



History – The ‘Birth’ of the Connect Club Charity ([1088081](#))

When Community Care came into being in the 1990’s the remit of our current General Manager was to develop locally based ‘Clubs’ for anyone managing a mental health problem in the Welwyn Garden City/Hatfield locality. It was recognised that patients who had been in local mental health hospitals and long-stay asylums had no way of socialising with others and led very isolated lives.

The first ‘Lunch’ club was developed in a working men’s club in Welwyn Garden City which was deemed ‘good enough’ for the service users. The premises were in a dire state with curtains on the floor and an intense smoky atmosphere. The first committee was born here and the attendees chose the name ‘Connect Club’ as they felt connected to each other through the Club.

The Breaks Manor in Hatfield was the second venue. Every Friday at least 40 people turned up for a two course meal which was cooked by the service users. The lunch meetings then became twice weekly as the need was so great and the service users, with support, ran it themselves.

At Breaks Manor our current General Manager adapted pantomimes and variety shows in which the performers were the service users whose latent talents for playing guitars, singing and acting came to light. At Christmas everyone joined in to put on a Christmas lunch for 70 people. Lunch was followed by a show attended by Community Psychiatric Nurses, Psychiatrists, Counsellors and Social Workers as we all worked so closely together.

When we were forced to leave Breaks Manor the General Manager looked at empty premises at 16 High View which is now ‘Wot-Nots’. The premises were considered a good site to have a ‘drop-in’ centre. After securing a peppercorn rental agreement from the council for the first year the potential was there for development and the idea came about for a Charity shop. One of our service users persuaded her husband’s firm to provide plumbers, electricians, and carpenters etc. to refurbish the shop which had stood empty for 6 years.

The General Manager, with support from the service users, worked alongside the tradesman and, after a delay of a week to accommodate filming in the premises by Lee Evans! , Wot-Nots was opened to a ‘Fanfare’ on December 15th 2000.

In February 2002 the Etcetera Furniture Shop was opened. At this opening The Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire – Sir David Bowes Lyon presented The Queens Jubilee Award for Volunteers. Sir David did not want to speak to the attending dignitaries who appeared from the woodwork, in his words ‘It was the day of the volunteers’. What a day that was!

Wot-Ever was ‘born’ in September 2004 and then, as they say, ‘The rest is history’.

So, is there to be a Wot-Next?