



Spring 2025

Chat Central News

Chat Central is a National Lottery Funded project where we help people to find others with similar interests, to have fun, get out of the house, join in with a hobby, get involved with their community and to find new friends, tackling loneliness and isolation in all its forms in Coventry.

We help people to explore their interests and start doing the things they want to do. Our support is tailored to the person's needs and can be anything from a one-off visit to us for information to longer term support. We have a range of activities including welcome sessions, walks, arts and crafts, yoga, pool, bingo, group volunteering and health talks. Our aim is to reach-out and help anyone in Coventry who is 18 and over, especially if they are bereaved, retired, a new parent, just out of hospital, dealing with an illness or condition that limits their ability to get out, recently arrived in the city or just out of practice with socialising. We help people to:

meet new friends

rediscover interests

or find new ones

build confidence

volunteer

Chat Central has had a great start to 2025 with a focus on visiting community groups and events across the city, still with the aim of encouraging people to try new things, meet new people and get involved. As the spring weather arrives it's time to look back on all those outings and events that kept us busy in the winter months, from the lantern lit wassail, joining The People's Show Choir through to our Creative Wellbeing Day at the Anglican Chapel. Read on to hear all about it...



LANTERN LIT WASSAIL

Much fun was had by all at the 'Lantern Lit Wassail' organised by the Food Union and Flawed Mandrake Theatre. Wassails are an ancient ritual to bring good health to the crops for the New Year. The puppets and lanterns looked amazing, the band were incredible, and the crowd made lots of noise with bells and pans as we scared away the dark spirits and hung our wishes for the New Year on the apple tree. There was a great sense of community and the food prepared by The Pod was delicious. The Food Union allotment off Four Pounds Avenue is a great place to volunteer and get involved and we hope to return later in the year.



NATIONAL TRUST VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES AT CHARTERHOUSE

In January, it was announced that the National Trust would be taking over the management of Charterhouse for the next five years. Chat Central took a group of participants, who were keen to find out more, to one of their volunteer recruitment open days. It was wonderful to hear about the plans for this historic building and to find out about volunteering opportunities available in the house, beautiful gardens and surrounding parkland. Our fantastic volunteer guide gave us a tour of the former monastery, which houses 15th and 16th century wall paintings of national significance. Participants were able to talk with current volunteers about roles in the house and garden. Such a special place to visit and volunteer at!

NATIONAL TRUST SUPPORTERS GROUP

The National Trust Supporters Group meets each month at Earlsdon Methodist Church for a range of talks from Egyptians to New Zealand wildlife. Funds raised from the monthly meetings and other events are used to make donations to National Trust properties, which have recently included funds for mobility scooters. During our visit, the guest speaker Debbie Arkinstall, created a magnificent flower arrangement like those she created when she volunteered at National Trust properties such as Baddesley Clinton. Chat Central will be returning to the Supporters Group in May for a talk by local historian David Fry who will be telling the story of Coventry's trailblazing post-war precinct and the two planners who created it.



NATURE CRAFTS WITH SHERBOURNE VALLEY PROJECT

Chat Central joined Kirsty from Warwickshire Wildlife Trust for a morning of nature journaling at the War Memorial Park. The monthly meet up delivers a range of arts and crafts throughout the year including weaving, collage, macrame and bead work. It was a friendly relaxed sessions in which we used a walk around the park for inspiration. We then used a range of mediums to complete amazing artwork and journalling.



LOVING OUR LOCAL LIBRARIES

Over the past few months, Chat Central have enjoyed a range of sessions hosted by the Coventry libraries, including Creative Kindness, Film Club, a wellbeing event hosted by Department of Work and Pensions and juggling workshops. We received an especially warm welcome from Holbrooks Library who welcomed us to their 'Wellbeing Wednesday' for chair yoga and a creative writing session. The chair yoga session was very popular with people enjoying coming together to do some gentle stretching and exercise. We then stayed on for the creative writing session. In their previous session the group had chosen a topic to research. They then came back together, having found poems, short stories and articles to share, with some members even writing their own thoughts on the topic. It was a really thought provoking and interesting session focusing on the power of words. The library also has a knitting group and a local history group, who have created an amazing book bringing together memories and photographs from Holbrooks in years gone by.



SING, SING, SING!

The People's Show Choir kindly invited Chat Central participants to join them for a series of six free taster sessions at their weekly meet up at Cheylesmore Community Centre. When we joined the choir, they were busy preparing for a show at Birmingham's Symphony Hall featuring songs including, 'It's Raining Men,' 'All that Jazz,' 'You're the One That I Want' and 'What a Wonderful World.' It was tricky at times, focusing on your own part but the focus is very much on having fun and giving it a go. It sounded amazing when all the different sections joined together and their performance at Symphony Hall was incredible!

