

Interview with **Our Town Horsham Advocates** *from the Butterfly Centre*

What is our town?

Our Town Horsham is a scheme which identifies locations and shops in Horsham Town Centre which can act as safe places for vulnerable people in time of need. It's about staying connected with you community, promoting independence and allowing people to feel confident. We like to think as the shop and locations as good places.



Why did you set it up?

We wanted to help people and to make sure that they are happy and can go into town safely. It's nice to have freedom and to make sure that people are ok.

What do you do to find friendly businesses?

We are quite brave and we go into shops and chat to the staff. We tell them what the scheme is about and if necessary leave them information for their manager or head office. Most people are really friendly and want to support the scheme. We like going into the shops as it means people get to know us and we get to know them.

What do the businesses need to do to join the Our Town scheme?

Not a lot. We make sure that they know how the scheme works and leave them with a poster for their staff notice board and the fun bit is putting a sticker in their window. We also really like the staff coming outside the shop and having their photo taken with us to celebrate them signing up to the scheme. We also make sure that we pop into the shops regularly to make sure everything is ok and if they need any more info or have a new member of staff etc.

What do local people think of the scheme?

The general response has been really good. Most people are very nice and friendly and would help somebody in need anyway and they see our scheme as a great way to help more people. Nobody has thought it's a silly idea yet.

What do you think of the scheme?

We love it. It's really allowed us to get out and about and talk to lots of people and at the same time make sure that vulnerable people can feel safe in town. If it works for us it can work for lots of people. We're very proud and impressed with all we've done.

How has Our Town helped you?

Its allowed some of us to come out of our shell and given us a sense of purpose. It's also made us closer as friends and improved our relationships. Its allowed us to have our own say and to be in control of decisions.

Who else benefits from Our Town?

This is for anybody that is vulnerable. It works for us as we have learning disabilities but it can and has helped young people, old people and people with other disabilities. We also think that the town as a whole benefits as it brings people together and encourages inclusion and acceptance of diversity.

If people wanted to do this in other towns what do they need to do?

Get a group of people together who want to make the town a safer and more friendly place. Get people to help you like support staff or the council and then get out there and tell people about the idea. You have to commit to the scheme and become an ambassadors so that you keep pushing the scheme every chance you get. We go out every Friday to tell people about the scheme and make sure those people signed up to it remember how it works.



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