



# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES





Feel-good news has been hard to come by these past nine months. So when **Craig Smith** heard about the Chatter Chairs project – aimed at engaging older adults in physical exercise – he was determined to find out more.



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**he brains behind Chatter Chairs, personal trainer Emma Fisher, had**

**found herself having to turn people away from her senior fitness classes due to less physically able individuals with mobility issues requiring a seated position.**

With community spirit and a warm heart the cornerstones, Emma decided she simply had to act on this, and so the cleverly named Chatter Chairs was born with the assistance of a £10,000 National Lottery Community Fund via Brightlife – an organisation tasked with reducing isolation in people aged 50 and over in Cheshire West and Chester.

Aimed at providing a physical workout of seated exercise, Chatter Chairs has reinvigorated the older adults of Chester, with the fantastic added benefits of offsetting isolation and loneliness in many cases – factors that mental health charities speak all too often about.

The benefits of programmes such as Chatter Chairs and engaging older adults in physical activity cannot be underestimated, with controlled exercises being performed to improve joint mobility, muscle strength, balance, flexibility and coordination – all of which help counter the inevitable frailty that comes with ageing bones and muscles.

“Seated exercise formats using balls and bands do already exist, however I wanted to incorporate more functional resistance equipment into the class. The provision of free refreshments afterwards also offers a welcome opportunity to socialise and meet new people,” states Emma.

“Age-related muscle loss and function, called sarcopenia, accelerates particularly after the age of 60 and increases by around 2–3% per year.

“This natural process, along with a sedentary lifestyle and stays in hospital, can have a real impact on a person’s ability to perform everyday tasks, such as walking unaided, lifting objects and climbing stairs.

“Resistance exercise, focusing on key compound muscle groups, plays a crucial role in offsetting this loss whilst also improving bone density and strength.”

With its undoubted health advantages, the Chatter Chairs concept was sold to local care homes to help tackle the sedentary nature of this generation. It’s fair to say it has been a roaring success, going down extremely well with residents and staff alike, with classes being a weekly highlight for many and participants often talking of their improved confidence and everyday movement.





“We have several people in their 80s and 90s who attend, as well as wheelchair users. The sessions give a welcome chance to catch-up with each other and the care home residents look forward to me coming every week,” beams Emma.

Like everything this year, Chatter Chairs has not been without its challenges.

Having started in two venues before expanding to a third, the original funding has now ended, which means Chatter Chairs may be reduced to taking place in just one venue in the future. Undeterred by this setback, Emma has mustered extra drive to continue to help the older adults in her community. Her efforts were recently noticed by Ross Care, a private group of companies that provide equipment for independent living.



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"I am doing it because it serves a purpose in our communities. More focus should be given for community projects like this to promote preventative healthcare," she says.

Throw coronavirus into the mix as an additional unwelcome ingredient and the sessions continue to face uncertain times, though Emma's sheer determination shines bright.

When the pandemic hit, Emma was no longer able to go into the homes and so she utilised online technology, which has worked on the whole with the valued contribution of carers, but unfortunately the blend of the digital world and an older clientele has proved a tad restrictive.

"I've had to adapt my offering and managed to keep up the sessions online via Facebook Live," says Emma. "The Chester branch of Versus Arthritis has kindly funded me to continue the sessions online."

The fantastic job Emma is doing in and around Chester is testament to her character and drive and it is pleasing to hear she is being recognised for her work, as a finalist for a Community Impact Project Award and Social Inclusion Award.

She has taken the step to trademark the name Chatter Chairs and has already sold her first licence to a leisure management group in Devon. Great work, Emma!



#### **A typical Chatter Chairs workout includes:**

- Dumb-bells (for biceps/ triceps) – lateral lifts, front raises, overhead tricep curls, abdominal twists, bent over flys, bicep curls, diagonal punches
- Ankle weights (for quads/ hamstrings) – knee curls, marches, leg raises, knee raises
- Therabands (for glutes/ abductors) – leg stretches, overhead side bends
- Resistance loop bands (for shoulders).



