

Benefits of Membership:

A Personal Journey

Ok, so first off, you may be wondering about Membership of NLTSG and asking, "what's in for me?" I know I certainly did, but perhaps a better question is, "well, what has NLTSG ever done for me?" Now, obviously that's not a question that can be answered by anyone but yourself. So let me tell you my story. Please bear with me for my not-so-little self-indulgence.

I've been positive for 23 years now, diagnosed way back in the dark days in 1993 (a year after NLTSG was formed) when a diagnosis of HIV was certainly something to be feared, if not a little bit of a death sentence hanging over your head. Being an HIV specialist nurse, no one had to tell me that my prognosis was grim. I became very ill, very quickly. I gave up my career, cashed in my pension, and, well, waited to die.

And waited. But '96 came around and with it came new drugs and new promises. Like many people at the time, we mourned the loss of partners, family and friends, and whilst we were better physically, society, even friends and sadly family sometimes, still feared us, often treating us as lepers. But we did the best we could, we had survived.

But everything however, has a cost. For me the cost came with nasty side effects, cardiac problems, mobility issues, blah blah, I am sure you all

have your own stories. Over the past few years, I've struggled but got on with it. Then my world came crashing down just over two years ago. I'd already had my first heart attack (aged 44, ironically on the cross trainer at the gym), I lost my job, which I loved, and the physical side effects exploded. I broke down, simply put.

That was when I went on my first NLTSG weekend. I was mentally in the darkest place, and to be honest, the first weekend scared me. I was surrounded by all kinds of people, but over the weekend, the thing that hit me most was, "damaged" as we may have been (apologies if that offends anyone, but that was my initial scared perception), we had many things in common. I don't mean just HIV, but also immense strength, humour, kindness and, way above EVERYTHING else, we understood each other. It didn't matter if we were straight or gay, black or white, or whatever part of the world we came from, I didn't have to explain myself or apologise for symptoms or hide that yeah, sometimes I feel like crap, mentally and physically. My co-weekenders just "got it". For the first time in a long time, I could be "me", and I haven't looked back. Yes, I've had my second heart attack, I've got arthritis in my hip and shoulder, my meds give me the runs, but I can laugh about it with my friends in NLTSG, or even cry about it, and people have got my back.

So, let me ask you again. What has NLTSG ever done for you? Nothing? Then membership isn't for you. But

has it actually helped? Have you made friends? Can you get on with the day to day difficulties with HIV just a little better because of NLTSG? Yes? There's your answer, what's in it for you? So much! I also know from first-hand experience at the weekends just how much other people benefit from being part of this wonderful organisation.

Signing up as a Member means that you have a voice in how we deliver our service, voting in elections, priority booking for the September weekend AGM and sharing your ideas and time to shape what we do and how we do it. Not just to keep us running, but looking to the future and getting stronger with us. If you want to help us do what we do best, at the very least making it possible to live with a quality of life with HIV for yourself and others, then sign up or renew your membership NOW. We simple can't do it on our own. To stay as great as we are, we need your support, and being a Member of NLTSG means you can give something back, and like they say, the more you give, the more you get. To renew your membership, reply to the membership email you have been sent, or to sign up as a Member, get in touch with Gary at gary@nltsg.org.uk or speak to one of the Trustees at the weekends or the social events. If you're not sure how you can contribute a Member, or if you have any questions, then for a personal consultation on how you can help, please do get in touch with Danny, the chair of Trustees, at danny.west@nltsg.org.uk

Many thanks, from Nick Maxwell.



Kew Gardens 15th October

In October, we had another NLTSG outing to Kew Gardens, made possible by the wonderful Community Access Program at Kew. Once again we opened the day to Central YMCA's "Positive Health" program (see our "charity profile" section) and were joined by 6 YMCA members. Joint "outings" like this work well to increase our own profile and that of the partner organisation, but also looks great for funders.

For nature lovers or for those who just like to spend quiet, quality time with friends, Kew has so much to offer. For people with mobility issues, they have loanable wheelchairs and even scooters, free of charge. The fact that it is all pretty flat is great, and they even have their "Kew Explorer Land Train" which lets you see most of the Gardens whilst sitting on the "train" with a sandwich and a flask of tea.

The weather on the day itself was pretty good, especially for mid-October. Happy to say that the sun even came out for most of the afternoon, though it did absolutely chuck it down on the way home. Gotta love the British weather.

Once inside the Gardens, we went to see the new installation of "The Hive" which is pretty amazing. Then we had lunch in the very lovely White Peaks restaurant. Good food but a tad expensive although Kew are happy for people bringing in their own packed lunches.

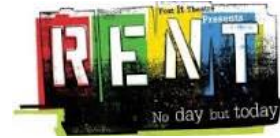
After lunch, a few brave souls ventured on to the "Tree Tops Walk" though one member expressed disappointment that it didn't go higher than the tops of the trees. Maybe we could book a helicopter next time? Most of us however were happy that it only went to the tree tops. Others went off exploring the other attractions Kew has to offer. Later in the afternoon, we had a coffee in the outdoor Pavilion restaurant, which was another great opportunity just to chat and make new friends, which is pretty much the idea of outing.

If you like the idea of the meet ups, then please do have a look around as to what is available in your own areas that local NLTSG members can attend. For many of us, a big problem is feeling cut off from other people, especially people who understand you and with whom you can be yourself. So, if you have any ideas for an outing or meet up, even something as simple as lunch, then please do get in touch with me at nick.maxwell@nltsg.org.uk and I will share it with other NLTSGers in your local area.

Funding Update

We have recently been lucky enough to be awarded another piece of funding from Awards for All from the Big Lottery. Thanks to Andy and Gary and co for their hard work in putting the bid together. However, this only sees us safe until September 2017.

We are also currently working on an application to the "Making a Difference" fund. Planned applications will also be going off to Awards for All again, and we are discussing applications to Comic Relief and The Elton John AIDS Foundation, from whom we have been funded before.



We have also been very kindly offered to collect on several of the nights during the upcoming production of the West End show "Rent" which will run in the St James' Theatre in London from 8th December to 28th January. At time of writing, final details for collecting at the theatre haven't yet been finalised, but we will be asking all London members (and friends) to donate a night or two to collect money before and after the performances. I don't know as yet if this means the possibility of seeing the show itself, and if it does it would probably necessitate having to stand to watch the show as it's selling out fast.

Always always we want you to be involved, so if you have any fundraising ideas, let us know. We are also taking delivery of a batch of new collecting tins, so maybe you are a regular down your local pub or community centre or even at your clinic and you think you could ask them to host a collecting tin for us, then again, let us know.



Charity Profile: Central YMCA London's "Positive Health Programme:"

Are you new to exercise or trying to get back into fitness? Our 12 week referral programme will give you the skills and confidence you need to make exercise a part of your daily life with supported gym programmes, classes, swimming and much more.

For more details please contact the Positive Health team or ask your clinic for a referral:

Becky – 0207 343 1720 / becky.ogorman@ymca.co.uk or

Victoria – 0207 343 1721 / victoria.brown@ymca.co.uk

<http://www.ymcaclub.co.uk/about-us/charitable-projects>