



The Chatty Café Scheme

Impact Report 2023 – 2024

During the past year, we have continued to be incredibly busy and have enjoyed seeing our services grow. In the past year, some of the key achievements have included:

- Recruited and trained 211 chatty telephone volunteers to provide weekly phone calls for 320 beneficiaries experiencing loneliness.
- Actioned 320 referrals received from social prescribing teams in Kent and Greater Manchester, where they identified beneficiaries experiencing loneliness and referred them to our service for telephone befriending support.
- Recruited and trained 232 chatty table volunteers to host Chatter & Natter tables in hospitality venues across England.
- 232 volunteer-hosted Chatter & Natter tables resulted in around 11,136 people connecting with others and meeting new people at volunteer-hosted Chatter & Natter tables in hospitality venues across England.
- Provided ongoing support for 589 hospitality venues that offer a Chatter & Natter table in their venue and worked with them to try and recruit local people to volunteer to host their Chatter & Natter tables.
- Held online Chatty Cafes via Zoom, attended by 488 beneficiaries providing a space for people to meet up and chat in a group environment.
- Delivered training sessions for venues offering Chatter & Natter tables, including Q&A's with venue managers, to provide peer-to-peer support.
- Delivered a series of training sessions for volunteers covering topics such as 'ideas for conversation starters' and 'maintaining positive boundaries.'
- Grew our staff team by employing a Volunteer Coordinator working 4 days per week and a Social Media Manager working 15 hours per week.
- Trained a successful Chatty Café volunteer to become a Chatty Café Board member.
- Improved the map on our website that shows where Chatter & Natter tables are located, to make it more accessible and easier to read.

How you've involved people from your community in the work you do

In mid-2023 we carried out a skills audit with our Board of Directors and identified that it could be beneficial to recruit a Chatty Café service user or volunteer to join the committee to bring practical or lived experience of loneliness to the committee. In April 2024 we recruited and trained a Chatty Café volunteer (Jon Haslam), to become a Board Member. Jon started volunteering at The Chatty Café Scheme around 2 years ago, he started as a telephone befriender and then hosted a Chatter & Natter table in his local café. His Chatter & Natter table attracted around 40 attendees every week, so it was a huge success in terms of attendance and helping to facilitate connections and bring people together. We were delighted that Jon agreed to join the Board. He is a real asset and brings practical volunteering experience that is helping shape our volunteer policies and training.

Jon has shared his learning by helping to run our volunteer training sessions for new and experienced volunteers. Jon has helped us to build and implement a volunteer training programme where we are

now offering new volunteers training every two months. The training includes a detailed explanation of promoting Chatter & Natter tables locally and ideas and tips for raising awareness. Jon also runs training for experienced volunteers every quarter. They follow a 'Q&A' type format and are helpful for volunteers to speak to other volunteers hosting tables around the country and to discuss topics in detail.

A recording of one of the training sessions can be accessed here: [Training session with volunteers](#).

The Passcode to access the recording: EW=6BEF.

Hearing a volunteer speak about their experience about 29 minutes into the recording highlights the positive impact hosting can have on volunteers.

Another example of involving people from our community is when we asked service users if anyone had any experience in safeguarding during the time that our safeguarding policy was due for an annual review. A gentleman called Mark Thompson came forward who regularly attends online Chatty Cafes. Mark is a retired Head of Social Work for a Local Authority and has extensive experience in Safeguarding matters. Mark kindly helped improve our Safeguarding policy by helping to clarify some areas, so it is now clearer and easier to understand for service users and other stakeholders.

When we asked stakeholders for feedback on our marketing materials, we were advised that the 'Chatter & Natter' table signs were too 'busy' and might look better if the text was simplified. Taking this feedback on board, we revised the table signs and proposed three different versions for our community to vote on. We have taken the sign that received the most votes and have implemented the re-design for the Chatter & Natter table signs. The images below include the old and new versions.

Old Version



New Version



In early 2024 we gathered feedback from service users of Chatter & Natter tables and randomly selected a sample of 50 venues that have volunteers hosting Chatter & Natter tables from across the country. The volunteers were asked to hand out feedback cards for beneficiaries to complete. We asked a series of questions to gauge to what extent the tables are helping to reduce loneliness, making people feel happier, better connected, and any ideas for improvements. The feedback has been used to drive improvements including supporting volunteers to find out about other social events happening in their local areas, so they can share ideas at the Chatter & Natter tables. This is because a high number of beneficiaries reported that it was 'good to discuss other groups and activities in the community.' When asked if attending the Chatter & Natter table had inspired beneficiaries to join any other social groups, feedback showed beneficiaries went on to join other local activities such as church choirs and walking groups. A beneficiary noted they 'now volunteer at the charity shop next door at the recommendation of someone they met at the table.' Importantly, a common theme was that beneficiaries felt part of a community since attending Chatter & Natter sessions. Other reasons for attending the tables included 'I am caring for an elderly aunt and having a chat and a coffee gives me a much-needed break.'

