy: How does sailing affect you physically and mentally?
Denise: It tires me out. That's why I haven't gone every week. I couldn't manage that physically. It costs £80 for the whole summer, which is really affordable, but physically I couldn't do it every week. Mentally, though, it's different. I feel like I've come alive. There are no restrictions. Even when I go for a walk, I use a mobility scooter because I can't walk far. Sailing feels different. You're doing the same thing as everyone else.



Amy: So, it helps you feel less limited by disability?
Denise: Yes.
Amy: Is there much of a social side to it?
Denise: The people there are lovely. There's a boathouse where you can buy drinks, and that's where people gather when they're not out on the water. A lot of the volunteers are the same. They work on Wednesdays and Thursdays, so you get to recognise people.
Amy: What would you say to someone who feels nervous about giving it a go?
Denise: If you find water relaxing, you'll probably find sailing relaxing too. Try not to focus on the barriers. Talk about them.
I remember saying to a friend that I felt more comfortable with one instructor than another. Nobody did anything wrong. Everyone is DBS checked. I just clicked more with some people than others. There are motorboats nearby, so if you become overwhelmed or uncomfortable, support arrives straight away. Everything is visible from shore and people are always

watching out for you. I never felt vulnerable. When you join, you complete an assessment form and can include anything you're worried about. My hoist requirement is part of my care plan. They also provide life jackets, so you don't have to buy one. Everyone wears one, even people standing near the water. Theres also a book that you can work through to reach certain goals.

Denise: At one point the boat was practically on its side, but they're very safe boats and don't capsize easily. They told me they've only had two capsizes in about ten years. I even brought spare clothes expecting to get wet and never needed them.

I was going quite fast with the boat leaning over and the instructor. asked whether I was worried. I said, "No, it's brilliant." I used to ride motorbikes, so I like that feeling.

Amy: It's wonderful that you've found something that still gives you that rush and that feeling of being alive. It's been lovely talking with you today.

By Amy, MHELO Project Worker





For more information about Denise's sailing group visit: **www.sailabilityatwhitefriars.org.uk**

Leek and Potato Soup Recipe



Ingredients

1 tbsp vegetable oil
1 onion, sliced
200g potatoes, peeled and chopped
2 medium leeks, sliced
2 pints of vegetable stock (or chicken)
Salt & pepper
Topping of your choice. Croutons, bacon bits, fried onions etc.

Method

1.Heat the oil in a large pan and add the onions, potatoes and leeks. Cook for 8 minutes over a medium heat until they start to soften. Just check they aren't burning on the bottom!
2.Add the vegetable stock and bring to the boil. Season with salt and pepper. Simmer for 10 minutes until the vegetables are tender.
3.Whizz with a hand blender until smooth. Reheat if needed and add toppings.

Tried and tested by Amy, MHELO Project Worker

The secret making this soup really tasty is not to add too many potatoes and to give the ingredients lots of time to soften in the first step. I've added croutons and bacon too!

Yorkshire Parkin Recipe



Ingredients

- 225g/8oz self raising flour
- 110g/4oz caster sugar
- 1 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 55g/2oz butter
- 110g/4oz golden syrup
- 1 egg
- 200ml/7fl oz milk

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 150C/130C Fan/Gas 2. Line a 22cm/8in square tin with baking paper.
2. Sieve the flour, sugar, ginger and bicarbonate of soda into a large bowl.
3. In a small pan gently heat the butter and syrup until melted. Set aside to cool slightly.
4. Gradually pour the butter and syrup into the flour and stir until completely incorporated. The mixture will be thick.
5. In a small bowl, beat the egg into the milk. Stir this mixture into the batter until smooth. Pour into the lined tin.
6. Bake for about an hour or until a skewer inserted into the centre of the cake comes out clean.

Tried and tested by Joanna, MHELO Team Coordinator

News and Engagement

MHELO attended the AccessAble launch at Gloucestershire Hospital on the 19th October. It means there are accessible guides online so people can view the hospital and specific areas within the hospital, including toilet facilities before their visit and to help with planning a visit. Scan the QR code below to visit the AccessAble website.

Denise represented MHELO at the Mental Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board in October. To find out more, sign up to our membership for our quarterly email by scanning the QR code below.

