

News Release

Monday 21 June 2021

For immediate release

New Chatty Bench Installed in Dungannon Park

Mid Ulster Loneliness Network has placed its first 'Chatty Bench' in the Mid Ulster district, with the support of Mid Ulster District Council, marking this year's Loneliness Awareness Week (14 – 18 June).

Situated in the popular and picturesque surrounds of Dungannon Park, the special bench has been introduced to provide a place for people to come together to have a chat. Two other benches are also included in other sites within the park.

Chair of Mid Ulster District Council, Councillor Paul McLean welcomed the first chatty benches in the Mid Ulster district, saying:

"The restrictions of the past 18 months have exacerbated the experience of loneliness and isolation for many people. Some people may go days or even weeks without the simplest of human contact, so the installation of Chatty Benches here in Dungannon Park is a timely initiative as it seeks to break down that social barrier and allow us all to say hello.

"It is our hope that it will be a way of tackling loneliness by encouraging people who may be experiencing it to connect with others, and for others not experiencing loneliness to recognise that starting a welcomed conversation can bring so much to another person's day."

Sandra McKenna, Chair of the Mid Ulster Loneliness Network, said,

"As a volunteer for Agewell I witness increasing levels of loneliness on a daily basis. The Mid Ulster Loneliness Network members are totally committed to addressing this issue through many different initiatives. These are our first Chatty Benches to be installed, and we intend to place more in different towns throughout the district."

The project is also supported by both the Northern and Southern Health and Social Care Trusts Neil Gillan, Promoting Wellbeing Locality Manager – Armagh and Dungannon at the Southern Trust added his support for the new benches in Dungannon Park, saying:

'The Southern Trust recognises that loneliness and social isolation can affect anyone, irrespective of their age and stage of life. We hope the Chatty Benches encourage conversation and makes it easier for people who feel alone to connect with other members of their local community.'

Yvonne Carson, Thematic Lead for Loneliness in the Northern Trust added

"Chatty Benches are designed to help tackle loneliness and support positive mental health within the community. We hope the Chatty Benches will be seen as a place for people to come together to chat and connect and be the first of many in the Mid Ulster district."

Dungannon Park is a 70 acre oasis centred round an idyllic stream fed lake only 2 miles from Dungannon town centre. The park is open from 8.30am – 9.30pm from now until

October, when it moves to closing at 5.30pm for winter. Further information on the network can be obtained by emailing mulnetwork@northerntrust.hsni.net

#Ends

Note to Editor:

For further information, contact Kate Keys, Marketing and Communications Officer, Mid Ulster District Council, kate.keys@midulstercouncil.org , tel: 03000 132 132, mob: 07584 203 866.

Chatty Benches

Report Card

June 2021

Overview

Chatty Benches

Chatty Benches are designed to tackle loneliness and are a place for people to come together to chat and connect with each other. They aim to:

- Support positive mental health and wellbeing
- Help reduce loneliness and isolation
- Enable people to feel part of their local community

Chatty Benches are well established in many parts of the UK and there are also a few in the Republic of Ireland. The 'Chatty Benches' initiative is being progressed by the Locality Loneliness Networks in the Northern Area. Currently there are eight Chatty Benches with six being launched within Loneliness Awareness Week (14th-18th June 2021) with more planned for the future.

How much did we do?



Antrim and Newtownabbey Loneliness Network have launched 2 Chatty Benches in Castle Mall and Antrim Castle Gardens

Mid and East Antrim Loneliness Network have launched three Chatty Benches in Carrick, Larne and Ballymena

Mid Ulster Loneliness Network have launched three Chatty Benches in Dungannon Park



How well did we do it?

“The restrictions of the past 18 months have exacerbated the experience of loneliness and isolation for many people. Some people may go days or even weeks without the simplest of human contact, so the installation of Chatty Benches here in Dungannon Park is a timely initiative as it seeks to break down that social barrier and allow us all to say hello.

Paul McLean Chair Mid Ulster Council

“It’s great to have another Chatty Bench installed within the Borough and we hope the addition of this bench in Antrim Castle Gardens will go some way to addressing the issue of loneliness in the Borough. Everyone can experience loneliness at some point in their lives and to raise awareness of this growing issue.

Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey, Councillor Billy Webb

“I am delighted to have participated in launching two more benches in Larne Town Park and Wellington Street. I look forward with anticipation for others to come in the Mid and East Area Borough soon.

Deputy Mayor Cllr Matthew Armstrong, Mid and East Antrim

“We hope Chatty Benches will be seen by people as a place to come together to chat and connect. We are planning more for the local area”

Yvonne Carson, Thematic Lead for Loneliness, NHSCT

BBC have been in touch with Loneliness Networks to carry out a piece on Chatty Benches

Newspaper headline reads “ Chatty Bench set to become a real talking point”

Coverage of ‘Chatty Bench’ launches were promoted widely through media platforms including NHSCT and Councils with high levels of engagement

Is anyone better off

“An elderly lady whose husband died recently has met a new friend by sitting on the bench. They meet regularly .”

“I recently shared your fantastic post and have a lot of enquires about Chatty Benches if there will be more within the area and where they will be placed? It’s a great idea to combat loneliness”