

## Bat & Chat at Cheslyn Hay Table Tennis Club

*Theme: Bat & Chat, social table tennis, older adults*

### Defining the Issue

Cheslyn Hay Table Tennis Club has provided a competitive playing space for nearly 50 years. Keen to engage new players and grow their membership, Cheslyn Hay wanted to offer older adults in the area the opportunity to take part in social table tennis sessions. The club worked with Table Tennis England to provide Bat & Chat.

### Background

Cheslyn Hay Table Tennis Club was first setup in 1974, attracting mainly players only interested in competitive play.

Now a PremierClub operating out of Salem Church, Cheslyn Hay was keen to find ways of engaging new players and growing it's membership by offering social table tennis to older adults in the Walsall and Wolverhampton area.

Acknowledging the importance of social connection, even more so following periods of restriction put in place in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, Club Secretary John Quinn worked with the wider club committee at Cheslyn Hay to implement the Table Tennis England Bat & Chat initiative.

*"We wanted to offer a purely social activity where people could meet, play, chat and have social contact, which is so important in the present climate."*

### Project

Table Tennis England's Bat & Chat initiative aims to provide Over 50's with the opportunity to enjoy table tennis in a friendly and relaxed environment.

Cheslyn Hay first introduced Bat & Chat sessions to their club programme in January 2019, offering social table tennis to Over 65's on Thursday afternoons.

*"We wanted to set up a club whereby people could meet up as and when they felt able, learn to play table tennis, have a chat, a cup of tea and biscuit."*

Together with word of mouth methods, Cheslyn Hay advertised their Bat & Chat sessions at local libraries and leisure centres.

Understanding their audience, and that the majority would be retired and on low income, setting a price for the Bat & Chat sessions was challenging - the cost of sessions was set at £3 per person.

Further challenges came about shortly after launching their Bat & Chat sessions, when the Coronavirus pandemic and restrictions forced the club to close their doors, and left the club committee hoping that members would return.

## Impact

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, the Bat & Chat sessions at Cheslyn Hay have been a resounding success.

By following Table Tennis England's Ready to Return guidance, including regular cleaning of equipment and provision of hand sanitiser, Cheslyn Hay were able to provide a safe facility for members to return. Since the pandemic, and return of Bat & Chat sessions, the club has experienced a growth in membership. The sessions now attract 38 members, 18 women and 20 men, all from different walks of life.

*"The project has been unbelievably successful. We are now running every week, with a greater number of members who thoroughly enjoy table tennis."*

Bat & Chat sessions at Cheslyn Hay are helping to reduce loneliness, and provides those who take part with an opportunity to keep fit in a social environment.

*"They meet up, socialise, gain physical exercise and make new friends. It is a safe environment and acts as a signpost centre for members to gain support."*

*"The project is definitely worthwhile as it reduces isolation, loneliness and offers exercise at an affordable cost."*

Cheslyn Hay will continue to deliver social table tennis on a weekly basis, and a successful funding bid to Table Tennis England's Level The Table Grant will see the club grow their Bat & Chat project by providing female-only sessions.

*"I would advise any club, if possible, to offer their services along these lines to older people in the community."*

## Key Learnings

1. Bat & Chat sessions can help to grow club membership
2. Bat & Chat sessions are a perfect way to support return to play following the pandemic
3. Bat & Chat sessions provides older adults an opportunity to keep fit in a social environment
4. Social table tennis can help to reduce social isolation and loneliness



## Further Information

To find out more about Bat & Chat sessions, please visit our website at

<https://www.tabletennisengland.co.uk/clubs/programmes-for-clubs/bat-and-chat/>



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