We recently attended a Mental Capacity Conference, where we heard from professionals and people with lived experience about mental capacity, care, and inclusion.

One particularly inspiring moment, highlighted by Denise, was a video of a sailor who was able to steer and control a boat using only their tongue, showing how determination, adaptive technology, and inclusive opportunities can help people achieve remarkable things.

At the lunchtime marketplace, the MHELO team enjoyed chatting to attendees about our work and sharing our Self-Care Toolkits. It was a thought-provoking and positive day with plenty of learning to take away.



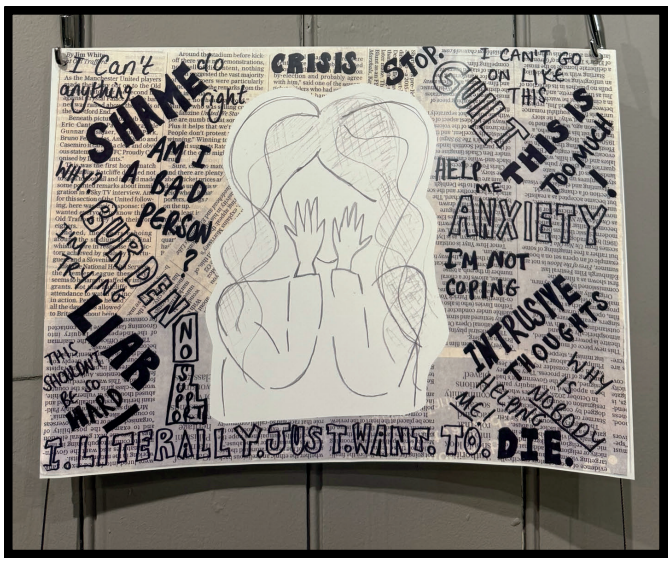
News and Engagement

Our Team Coordinator, Joanna, recently took part in the Hidden Disabilities, Visible Ableism exhibition with Inclusion Gloucestershire's Research Team.

As part of the project, each participant created a zine, sharing their experiences of hidden disabilities and the impact of ableism. These were brought together in an exhibition to raise awareness and spark conversation about the barriers many disabled people face.

'This powerful exhibition shares the lived experiences of people with non-visible disabilities through a collection of zines, highlighting the discrimination, misunderstanding, and barriers they face in everyday life, bringing people's stories to life. This has come as a result of our most recent piece of research looking into how ableism impacts the lives of people with non visible disabilities' - LeDeR







News and Engagement

We've updated our Self-Care Toolkit and have just received a fresh batch hot off the press!

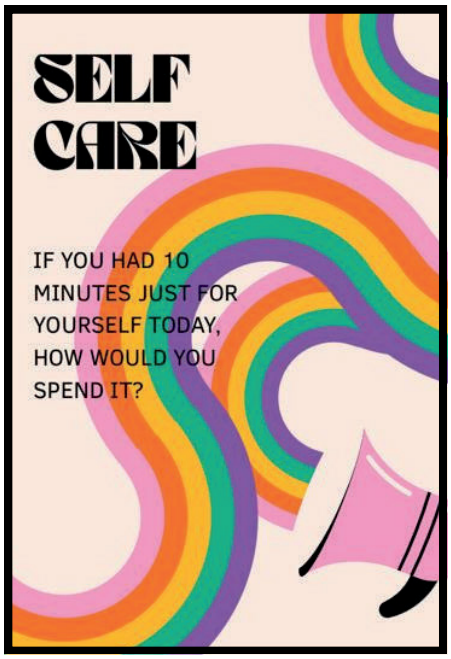
If your organisation would like to receive copies, we'd be delighted to hear from you. Contact us at mhelo@inclusion-glos.org.



Scan QR Code to read more, sign up for our next newsletter, or download a free copy of the toolkit

If you had just 10 minutes to yourself today, how would you spend it?

This was the question we asked our friends at Gloucester Pride in September, and their thoughtful responses highlighted the many simple ways we can take a moment to pause and recharge.



Here are some of the answers we received:

- Enjoy some time in the garden listening to the birds.
- Curl up with a good book in a comfortable chair.
- Play a game such as Wordle.
- Sit outside with a cup of tea and take in the nature around me.

Sometimes, just 10 minutes can make a real difference to our wellbeing.