



Summer 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. 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, discover interests or find new ones, build confidence and connect with community through volunteering or other community activity.



Funding for a further three years of Chat Central as part of the wider, 'Get Involved Coventry' project began on 1st April 2025. All events are now promoted on the site and participants are encouraged to create a profile on the community engagement platform and to book their places for sessions on 'Get Involved Coventry.'

A promotional graphic for 'Get Involved Coventry'. It features a purple and pink color scheme. At the top is a logo with a rainbow bar and the text 'GET INVOLVED COVENTRY'. Below this is a pink box with the text 'Coventry's community engagement platform' and the website 'www.getinvolvedcoventry.org.uk'. A central purple box asks 'What are you waiting for?' and includes a 'Create a profile and log on now!' button with a person icon. At the bottom is another rainbow bar and the text 'Voluntary Action Coventry'. The right side of the graphic is a collage of images showing people participating in various activities like climbing, playing pool, and socializing.

In recent months we've facilitated a range of activities and events for participants to try including, pool, crafts, Tai Chi, canoeing, visits to heritage museums, VE Day celebrations and volunteering sessions. Read on to find out more!

VISITING COVENTRY'S MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE SITES

We had a fabulous turn out to visit Coventry's Police Museum which is now housed in the Council House. Ran by volunteers, who are mostly now retired from the Police Service, the museum gives a history of policing in Coventry. Visitors are given the opportunity to try on old items of Police Uniform and gain an understanding of how policing has transformed over the years with new equipment and technology. There are artefacts and reports from famous cases such as the bicycle used in the IRA bombing of Coventry in 1939.

Participants also enjoyed visiting the Weaver's House in Spon End. The incredible volunteers gave a tour of the building, painting a picture of what life was like for John Croke and his family who lived in the house in the 1500s. Behind the Weaver's House is a medieval garden showing the plants that would have been grown for food, flavouring, medicine and household use. Spinning demonstrations gave us a better understanding of the process, allowing us to have a go and see what a skill it is! We were also lucky to visit on day when the Sherbourne String Quartet were playing, filling the house and garden with music from the Tudor period.

With participants keen to learn more about Coventry's heritage we also planned a visit to the Watch Museum in Spon End. Nestled within a historic Coventry 'court,' this site is a representation of 18th and 19th century living which celebrates Coventry's watchmaking heritage, showcasing a blend of traditional craftsmanship and modern innovation.

One participant explained how such visits with Chat Central have supported her, ***“As I have just moved to the UK from my home country, the activities I joined at Chat Central have helped me meet different people and learn more about the city. By listening to others, I can gain a deeper understanding of the local culture, communication styles, and, most importantly, simply enjoy the present moment and be with the people in this city. It also greatly benefits my well-being.”***



MISSION POSSIBLE: GROUP VOLUNTEERING AT THE PEACE ORCHARD

Chat Central participants braved the heat to lend a helping hand at the beautiful Peace Orchard. The Orchard, in Coundon Hall Park, the dream of D-Day veteran Dennis Davison, is a legacy to the apple orchards of Normandy where he and many others fought for peace in 1944 as part of the D-Day Campaign. Chat Central joined Heather Davison, who continues the legacy of her late father, ensuring that the Peace Orchard can be enjoyed by generations to come.

Participants were keen to get to work, sanding down and revarnishing the benches which are found around the orchard, many with beautiful and poignant quotes from local children about their thoughts on what peace is. As well as being used and enjoyed by walkers, the orchard has close connections with Cardinal Wisemen with whom they hold an annual peace picnic and there are a growing number of community events and celebrations throughout the year.

One participant, Nadia, reflected on her time spent volunteering at the Peace Orchard, ***“I have been living in Coventry for over 20 years and never knew about the Peace Orchard! We spent an afternoon repainting the benches in preparation of events organised for the commemoration of the 80th***

anniversary of VE Day. We also learnt about the founder, Dennis Davison, and how he came up with this beautiful idea of planting an orchard in memory of all those who gave their life to preserve worldwide freedom & justice. It is also a quiet place for all, especially the young generations, to reflect on the meaning of Peace and how important it is to maintain and spread it. Thank you, Chat Central, for offering us this lovely opportunity to get to know and involved in this beautiful initiative!"



