

Singing & Socialising

For weeks, each Thursday at 2 pm, the people we support, some of our volunteers and Rachel, one of our dedicated Operations and Development Managers from West Cumbria, jump on Zoom to sing, build friendships and socialise. It is no secret that loneliness is an issue that deeply affects the learning disability community, research in a 2019 survey found that 24% of individuals with learning disabilities identified as feeling lonely. The arrival of COVID-19 has done nothing to combat but instead has heightened it. It's one of the reasons, this year's learning disability week's theme was The Importance of Friendships During Lockdown.

The group consists of individuals we support from across our northern services, from Middlesbrough to Carlisle. Each individual bringing along their personalities and energies to make the Zoom session what it is – a safe and fun space to socialise. Rachel has curated an online environment where the people we support feel free to be themselves; they talk to one another about their week, ask questions and get to know one another.

During this session, the group activity was karaoke, each of the people we support had the opportunity to request a song, from ABBA to The Corrs, they sang along with each other, enjoying showing off their vocal skills. They also practised a song by Celine Dion which they're learning in Makaton. The Zoom sessions also allow the people we support to virtually meet the people they've been writing to during lockdown. Additional, to the Zoom sessions, Rachel also set up a pen pal system for the people we support. Each week, they write letters to each other, using a template created initially, to get the conversation going, they later learn enough about one another not to need a template.

The sessions are also attended by some of our incredible volunteers, Charlotte who was recruited for online activities joins every week. Charlotte also helps run the online well-being program and nature watchers along with the other volunteers recruited. We're so grateful to our volunteers who allow sessions like Thursday Zoom to be run, they truly ensure the people we support don't miss out on any social activity during COVID.