In late 2023, we facilitated Ripple Effect Mapping workshops where volunteers, venue staff, and beneficiaries were asked a series of open-ended questions in a group setting. The aim is to unearth any hidden stories and positive 'ripples' that have occurred since participating in a Chatter & Natter table. The exercise generated a huge amount of stories, [as shown here](#), and ideas for best practice learning. One of the ideas was for the Chatty Café Scheme to better support volunteers to access small pots of local funding to help pay for hot drinks at the tables. We have since developed guidance notes for volunteers to try and access funding for this purpose.

We have supported venue owners in sharing their experience of hosting a Chatter & Natter table to encourage best-practice learning and to motivate more venues to join the scheme. A recording of one of these sessions [can be found here](#). Passcode to access the recording is: naBD=4=d

The differences you're making (both big and small)

The tables below include the number of people we have supported (actuals) against the targets we set out in our project plan, across the whole project.

Year 1: August 2021 - July 2022	Targets	Actuals
Telephone Volunteers	141	186
Table Volunteers	129	114
Virtual Chatty Cafes	195	849
No. of Referrals for calls	259	315
New Venues & Repeats	600	409
Estimated connections at Chatter & Natter tables	2,585	4,104
Year 2: August 2022 - July 2023	Targets	Actuals
Telephone Volunteers	141	127
Table Volunteers	141	139
Virtual Chatty Cafes	195	955
No. of Referrals for calls	282	408
New Venues & Repeats	600	413
Estimated connections at Chatter & Natter tables	2,585	6,672
Year 3: August 2023 - July 2024	Targets	Actuals
Telephone Volunteers	141	211
Table Volunteers	288	232
Virtual Chatty Cafes	195	488
No. of Referrals for calls	288	320
New Venues & Repeats	600	589
Estimated connections at Chatter & Natter tables	4,230	11,136

The tables above show we have exceeded targets in every area except new venue signups. This has been more challenging than we expected, however, venue sign-up numbers have increased in the past year following improvements to our social media pages and comms work to raise awareness of our work.

Between 2021 and 2023, Coventry University undertook a detailed research study to measure the impact of our services. Their findings showed that 96% said being involved in the Chatty Café Scheme made them feel less lonely and 95% said being involved in the Chatty Café Scheme made them feel less isolated.

The research included surveying and interviewing beneficiaries engaging with our services. Findings showed that: 89% felt it helped them meet people they liked to chat to, 88% said it made them feel happier, 89% felt it brightened their day, 68% felt it helped them meet people with similar experiences, 78% said it helped them make new friends, 77% said it made them feel more confident in talking to others and 72% said it made them feel more confident to join other groups in the future.

76% of survey respondents said that being involved in the Chatty Cafe Scheme improved their social, physical and mental health, and therefore were less likely to go to the doctors or access mental health services. This shows that our services help alleviate pressures on the NHS. When asked about the impact of interacting with the Chatty Cafe Scheme on their mental health, 97% of respondents felt it had a positive impact: “It might only be an hour or so in the week. But it’s a delight. A good cup of coffee and a chat about anything and everything. It takes you away from everything, just for a little bit.”

Reflecting on their experiences with the Chatty Café Scheme many volunteers recognised the impact it had on their own lives as well as recognising the potential to support others: 70% felt it helped them meet people they like to chat to, 18% felt it helped them meet people with similar experiences, 88% felt it brightened their day, 92% felt it made them happier, 54% felt it made them more confident, 88% of volunteers said they were likely to very likely to continue as a Chatty Cafe Scheme volunteer and 97% of volunteers said they would be likely or very likely to recommend the Chatty Cafe Scheme services.

When asked why they volunteer for the scheme, Alan said: “It’s about paying it back. People need other people. And it was being part of the Chatty Café Scheme that it can be really the simple thing of just talking to people about everyday things that can help. Now I get to talk to people, which hopefully helps them, but also helps me too.”

