

CASE STUDY FROM COLIN, WHO ATTENDS ONLINE CHATTY CAFES; Reasons why I enjoy the online Chatty Cafe sessions and its benefits to me.



Impact on Social Anxiety:

- The relaxed and informal nature of the online groups helps me stay relaxed. In comparison to some online support groups, I occasionally attend where it can get a bit heavy, and I can clam up. The gentle way in which the host includes people in the conversation and takes an interest in whatever news they have, however small or large, helps me manage my social anxiety.
- For example, I recently took a break from the group while experiencing a bit of low mood and when I returned, I felt genuinely welcomed back and it helped me settle back in. Also, the host remembers my interests in American football, Wimbledon, and the Olympics and can include those topics as part of the group chat when those events are on TV. In general, my contributions are welcomed and encouraged but I am also left free to mainly listen on my quieter days.

Convenience and Accessibility:

- It is extremely convenient for me to access the chats online from the comfort of my home without the need for planning or travel time. It has a “drop-in” feel and I can decide to attend at the last minute depending on how I am feeling. Despite my occasional breaks, the accessibility of online has helped me stay consistent in attending the group for several years now.
- It is valuable to me that the sessions are cost-free without expenses for travel or food and drink since I am on disability benefits, and I need to keep within a budget. This cost-free aspect makes the Zooms more inclusive and reassures me that even if my benefits were reduced, I would still be able to attend.

Learning and Engagement:

- Both the host and the regulars in the group are an interesting set of people and I often learn new facts or tips during the sessions. For example, one member is a big fan of travelling within the UK and I enjoy learning about all the different places he visits. Another member has an interest in psychology and philosophy and shares interesting perspectives about life issues and changes. Other times I have learned practical tips about navigating the health service. I especially enjoy the way the conversation flits from topic to topic and connections are made between seemingly unconnected things.
- These informal learning opportunities add value to the sessions and, in a fun way, mean that the old saying "every day a school day" is true."

Overall Effectiveness in Combating Loneliness:

- Together the host and members have been successful in creating a sense of community and it doesn't feel lacking even though it's on screens. I feel a genuine sense of connection with the other participants.
- I have lived alone since 2015 and my social anxiety has made it hard to build a support network in the place where I live. By participating in online chats, I feel connected to the outside world and engaged in a community. If I am having trouble sleeping and have no one to talk to my loneliness might be a 7 or 8 out of 10. On the days when I have a Chatty Cafe Zoom, it's more like a 3 or 4 and my mood gets a lift for a while after the Zoom has ended. It feels like working in an office and getting to enjoy conversation with my colleagues over a lunch break giving me a lift when I return.