



Connecting Communities in Colchester



Themes: *connecting communities, active lifestyles*

Community360 is a charity in the heart of Colchester, who aim to inspire groups to seize opportunities and provide services for organisations and individuals to help enable social action and improve people's quality of life. As part of the Community360 team Emily is responsible for getting the residents of Colchester physically active, and she's utilised table tennis to contribute towards this area of work.

The One Colchester Community Hub is based in Colchester city centre, offering a range of services, activities and support for the community. The Hub is the starting point for community walks and provides IT support, board games and other support sessions. However, physical activity engagement manager Emily noticed there was a gap in the range of physical activities available at The Hub.

During the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games Emily provided several sports for the local community to try, such as mini tennis, mini shooting and making use of a dormant table tennis table. After sourcing donations of bats and balls from local organisations, including Colchester Table tennis League, table tennis was ready to be enjoyed by the local community. Throughout the summer of sport around 200 people came to The Hub to try the activities on offer, with table tennis proving extremely popular.

After the Games had ended Emily decided to keep table tennis at The Hub, with the activity being available to anyone during opening hours.

Emily reflects on the success of table tennis at The Hub and its impact on engaging the local community;

"It's gotten more and more popular; the two older gentleman who first played during the summer visit pretty much every day for at least an hour. We have the sixth form nearby and have students who come in on their lunch break to play. We also have volunteers who give their time to help run The Hub who enjoy playing. On average we have 10 people using it every day, with around half of those being the same people coming every day."

Emily Wingate, Community360



Having table tennis on offer has also attracted people who perhaps wouldn't otherwise visit The Hub, including passersby who have seen table tennis on offer through the window;

"We have our usual users who take part, so they're benefitting from being active and socialising, but we're also having people come in after seeing the table through the window. So, we're increasing the number of people coming into The Hub and we can talk to them about what we offer and signpost to further support when needed."

"Men are playing more than women, which is interesting because it's mostly women who take part in our community groups."

Emily

"I've made some good friends since playing table tennis here, and I've actually lost weight and feel better every time I play."

Player at The Hub



Although there have been a few concerns about noise levels from the activity, table tennis has made a positive impact at The Hub and has given the local community an opportunity to be active, connect with others and build a rapport with staff and volunteers who can provide support and signpost to other local programmes.

"Seeing people moving, laughing and joking, and being happy is really nice. Particularly when we have some people come in who are struggling with something, it's helped to boost morale at The Hub."

Emily

"I'm here most days now playing table tennis, sometimes with the staff and volunteers, but also with my friend. We're here almost every day for at least half an hour at a time. I look forward to it every day and I'm definitely getting better!"

Player at The Hub

Table tennis will continue to be available for the local community at The Hub during opening hours. There are aspirations to form a volunteer led community group in the future, which would aim to provide a more structured session at a set time with fun and informal games for anyone who wanted to get involved.

To find out more about Community360 in Colchester, please visit

www.community360.org.uk