WELLBEING WEDNESDAYS

The motivational workshop led by Fran Egan was a powerful session which allowed participants time, if they wanted, to share their story and their hopes for the future. It was a wonderful opportunity for reflection and a safe space to focus on positivity. Fran talked about the theory of this and acts of random kindness and concluded the session with a short meditation.

Chat Central are now holding Wellbeing Wednesdays at the beautiful Anglican Chapel in London Road Cemetery on the fourth Wednesday of each month. For our first session we welcomed Carol, who has kindly been delivering Tai Chi sessions for Chat Central for several years. Tai Chi is a mind-body exercise that combines slow, flowing movements with deep breathing and meditation. Practising Tai Chi can enhance physical health, improve mood and increase vitality.

Chat Central looks forward to welcoming a range of well being practitioners in the coming months for sessions on breath work, yoga and mindfulness. As with all Chat Central sessions complete beginners are welcome, seated options are available and it's a safe and friendly environment to try something new.



VE VJ CELEBRATIONS AND COMMUNITY DAY

Coventry hosted an amazing evening of entertainment and celebrations to commemorate 80 years since the end of World War II. Costumed greeters welcomed participants and actors dressed in 1940s style interacted with the crowd. The event honoured the contribution of South Asian communities to the war and

Chat Central participants were also offered the opportunity to try tennis at Coventry and North Warwickshire Sports Club. Many participants had never played tennis before or hadn't played since being at school. The coaches were so friendly and supportive and developed our skills step by step until we were able to have rallies using our forehand, backhand and service strokes.

MISSION POSSIBLE: LITTER PICKS

After a short break, Chat Central litter picks have returned and are happening on a regular basis! Come rain or shine, each month Chat Central participants meet at Coventry Canal Basin to enjoy a friendly chat, take a gentle stroll through the city and clear litter along the way!

We spoke to some of our amazing volunteers about why they litter pick, and how volunteering with Chat Central has impacted them and their community:

Carl is already doing a fantastic job keeping his local area clean, but in May he decided to join our litter pick team. Carl is such an enthusiastic volunteer and is always ready to get stuck in. It's wonderful to hear the sense of achievement and connection he feels from volunteering as part of a team.

"I personally chose to attend the litter picking because it was an opportunity to provide something back to my community. I do some litter picking in my own area (Wyken), but it feels more productive as part of a team. It's also pleasant just meeting new people and seeing the sense of achievement and accomplishment that occurs after only a few short hours. Hopefully this sense of purpose carries over to other parts of people's lives - finding other ways to help their community locally. Quite a few of the volunteers I talked to at our meets were involved with other projects and organisations." – Carl Young

Hannah began her journey at VAC in January 2025 through the Improving Lives programme. Since completing the Improving Lives programme, Hannah has become a dedicated volunteer with Warwickshire Wildlife trust and has been litter picking with Chat Central each month since our return. Hannah's passion and commitment to caring for the outdoors has been an inspiration to us all!

"I enjoy litter picking; it is my favourite volunteering activity. I like cleaning up the litter and improving the cleanliness of the streets, I find it fulfilling and it makes me feel like I am contributing and making Coventry a better place. I find it satisfying and rewarding at the end when all the bags are full and seeing the impact we have made by picking up litter." - Hannah Begley



ENJOYING THE ARTS

Over the past few months, Chat Central have enjoyed a range of sessions hosted by the Coventry libraries, including, Film Club and Holbrooks History Group. During our visit to the 'Synesthesia' Art and Photography exhibition at Earlsdon Community Library, we were lucky to meet Atmos, local artist and musician who was happy to tell us all about his work on display and other projects he is involved with. We're delighted that he will be giving a talk to Chat Central participants in September.

Earlsdon Library also hosts Film Club, where back in April we enjoyed watching, 'Stan and Ollie' the 2018 film starring Steve Coogan and John C Reilly as the comedy duo Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy.

We also visited George Wagstaffe and Michala Gyetvai's 'All that Pain, All that Joy, All the Same' exhibition at Coventry Cathedral. We were amazed by the range of sculptures, paintings, textiles and poems that were in the collection. Over the years George Wagstaffe has created a number of sculptures which are displayed in Coventry city centre including Naiad, Phoenix and Phoenix Tree.

Linda, our craft volunteer also led a session at which we created beautiful paper hyacinths. Like so many of our sessions at Warwick Road Church, it was a great opportunity to try something new whilst enjoying a drink and a chat with a great bunch of people.



