

Keeping active boosts recovery - Ian & Irene, March 2010

Being physically active post surgery is tough, but a retired Spreydon couple say it's the best road to recovery. Between them, Ian and Irene Oxley have survived breast cancer, bypass surgery and back surgery. Irene, 69, said the Canterbury District Health Board's cardiac rehabilitation physical activity programme and Sport Canterbury's Green Prescription were what enabled them to regain their lives.

"I hear about other people who have open heart surgery and they never quite come back on again. They recover but don't get any further. I can only assume that physical activity is the difference." Irene was physically active before and after her battle with breast cancer in 2002, but bypass surgery in 2005 was tough to recover from. Ian, 70, supported her through the cardiac recovery programme and Green Prescription.

The couple walked in the City to Surf last year, but their triumph was short-lived when it became apparent that Ian needed back surgery. Then it was Irene's turn to support Ian's post-surgery recovery through the Green Prescription physical activity programme. Ian said he had always held physically active jobs, but enjoyed the focused exercise.

"I had plenty of exercise with gardens and that, but it (Green Prescription) helped in terms of direction and it was also something that Irene and I could do together."

The couple enjoyed the exercise and social aspect so much that they felt at a loss when their time at Green Prescription was over. They tried gyms and other programmes, but Irene said they never felt at home.

"The thing that we found missing was the social component. Then I was driving home from Hagley one day and I said, "Why don't we start something here at the church?""

Last year, Ian took up the challenge, completed the Netfit community coach course sponsored by Active Canterbury, and the couple started their own circuit class on Thursdays at Spreydon Baptist Church.

Ian said he enjoyed coaching. "It's quite stretching, but it is worthwhile." Sport Canterbury Green Prescription area manager Linda Wensley said the Oxleys' transformation from post-operative recovery to community coaches was remarkable. "To me it's an amazing journey. While organisations in the health industry have worked well together to support them, it is the unwavering positive approach of Ian and Irene to manage their own health and then stand up and make a difference in the community that is truly inspiring.

Couple's volunteering to be celebrated - Ian & Irene, September 2014

Irene and Ian Oxley will be acknowledged this week for their work keeping Spreydon active. For the past five years, the couple have hosted exercise sessions at the South West Baptist Church called Keep Active! Participants pay only \$3 per session—which includes the session plus a cuppa in the café. About 30 to 40 people attend each of the three sessions held each week. When asked how they promoted the sessions to inspire such attendance, Mrs Oxley chuckled. 'We did have a marketing plan,' she said. 'But we never needed to use it.'

Instead word of mouth quickly took over and news of the couple's Keep Active! sessions spread throughout Spreydon - and beyond. Participants represent all levels of ability and ages, from 40 to 80 years old. The sessions consist of an aerobic warm-up, circuit activities such as swiss balls, exercycles, mats, dynabands, balances, weights and mini-tramps, with the participants rotating amongst the 30 activities every two minutes. This is followed by a stretching cool-down and then a cuppa together.

'A lot of them say they wouldn't exercise on their own,' Mrs Oxley said. Participants cite improving their balance, strength and confidence as key motivators for attending Keep Active!

Irene and Ian came up with the idea for keeping active after attending Sport Canterbury's Green Prescription programme called Be Active.

Sport Canterbury's Green Prescription team, Partnership Health, Canterbury PHO and the Canterbury District Health Board combine resources to deliver Be Active programmes to the wider community - for people wanting to increase their level of activity and have fun along the way.

Mrs Oxley said she enjoyed many things about Sport Canterbury's Be Active course, including 'the fact you did a wide range of activities and having a cup of tea afterward.'

A community celebration of the couple's work will be held on Thursday from 2pm at the South West Baptist Church.

