

# FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Wisbech walk leader is helping others after eight stone weight loss**

Less than four years ago, Dee Ucuncu had such a weight problem she struggled to walk.

Now she is completing half marathons and running a weekly wellness walk in Wisbech that is changing other lives too.

People who join her for the Wisbech Wellness Walk talk about how it has reduced their social isolation and allowed them to access gentle regular exercise.

Mum-of-two Dee (41) said: “The more people that come to me and say ‘because of you I’ve made friends’, ‘I’m not isolated any more’ or ‘I look forward to this’ the more proud I feel.

“Before, I wasn’t really living, I couldn’t look at myself in a mirror and felt dead inside. I couldn’t run around the park with my children. I couldn’t take them anywhere.

“I can’t believe I run now. I feel proud just to be able to walk properly and physically able to do a lot more things.

“I was using food to suppress how unhappy I was. It was like a drug. Now, I’ve learned that’s not how to deal with things.”

In May 2019, at 5ft tall, Dee was 17 stone. The weight put such a strain on her body and self-image that she was virtually housebound.

Dee came from a family of people with weight issues and had been overweight herself since childhood. In her teens she had periods where she got her weight down but never in a healthy, measured way.

Then, she took a trip back to her native Cyprus to visit her father’s grave. On the way home a neighbouring passenger was incredibly unkind and complained to the cabin crew she was encroaching on his space until they moved him.

The incident left Dee in tears for the entire journey.

She said: “Being in that situation was heartbreaking.”

When Dee got home to Wisbech she joined a weight loss programme, but her hopes were low.

She said: “I thought I’d never stick to it and gave myself two weeks.

“I thought it meant only eating salad, but it wasn’t. I just had to make some healthier choices.

“In six weeks, I’d lost a stone then I added a little bit of walking. For me, even walking 100 metres was like running a marathon. I bought a fitness watch and to begin with it showed I was only managing about 1,000 steps a day.”

A common fitness goal to maintain good health is 10,000 steps a day. It took Dee about five months to achieve that five-days-a-week.

And she stuck with her new eating plan too, losing six stone in six months. To lose the final two stone to reach her target weight of nine stone, Dee switched to a new weight loss programme and discovered portion control was key.

In 2021, Dee was inspired to try running by someone she met. Dee completed the [NHS Couch to 5K](#) programme, joined Fenland Running Club and in March last year completed her first half marathon.

### **Becoming a volunteer walk leader**

Then last summer Dee saw that Fenland District Council’s [Active Fenland](#) was looking for a volunteer leader to run the [Ramblers Wisbech Wellbeing Walk](#).

She jumped at the opportunity.

She said: “I’ve lived in Wisbech ten years but when I started walking I didn’t know anybody. I did it on my own because I had no one to go with.

“I would have loved a group like that to go to. I’m shy but thought ‘I’m going to do this’ and I was determined to create a route with lots of opportunities to stop along the way so that any fitness level could join.”

The free no-commitment weekly walk, which is open to all and begins at the bandstand in Wisbech Park at 10am every Friday, launched last summer. Three people turned up. Now it regularly attracts up to 20.

Dee said she gets as much out of leading the walk as the people who join get out of coming.

### **“I love these walks”**

Elaine Mills, 64, of Wisbech, was at the first Wisbech Wellness Walk and still attends regularly.

She said: “I came on my own and met a lady that day who isn’t well enough to come herself anymore but I still see regularly.

“I come along, get some fresh air and talk to people I wouldn’t have otherwise met. There have even been days when it was pouring down when we’ve still done it and afterwards you think ‘I’m so glad I did’.”

For Jenny Wyant, 60, of Leverington, the walk has kickstarted a new social life.

She said: “I moved here a year ago last December and didn’t really know anyone.

“I’m not very confident doing things on my own and was really nervous. I didn’t even know where Wisbech Park was. I rang Dee and she said everyone was friendly and as soon as I got here they were lovely.”

Jenny has made friends who she now goes line dancing with.

Hazel Haizelden, 71, of Outwell, is having a similar experience having moved to Fenland in May last year from Spain to leave behind the extreme summer and winter temperatures.

She said: “In Spain the hills hurt my knees but I want to get more healthy. I love these walks. I chat to people on the way round and have started walking every day.”

· [Wisbech Wellbeing Walk](#) is open to all and sets off weekly at 10am Fridays from the bandstand in Wisbech Park, Lynn Road.

· [March Riverside Wellbeing Walk](#) launched on Tuesday, January 24, it starts at 1.30pm from outside March Library, in City Road.

· Active Fenland is looking for volunteer walk leaders to lead walks in their local communities. For details email [activefenlandbookings@fenland.gov.uk](mailto:activefenlandbookings@fenland.gov.uk), call 07874 893316 or 07592 774656 or see: [Ramblers Wellbeing Walks](#) at: <https://bit.ly/3HhO87p>

## **ENDS**

### **Photos:**

Before: Dee Ucuncu before her eight stone weight loss.

After: Wisbech Wellbeing Walk leader Dee in her running gear following her eight stone weight loss.

Group photo: Walk leader Dee (in fluorescent vest) about to set off on a recent Wisbech Wellbeing Walk with her group