

Years ago the Church was the sanctum of everyone really, cause from that I mean we had a Cycle Club, we had a Cricket Club, Drama Society, everything... Years ago everything came from the church cause you didn't have leisure centres you didn't have all the sports facilities, so everything, the Youth Club, the Guides, the Scouts, the Brownies, everything was attached to the church.

When I was 53 a whole new world opened up in front of me, because we launched the project "Healthy Wealthy & Wise" in 1990. It was after a very traumatic period in my life where I'd been very seriously ill and not expected to survive. In 1996 I was awarded the MBE for my services to the community of Ely and was invited to London to receive my medal from the Queen. It doesn't mean much really, today it's in a box. It means I am a member of the British Empire that's what it is and it means once a year I wear it on Remembrance Sunday. It doesn't mean a lot but I do use it after my name, particularly with my job because if you are trying to make an impact, I think it helps a little. They might look at that and say "Oh yes, she says she is who she is", you what I mean?

Since we started the project "Healthy Wealthy & Wise" my horizons have definitely expanded, beyond all thoughts! My project, which I'm still working on, after 24 years, is working with older people and keeping them motivated, activated, and giving them a sense of worth and a feeling of "I have still something to give to my community", cause that's the whole ethos of the project, because a lot of people who lose their partners become very withdrawn, and lots of them don't go out, they stay in, because they're grieving, all sorts of reasons. So the project was to try and draw these people out of their homes, to bring them to us, find out what their interests were and form all these little groups and clubs and classes, so that it could fulfil their needs and meet each other. In 24 years it's been quite incredible. The motto that I've got on the passports that we produce is "Adding life to our years".

"Healthy Wealthy & Wise" started also to work with a theatre company. They did the same with the schoolchildren. They wrote the script, and of course us older people were part of it. But the point I wanted to make was, when we first got together, children and us, you can imagine, teenagers, you know what it's like, and we were sat in one group and they were sat in another group, and slowly, week by week, we got closer. And it ended up in the end, we were all on Christian name terms, and they'd say "Oh come on girls, come on Sheilagh, here's a seat", and in the end we were part of the gang, and it was wonderful.