Chat Central also joined the 'Nostalgic's Singing Group' who are based at Avenue Bowls Club in Coundon. The group gives everyone the chance to step up to the microphone and sing a song or two accompanied by their pianist or backing track. It's such a supportive group where people might get up and have a dance, sing along or just enjoy the talents of those taking centre stage. There's time for a cuppa a chat, the weekly raffle and the group also enjoy days out together.

We joined our friends at Underground Lights for a songwriting workshop as they prepared songs, poems, role plays and raps for their upcoming show and open mic. Underground Lights is a community theatre group which is run for and by adults experiencing social disadvantage, homelessness and/or mental health issues. It was wonderful to go as a group to their show and we were delighted to see former Chat Central participants up on stage performing.



Underground Lights Photo Credit: Fai Banks

GIVE IT A GO THURSDAYS

Our 'Give it a Go Thursdays' offer the perfect opportunity to try something new in a friendly, supportive and relaxed environment. In February we welcomed back Rosanna who led a wonderful yoga session. As always, a seated option was available, and everyone was encouraged to take things at their own pace. In March, Jane from Arboreal Seeds led us in a mindfulness session in which we were encouraged to move a little slower and breathe a little deeper. We took time outside to develop a greater awareness of the signs of life that are always around us focusing on sounds, sights and textures. We also focused on ash branches and Jane talked about the beliefs that many people have about its healing powers.

MISSION POSSIBLE: GROUP VOLUNTEERING AT SALVATION ARMY STORE

Chat Central loves to support people into volunteering roles and experiencing the many benefits that volunteering brings. We took a group of volunteers to the Salvation Army store at Central Six for a taster session to experience what it is like to volunteer at the store. Participants had the opportunity to try a variety of tasks including accepting and sorting through donations, putting stock out and keeping the store looking tidy and organised. We were delighted that after the session, five Chat Central members decided to volunteer independently at the store.



THE HERBERT, HISTORY and HERITAGE

Chat Central visited the Herbert for a tour of the museum and art gallery which for some was their first visit to the Herbert. We had a whistle stop tour taking in the History Gallery on the ground floor tells the story of Coventry and its people from the medieval period to the present day. We then visited a temporary exhibition called 'Microworld' in which you immersed yourself in a world where digital creatures respond to your every move. We also spent time in Gallery 2 which homes the Herbert's largest painting, Bacchus and Ariadne, painted by Luca Giordano in the 1600s, where we practised 'Mindful Looking' at the various paintings. Our tour guide asked us to take time and gave us questions to consider as we looked at our chosen painting. We all agreed that taking that time to really look carefully at the paintings enriched our experience.

We also visited the Herbert for a historical talk about Spon Street by 'Spooky Jo,' who shared her wealth of knowledge on past residents of Spon Street. Jo, who has led haunted tours of Coventry for many years is a wonderful storyteller and not afraid to tell a gruesome tale or two! It was an informative and entertaining morning which made many of us want to learn even more about the history of our city.

Greyfriars Arts and Recreation Society also welcomed us to one of their weekly meetings for a talk about the church of St. John the Baptist by it's minister Father Bracey. He shared photographs of the church and talked about its history dating back to 1344 when it was founded by Queen Isabella of France. Following the dissolution in 1546 the church was used as a prison before being restored to a parish church in 1734.



NATIONAL LOTTERY OPEN WEEK DRAMA WORKSHOP

Every March, the National Lottery Open Week sees charities and organisations who benefit from funding from the National Lottery open their doors to players of the Lottery. This includes many heritage venues and projects such as Chat Central offering free sessions and workshops. This year we invited Fran Egan to lead a 'Building Confidence through Drama' workshop.

The confidence building session featured games, mime and role play which we all thoroughly enjoyed. One participant said, "**It was something completely different for me. It was fun!**" whilst another added, "**Fran was amazing and made me realise that I want to get back into acting.**"

We are grateful to The National Lottery, who fund Chat Central, allowing participants to join for free sessions so that they can try new things and connect with people and opportunities throughout Coventry.