In addition to carrying out surveys, we have interviewed beneficiaries, volunteers and venues for case studies. Below are some of the case studies, with links to the reports that are on our website:

- [Case study from a venues perspective](#)
- [Case Study on why a gentleman attends a Chatter & Natter table](#)
- [Case Study on why a volunteer hosts a Chatter & Natter table](#)
- [Case study on why someone attends online Chatty Cafes](#)
- [What people say about our Telephone Friendship Service](#)

What you’ve learned

We have learnt that a brilliant pathway to volunteering is when beneficiaries engage in our services and feel they have benefitted from them so much that they decide to become a Chatty Café volunteer. This means we have volunteers who have lived experience of loneliness, and often turn out to be fantastic volunteers.

We didn’t expect to secure commissioning contracts with County Councils to deliver our telephone befriending service and we have therefore been delighted to secure a contract with Kent County Council and a recent contract with a Social Prescribing team in Oldham.

We also didn’t expect to be approached by ITV to take part in their ‘1 Million Minutes campaign.’ The campaign encourages viewers to donate their time to help people experiencing loneliness and gives the scheme national TV coverage, which is a fantastic way to raise awareness of our work. The

campaign led to a huge spike in volunteer applications throughout December 2022 and 2023 and we are taking part in the campaign again this December 2024. It is a brilliant way to help raise our profile and to recruit volunteers to help deliver our services.

We realised quite quickly into the project that Chatter & Natter tables in venues need volunteers to host them if they are going to be effective in bringing people together. One of the biggest difficulties has been encouraging businesses to register to join The Chatty Café Scheme and recruiting local people to volunteer to host Chatter & Natter tables. However, since we recruited a freelance Social Media Manager and implemented digital strategies to attract more venues, venue numbers and volunteer table hosts have steadily increased.

As our organisation grows, we are seeing how important it is that we standardise and automate (as much as possible) our processes, so we can achieve more with the same paid resources. An example is making full use of our CRM system, to collect and track volunteer feedback, and to process volunteer applications. We are continuing to review our systems and ways we can reduce manual administration.

How you're changing what you do

Based on our experience and what we've learned, we've made the following changes:

- We seek to recruit at least 2 volunteers to host a Chatter & Natter table in the same venue, to ensure the table is hosted every week and to avoid any gaps in service delivery.
- We avoid working with corporate companies that offer 'staff volunteering days.' Because they often volunteer only 1 day and we need volunteers that can make larger time commitments to suit the delivery of our services.
- We offer 'check-in's with all volunteers at least once every month, in the form of training sessions or online get togethers, so that volunteers feel as supported as possible.

As part of this project and as mentioned above, we spent two years working with the research team at Coventry University who were tasked with measuring the impact of our services. In May 2023 Coventry University published a detailed report containing findings from the study. Since its publication, we have carefully considered the recommendations in the report and the table below explains how we are driving forward improvements against the recommendations that were put forward.

Recommendations from May 2023 Report	What we have done since then
Chatter & Natter tables: findings from the survey suggested that a more extensive network of Chatter & Natter tables was needed to ensure that people across the country could access them. A related point was that a broader range of venue types could be considered, although this is already taking place.	There are currently 589 participating venues located across England. The areas with the fewest Chatty Cafes include Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Somerset, and Cornwall. We are using geotags across our social media platforms to encourage more venues in these areas to join the scheme to have a more even spread of Chatter & Natter tables across England. Whilst we are keen to offer Chatter & Natter tables in a range of venues, currently they predominantly occur in cafes. Currently, the type of venues offering Chatter & Natter tables includes 76% in cafes, 1% in care homes, 9% in community

