

Friendship Lunch in Chapeltown: The heartwarming events that fight loneliness are bigger than ever



Live singing at the Oak House Restaurant Friendship Lunch. Source: Demi Koutouzi

Friendship Lunches have been taking place across Sheffield and are aiming to reduce loneliness by creating a welcoming space for everyone.

Kathy Markwick came up with the idea seven years ago, when she worked in the care sector in Barnsley, and was given £300 to organise a tea party.

Mrs Markwick, a community consultant and organiser of Friendship Lunches said: “We know we are enhancing people’s lives and giving them something to look forward to.

“My friend started bringing an elderly neighbour with her, who never wore new clothes or took care of himself. But now he has started coming out, he is ordering new clothes online to go out in, and he even has a lady friend.

“It is the live music that is really lovely, because people of that generation used to go to dance halls. They love it, and they make lots of new friends.”

The Chapeltown Friendship Lunch at the Oakhouse Restaurant takes place once a month and consists of a two-course lunch, live music, dancing, and ends with a raffle. The events have been making a positive impact on people’s lives.

Maureen Geraghty, 78, said: "I have been to three lunches and I think it is so nice that everybody is so friendly, and even though there are much older people here, they are all enjoying themselves, singing and dancing."



Tony Hollands dancing with his wife at the Oak House Restaurant Friendship Lunch. Source: Demi Koutouzi

After the lockdown, a lot of people were hesitant to go out, but more and more people are now going to the events and looking forward to social activities.

Mrs Markwick said: "I wish I could do it every week. Imagine when they all left that place today, and it went from a buzzy place to an empty shell. A lot of people do things for older people at Christmas. But that is one month out of twelve a year. You don't just want a Christmas party; you want a party every week."

Kathy's events are dementia friendly and open to everyone, with some events specifically for over-100s.

Tony Hollands, 79, said: "I think it is a wonderful idea. More people should know about this, although it would get too busy, but that means that there should be more places like this."