MISSION POSSIBLE: THE PEOPLE'S PATCH

In July we teamed up with Groundwork at 'The People's Patch' at the Alan Higgs Centre to help turn an unused space into a community garden. Chat Central participants helped to level ground, create a raised bed, cut back climbing plants that had taken over the perimeter fence and move water butts into place.

Although the project only started in May, the transformation is really starting to take effect and there is a great sense of community as many groups and individuals are working together to improve the area.

One Chat Central participant went on to volunteer independently as he enjoyed the session so much. Victor told us, ***"I had a great time volunteering with Groundwork over the summer. I was interested in joining because I was looking for ways to be more physically active and social. Both goals were achieved when I went to my first session, I really enjoyed how collaborative the environment was. I attended the rest of the month's sessions, further developing my gardening skills."***

Volunteering with Groundwork enables people to learn gardening skills, to meet friendly, like-minded people and to make a real difference to the community. So, whether you're an experienced gardener or a complete beginner and curious to learn more, everyone's welcome. Groundwork will be at 'The People's Patch' at The Alan Higgs Centre every Thursday 10am -3pm.



CHAT CENTRAL'S HISTORY GROUP

In June, Chat Central launched its own history group which meets on the first Wednesday of each month at the Old Bluecoat School in Priory Row. We were delighted to welcome Pru Porretta MBE (aka Lady Godiva) to our first meeting, who gave an incredible talk about the origins of the city and her role as Lady Godiva. Pru works tirelessly leading storytelling sessions, educational workshops and promoting Coventry's Peace and Reconciliation events as well as leading the Godiva Sisters.

The following month we welcomed Elizabeth Yardley, a highly valued volunteer with Historic Coventry Trust, who shares her extensive knowledge of Charterhouse and London Road Cemetery giving tours and leading their Volunteer's Choir. Elizabeth also has a passion for family history and told us of the discoveries she made whilst researching her family tree, uncovering stories of her ancestors which intertwined with Coventry's history

Elizabeth began by talking about her father and the role he played as a pilot with the RAF during World War II, sharing incredible photographs of him with his crew after their plane had been shot down and as a Prisoner of War. As Elizabeth went back through the generations, we learned about her family who ran the Leopard Inn in Smithford St. and of watch case makers who lived and worked in Craven St. She found a description of one relative, John Yardley, as being a remarkable mechanic and a simple hearted, talented friend. "He was one who thought little of his own time where the spending of it would be the means of helping others." It seems the apple hasn't fallen too far from the tree!

In August, as well learning of interesting Coventry characters that Elizabeth had discovered through her volunteering at London Road Cemetery, one of our incredible members Alice, shared her own personal account of her childhood growing up in the Netherlands during World War II. You could hear a pin drop as Alice painted a vivid picture of her family preparing and storing food in preparation for the hard times that were set to come, of German soldiers invading Holland and taking Jewish families away, of American soldiers hiding in the hay stacks and of her father falsifying papers in order to protect his family and save those who faced persecution. A fascinating and moving recount from an incredible member of our history group.



VOLUNTEERS' WEEK

Volunteers' Week provided the perfect opportunity for Chat Central to promote volunteering to its participants. We started the week with a visit to St. Francis Employability in Radford to show the many services it provides and were given a tour with their Volunteer Co-Ordinator, Danielle. Two Chat Central participants were so keen to get involved that their inductions were booked in before we'd left!

We also returned to the community garden at CROW Recycling. Chat Central was amongst the groups that help create the garden last year, so it was wonderful to go back and see how it has grown and developed. As always Esther was a font of knowledge for everything to do with plants and encouraged everyone to have a go. One participant admitted he wasn't a keen gardener and had a fear of worms, but by the end of the session he was potting tomatoes and onions and even held a worm in his gloved hand!

We held a session with volunteers old and new to talk about the continued opportunities for volunteering with Chat Central. We are so lucky to have people who support with refreshments, who use their skills to lead sessions including crafts and songwriting, volunteers who support with publicity and delivering flyers around the city. We also welcomed new volunteers who are planning to help with social media, marketing and leading craft and wellbeing sessions. We are so grateful for all the time and energy our volunteers give to Chat Central. We couldn't do it without you!