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	centres, 4% in libraries, 7% in pubs and 2% in restaurants. Chatter & Natter tables in pubs seem to work well, and we are actively working with pub networks, for example a group called 'Pub is in the Hub' to promote the scheme and encourage other pubs to join.
<p>Telephone friendship service: Both beneficiaries and volunteers highlighted the need to extend the limit on the length of time that phone calls can take place in some cases. It was felt that for a friendship service to have a limit was potentially creating issues for beneficiaries when the phone calls ended. While the need for a limit is recognised it was felt that it may be useful to have greater flexibility on a case-by-case basis.</p>	<p>In the past 12 months, we have altered the time limit of the calls to give volunteers the option to extend their calls by a further 8 weeks. This means that all volunteers must call their beneficiary for a minimum of 12 weeks but they have the option to extend the calls at the end of the 12 weeks by a further 8 weeks if they wish to do so, the calls can therefore run for a maximum of 20 weeks. Based on our experience of running this service it is preferable to stop the calls after 20 weeks to avoid the beneficiary becoming too dependent on the volunteer. Having a time limit is also crucial if we are to manage volunteer capacity and to continue to support new beneficiaries who are referred into the scheme for weekly calls.</p>
<p>Online Chatty Café (Zoom) sessions: Findings suggested there was a demand for more frequent, and longer, online Chatty Café (Zoom) sessions so there was greater flexibility to fit around other life commitments/appointments etc. A further suggestion from beneficiaries was around how they connect with other beneficiaries outside of the time they are in the Chatty Café sessions/phone calls/tables. There was a suggestion that it might be useful to have some kind of online discussion forum where those who meet through the services could then communicate on related issues, or at least connect with each other so the conversation could then carry on.</p>	<p>The online Chatty Café sessions currently run on a Tuesday and Thursday at 1pm and run for around 45 minutes. We have tried to bring on volunteers to facilitate these groups, but we feel it is important that a paid member of staff is always in attendance and takes on the role of the host. This is because the conversations can take many turns and the host needs to be able to manage multiple topics and conversations which is a skill that has taken some time to build. For this reason, we have not increased the frequency of the online groups due to limitations around resourcing the sessions and juggling other work priorities, considering they are always hosted by staff. Whilst we would love to implement an online discussion forum for beneficiaries, we do not have the resources or budget to implement this now. We will however keep this on our roadmap and consider it in the future subject to resources and costings.</p>

Recommendations from May 2023 Report	What we have done since then
<p>Volunteers: Many of the Chatty Café Scheme activities are fundamentally reliant on the availability of volunteers. It is vital that more volunteers are retained as it requires significant resource to onboard volunteers and provide support for them to deliver the services. It is important that the role and expectations of the volunteer are made very clear at the point of application.</p>	<p>We know how challenging it is to recruit volunteers and therefore volunteer retention is essential if we are to continue to offer our services. We are proud to say that 28% of our current volunteers have been with us for over 3 years. Some volunteers joke they are now ‘part of the furniture.’ We have made improvements to the volunteer role profiles to make it very clear what is expected of the volunteers and the time involved in all elements of training and within the ongoing role. Being clear of the expectations at the start has helped reduce dropout rates.</p>
<p>Volunteers: Many volunteers expressed the desire to communicate with other volunteers, to share best practice, experiences and to create their own sense of belonging as part of the Chatty Café Scheme. It was felt that this could create a community in itself and this could support the wellbeing of volunteers. Suggestions usually centred around the creation of some type of online forum where volunteers could communicate, pool knowledge and share skills, tips, information sources that may be useful in their role.</p>	<p>Since receiving this feedback we have implemented monthly ‘cup of tea and a chat’ sessions for telephone and table volunteers. They are held on Zoom and run for around 45 minutes to 1 hour. They provide a great opportunity for volunteers to meet one another, share positive stories, as well as any concerns they might have and to share ideas for learning. We also ask the group if they have any ideas for future training sessions and ways we could make improvements. This group also offers volunteers peer-to-peer support.</p>
<p>Volunteers: While most volunteers were extremely complementary about the initial training and support received, it was felt by many that it could be useful to provide different levels of support for volunteers depending on the needs of the beneficiary they were being matched with and the experience of the volunteer. For experienced volunteers, who perhaps already had a background in health and social care, being a telephone volunteer was not considered challenging, but for volunteers with less experience there were suggestions that there should be greater support and training options available, so they felt they had the suitable skills to be able to support beneficiaries with specific needs. This could potentially reduce volunteer attrition.</p>	<p>We have introduced quarterly training sessions which focus on specific areas. For example, ‘how to maintain positive boundaries’ and ‘ideas for conversation starters.’ It is not mandatory to attend but they are offered to volunteers who might be seeking further support. All of the training sessions are recorded and sent to volunteers afterwards, for anyone who would like to attend but can’t make it. We have also introduced mandatory annual safeguarding training for all volunteers.</p>
<p>Marketing: Beneficiaries, volunteers and the public highlighted that there could be improvements around the level, frequency and focus of communications from the Chatty Café Scheme, mainly in terms of marketing their</p>	<p>Since receiving this recommendation we have employed a social media Manger who works around 15 hours per week for our organisation. This has resulted in a significant increase in social media traffic, and we now have over</p>

