

CASE STUDY: WHY I VOLUNTEER TO HOST A CHATTER & NATTER TABLE

By Anita, who hosts a table at The Pond Barn, Bracklesham Bay, every Tuesday from 12:15pm- 1:15pm.

I came across the Chatty Café Scheme in December 2021, after seeing a clip of it on ITV's Good Morning Britain programme. The organisation's aims resonated with me because at the time I was working as a carer and for years I'd been saying the real problem to poor health was loneliness. I saw how a simple chat and a few general questions could massively lift someone from seeming completely withdrawn to becoming more upbeat.

For that reason, I decided to set up and host a Chatter & Natter table in a venue local to me, called The Pond Barn, which is a café/restaurant in the day and more of a pub during the evenings. They jumped at the idea and said they had wanted to do something similar but couldn't work out how to put the idea into action, so they were delighted when I approached them with this. I started hosting the Chatter & Natter table in February 2022 and at the time of writing (November 2023), I am still hosting the table every week.

Initially numbers were low, but as word of mouth spread, and after a few poster and leaflet drops, the numbers grew quite rapidly. I'm an avid dog walker and if I chat to people in the park, I tell them about the Chatter & Natter table and quite often see them the following week. If I see someone sitting alone in the venue, I invite them to join us.

The comments I get from those attending the group really makes me feel appreciated and some say without this group they don't see anyone from one week to the next. It makes such a difference to people's mental health, and it really brings joy to me to see the friendships being formed.

"Most weeks we have about 20 regulars, and sometimes up to 25-30 people attend. The great thing is the venue as they have entertainment at weekends and last Sunday night there was a Neil Diamond tribute act. About 10 of us went and I got them all up except 1 on the dance floor. One lady hadn't been out in the evenings since 2019 and thoroughly enjoyed herself. Another man lost his wife about 6 months ago and only joined my Chatter & Natter table 3 weeks ago - he's 83 years old and got on the dance floor too."

In terms of the people that attend, last week we had 30 at our table and the gender/age split is shown in the table below:

Gender	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-99
Male		3		2	1
Female	5	6	8	5	

We also do lots of things outside the group together in smaller subgroups depending on people's interests. Such as going out for meals, local disco, church activities and visiting other coffee shops.

It really feels like a big family, and I get so much personal satisfaction that I helped bring these people together. I absolutely love my volunteering and will keep it going for as long as it's needed. It makes me laugh that I initially planned to do it for 12 weeks but here I am, nearly 2 years later and still loving it.

On the right-hand is a photo of me with my lovely group.



Anita with her Chatter & Natter group