If you have a passion or a skill that you could share with our group members at a one-off session, then please do get in touch.



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 community engagement platform where you can find details of all events: <https://www.getinvolvedcoventry.org.uk/o/Utopia271151-Chat-Central-Team>

Alternatively, for full details of the project visit our website and sign-up: <https://www.vacoventry.org.uk/chat-central/>

COMING UP IN SEPTEMBER...



SEPTEMBER 2025

At Chat Central, you will find a friendly place to:

- Make connections
- Try something new
- Get active
- Chat, share and support
- Meet up and socialise
- Get into volunteering
- Walk and explore Coventry



2025
RIVER FESTIVAL COVENTRY
SAT 20TH SEPTEMBER 11:00 - 16:00PM
SUN 21ST SEPTEMBER 11:00 - 16:00PM
FARGO VILLAGE, FAR GOSFORD ST, CV1 5ED
#RiverFestCov PUDDLES FOREST/DARE

FREE ENTRY

- MUSIC
- THEATRE
- CRAFTS
- MARKET STALLS
- GUIDED WALKS
- STORYTELLING

SATURDAY 20TH SEPTEMBER
9:15 - 11:15 AM
GROUP VOLUNTEERING SESSION:
HELP TO SET UP THE FESTIVAL

11:00AM - 4:00 PM
VISIT CHAT CENTRAL AT THE FESTIVAL AND ENJOY LIVE MUSIC, THEATRE, DJS, CRAFTS AND LEARN ABOUT COVENTRY'S RIVER SHERBOURNE

FARGO VILLAGE, FAR GOSFORD STREET, CV1 5ED

GET INVOLVED
COVENTRY

FULL DETAILS AND BOOKING INFO
ON:
GETINVOLVEDCOVENTRY.ORG.UK

CHATCENTRAL@VACOVENTRY.ORG.UK

CALL: 07541 343491

Tuesday

2nd Tennis Taster Session 1:00 - 2:30pm
Coventry and North Warwickshire Club
CV3 1HB *All equipment provided **FREE**

9th Pool at Rileys 2:00 - 3:30pm
Rileys Sports Bar, Butts Road, CV1 3JZ
FREE

30th Litter Pick 10:00 - 11:30am Meet at the steps to the Canal Basin, CV1 4LY
*All equipment provided **FREE**

Wednesday

3rd Chat Central Coventry History Group
Talk by John Greatrex: Joseph and his amazing Crystal Palace
1:00 - 2:30pm Trinity House, Old Bluecoat School, 5a Priory Row, CV1 5EX **FREE**

17th Talk with local photographer Atmos
2:30 - 4:00pm Warwick Road Church Centre (United Reformed Church), Warwick Road, CV1 1EX **FREE**

24th Wellness through Singing with Fran Egan 1:00 - 2:30pm Anglican Chapel, London Road Cemetery, CV1 2JT **FREE**

Friday

12th Coventry's Medieval Churches:

Tour of Holy Trinity Church
11:00am - 12:15pm Priory Row CV1 5EX

Visit to St. John the Baptist Church
12:45 - 2:00pm Fleet Street CV1 3AY **FREE**

19th Dame Goodyvers Daye 9:45am - 12:15pm, Broadgate and Priory Gardens
Meet outside Holy Trinity Church, CV1 5EX
Procession with entertainment and community picnic **FREE**





VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Are you skilled and interested in arts and crafts?
Would you like to volunteer in a welcoming and supportive environment which encourages people to try new things and make connections?
Chat Central are looking for volunteers to deliver arts and crafts sessions to groups of participants.



Wednesday or Thursday afternoons
(day to be confirmed)
Can be one off or on a regular basis



City Centre Location

We are looking for volunteers to plan and deliver stand alone arts and crafts sessions, lasting 45 mins to an hour for small groups of Chat Central participants.

All resources can be provided.
Chat Central staff will be present at all sessions to support.

Previous volunteers have led arts and crafts sessions including painting, collage, sugar crafts, book mark making and more.

**TO FIND OUT MORE CALL CHAT CENTRAL ON
07541 343491
OR EMAIL CHATCENTRAL@VACOVENTRY.ORG.UK
OR SCAN THE QR CODE TO APPLY**



BENEFITS :

- Build skills and confidence
- Take part in other Chat Central activities
- Travel reimbursement



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

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Voluntary Action Coventry