CREATIVE WELLBEING DAY

The historic Anglican Chapel at Paxton's Arboretum (London Road Cemetery), was the perfect venue for Chat Central's Creative Wellbeing Day. Participants created gorgeous spring wreaths using rattan bases decorated with a mixture of fresh flowers and dried flowers from the beautiful gardens of Charterhouse. The workshop was very popular, and everybody's creations were stunning! **"I loved creating a wreath and arranging leaves and flowers. It was relaxing and mindful. All this in a lovely atmosphere!"**

Participants were also offered the chance to take part in a sound bath led by Sanctuary of Sound, an ancient meditative experience which helps nourish and rebalance the mind, soul and body. In the afternoon Fran Egan delivered a 'Wellness Through Singing' workshop which was fantastic fun and Arboreal Seeds concluded the day with a relaxing mindfulness session which made the most of the stunning surroundings and building.

Some participants shared their thoughts on the day, **"I loved the sound bath, it gave the feeling of peace and all the pain drifting away."** Another told us, **"I really enjoyed the singing and smiling! So many smiles and learning I can sing!"**



If you or someone you know would like to join Chat Central, to try new things, to meet new people and get involved, then please visit our website: <https://www.vacoventry.org.uk/chat-central/>

COMING UP IN MAY...

Thurs May	1 st	12:45 – 3:00pm	Mission Possible: Group Volunteering Help revarnish the benches and find out about volunteering opportunities *Wear old clothes and sturdy shoes	The Peace Orchard, Coundon Hall Park Tamworth Road CV7 8NJ	FREE Spaces are limited, please book your space on 'Get Involved Coventry' or call Chat Central today
Tues May	6 th	10:00am – 12:00pm	National Trust Supporters Group 'A Tale of Two Architects' The story of Coventry's trailblazing post-war precinct and the two planners who created it. Speaker: David Fry	Earlsdon Methodist Church 227 Albany Road CV5 6NF	FREE to Chat Central members *£2 to non- members
Thurs May	8 th	7:30 – 9:00pm	VE/VJ Day 80 th Anniversary Celebrations: An evening of music from the 1940s to celebrate the 80 th anniversary of the end of World War II	Broadgate Meet at the entrance to Holy Trinity Church 5a Priory Row CV1 5EX	FREE
Tues May	13 th	10:30am – 2:30pm	Mental Health Awareness Week Event Pop along to talk to Chat Central, Improving Lives and other organisations	Lower Precinct, Coventry City Centre CV1 1NQ	FREE
Thurs May	15 th	1:30 – 3:00pm	Synesthesia Art and Photography Exhibition	Earlsdon Community Library Earlsdon Avenue North CV5 6FZ	FREE
Thurs May	22 nd	10:00 – 11:30am	Litter Pick	Meet at the steps to Canal Basin CV1 4LY	FREE
Tues May	27 th	2:00 – 3:30pm	Pool at Rileys	Rileys Sports Bar, Butts Rd CV1 3JZ	FREE
Weds May	28 th	10:00 – 11:30am	Litter Pick	Meet at the steps to the Canal Basin CV1 4LY	FREE

Volunteering with Chat Central

We are always grateful to our wonderful volunteers who help add extra quality to our sessions by sharing their skills and helping with the running of events.

If you have a skill you'd like to share at our meet ups, or if you'd like to come along to help serve refreshments and chat to people, we'd love to hear from you. If interested, please contact Celia on 07541 343 491.

Chat Central also welcomes volunteers and participants who are new to the UK and can help support and direct people to improving language skills, self-confidence and build people up to start volunteering in the community.

- Are you able to help people to feel better about themselves?
- Do you like talking to people and getting involved?
- Do you accept people as they are?
- Can you put yourself in their shoes and think about their experience of life?
- Do you understand, or have you experienced loneliness, and can you relate to how it affects people?
- Can you listen well to others?
- Are you happy to work with and accept differences?
- Are you happy to work under the guidance of the Chat Central Lead Officer, following suggestions about the needs of the people we work with and health and safety issues?
- Do you value the benefits of group work, community, and how activities like crafts and hobbies bring people together and build confidence?

We are looking for people to help with leading activities such as arts and crafts, yoga, bingo.... and chatters to help people feel welcome.

Find out more:



Call Celia (Chat Central Lead Officer)
or Whats App

07541 343 491

Email:

chatcentral@vacoventry.org.uk

www.facebook.com/ChatCentralVAC



Call or WhatsApp
Alice

(Get Involved
Coventry

Support Officer):

07895 450 560



Come along to **FREE** welcoming & fun events in Coventry. Build **confidence**, get into socialising, feel more **connected** & start **making a difference!**



CHATCENTRAL@VACOVENTRY.ORG.UK

CALL 07541 343 491

Chat Central is a project of VAC and funded by TNL



Voluntary Action Coventry