Recommendations from May 2023 Report	What we have done since then
<p>services. It was felt that the Chatty Café Scheme had already significantly improved their online social media presence, but that wider advertising in society was needed to raise awareness of the Scheme and its activities.</p>	<p>10,000 followers across our social media platforms. By improving the level of frequency of our communications, we have encouraged more venues to join up to the scheme. We also send monthly newsletters to those on our mailing list as well as more tailored newsletters to volunteers and venue owners.</p>
<p>Capacity: Given the limited number of staff within the Chatty Café Scheme, consideration will be needed to envisage how to continue to scale up operations. Onboarding of volunteers, venues as well as management of the Scheme's different activities is labour intensive and is likely to reach a point where it would become challenging to manage all areas of activities effectively. The Chatty Café Scheme is already exploring the use of technology to streamline some processes within the organisation but there should be a consideration of expansion plans and the associated labour that would be required to do so, and how this could be funded.</p>	<p>We have considered resourcing and funding as part of our 3-year strategic development plan. One of our priorities is to diversify our income streams and to use this income to increase our workforce as well as grow the number of volunteers, to keep supporting more people.</p> <p>In terms of streamlining services, we have significantly reduced administrative burdens by implementing a CRM database which we use to process all volunteer applications and beneficiary referral details. There is more work to do to further automate some of our process and this work is underway.</p>
<p>Partnership and sponsorship: A key issue for the Chatty Café Scheme will be to ensure the financial sustainability of the organisation so that it can continue to operate its services. While it has been involved in some corporate partnerships, it could be beneficial to explore more routes for corporate sponsorship as well as links with city councils and organisations in different local areas.</p>	<p>Whilst it is brilliant that we have a corporate partnership with Costa Coffee, we are very keen to secure other corporate partners. We were in talks with Waitrose, however, they have a partnership with Café Nero and felt that our partnership with Costa Coffee was a conflict of interest for them so this has not progressed.</p> <p>We are seeking support from Board members to develop a corporate sponsorship package, where we could charge businesses to put their logo on the Chatter & Natter table signs and/or our website. We are proactively reaching out to businesses to build relationships with a hope that we can secure additional corporate partnerships.</p>
<p>Partnership and sponsorship: Respondents in the research were often surprised there were not more big brands backing the activities of the Chatty Café Scheme. While the loneliness and social isolation are nationwide issues, their extent and how they are experienced is likely to differ across the country depending on local geographies and demographics. Respondents</p>	<p>In the past year, we have secured a partnership with Cardinal Health and their staff are going to fundraise for us.</p> <p>We have also worked with several Councils where they paid for up to 50 venues in their local areas to sign up to The Chatty Café Scheme, so there is no cost to the individual</p>

Recommendations from May 2023 Report	What we have done since then
often highlighted that there could be more potential to link with city councils in order to showcase the potential for the Chatty Café Scheme services and highlight where they could be most beneficial.	<p>businesses to participate. The Councils we have worked with in the past year include: Newham Council, West Northamptonshire Council, Tyneside Council, Kingston Council and Blackpool Council.</p> <p>As more venues join our organisation and the number of followers on our social media grows, this should help attract more corporate sponsors and Councils to want to work with us.</p>

[If it's your last progress update with us and any thoughts about the overall project](#)

Whilst delivering this project, it has been interesting to learn that so many different people experience loneliness, that it is certainly not the stereotypical 'older person who lives alone,' as people of various ages and backgrounds are accessing our services.

We didn't expect there to be so many crossovers between our services. For example, beneficiaries receiving weekly calls sometimes join online Chatty Café groups and/or join a Chatter & Natter table in their local café. Another example is when beneficiaries join online Chatty Café groups and learn about cafes near to them that offer Chatter & Natter tables and decide to go along. They often then feedback to the online group about their experience of accessing in-person Chatty Cafes.

Finally, this 3-year project has significantly helped The Chatty Café Scheme as it has:

- Further established The Chatty Cafe Scheme as a key player in the tackling loneliness space.
- Put us in a much stronger position to apply for commissioning contracts with Local and County councils for contracts to deliver our telephone befriending service.
- Helped boost footfall in struggling high streets and town centres, by encouraging more people to visit Chatter & Natter tables in venues.
- Increased attendance and sustainability of other community and social groups in local areas, as beneficiaries at Chatter & Natter built the confidence to attend other nearby activities.
- Improved the environment by offering a volunteer-hosted Chatter & Natter table in a place that residents can walk to, leading to less reliance on car usage.
- Supported hundreds of beneficiaries who are housebound to receive weekly calls and/or join online Chatty Cafes from their home.

According to the Annual Report of the Director of Public Health for the NHS; "Lonely people are more likely to visit their GP and to use other health services." By tackling loneliness which is often the root cause of many health issues, we believe this project has helped reduce pressures on the NHS and other support services.

