



An inspirational volunteering journey

Author: Paul Stimpson

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An avid table tennis player, Pat Johnson at 72 years of age is a volunteer at Bishop Auckland Table Tennis Club, a Level 1 table tennis coach and has played socially at other clubs in her local area.



How did you get involved in volunteering?

"I got into volunteering as a result of significant life-changing situations within family health. Full time caring took over my daily life and my GP advised counselling to help me recognise that I needed to find the time to do something to improve my well-being – time out for me.

"Getting back into the sport I had been passionate about since early childhood where I gained hand eye skills playing on the dining table at home was one of the obvious choices. Get active, have fun, meet people socially . . . get well again.

"Meeting (BATTC coach) Matt Porter and joining BATTC as a social player was key to me choosing to volunteer as I quickly saw how much helping could benefit the club. So much work goes on in the background to enable everything needed to run smoothly. Volunteers free up time for others to do their work."

"Through my volunteering I became a Durham County Umpire, received an award from Durham County Sport – Pass on your Passion – This Girl Can, completed an Aerobic Table Tennis course and a was awarded certificate for Mental Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity.

"More recently I was chosen as a [Female Ambassador for Table Tennis England](#), won Club Volunteer and was awarded the [Pride of Table Tennis Awards](#) Volunteer of the Year in 2019.



How did your volunteering journey progress?

"Attending the club regularly and helping meant I was encouraged to be more involved and took part in top squad sessions, led over-50s sessions and successful women and girls' sessions, helping with primary school and disability sessions too.

"The respect, support and encouragement of all coaches, members and parents was to be admired and all contributed immensely to help turn my life around from feeling anxious, vulnerable and isolated.

"Who wouldn't want to give something back when my mental and physical health were both improving from being in this social and competitive environment, spurring me on?

How did volunteering help your well-being?

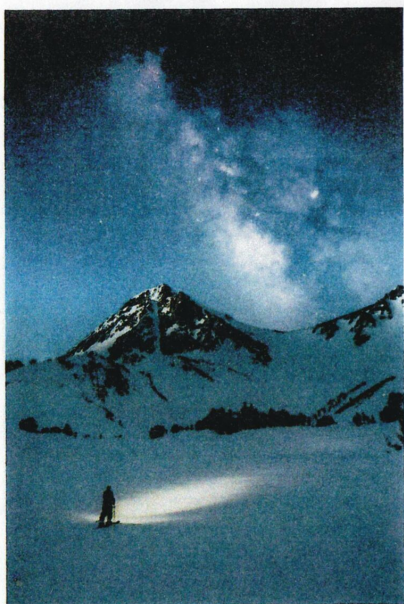
"Experiencing how it felt to have a stress-free mind for a while, having focus and guidance on and off the table, finally allowed my personality and confidence to show. This also gave me conversation to take home to have with family and lift their mood."

What impact did your volunteering have?

"During this time, I also visited the [Ping Pong Parlour](#) in Durham, inspiring many who insisted they could not hit a ball to step up to the table, to encourage everyone to play, helping Paul Henderson for many months and we became known as Ping Pong Paul and Ping Pong Pat! The community and Durham County Sport were very supportive too.

"The activity itself plus the heart-warming response from current and new members really was worthwhile, bonding everyone together. Some took the trouble to mention how much they, as a parent or player, enjoyed the atmosphere and how the young players gained life skills to enhance their confidence too. Some chose to thank

me personally, a tremendous boost to know you are making a positive difference and a feel-good experience for others."



I wonder what lies beyond that beautiful night sky... Is it the canvas of all the memories that have been made? Or is it a whole new adventure? Perhaps it is...

The choice is yours

Pat,

I would like you to know that I am grateful for everything you have done for me. From taking me to Bishop Auckland so diligently every week, to being a wonderful table tennis partner.

But you are not only that. There is so much more than table tennis in you. You are committed, determined and will not stop until you achieve your goals. I highly respect that. You take care of family, always answer the call of duty, but I never see you complain about it.

Despite all of that, you still manage to have this wonderful smile that really brings out the good in people. On top of that, you are generous beyond compare.

This is why I would like you to accept this gift. It is a little reminder of just how small our worlds are. But with the action of a button, everything lights up. You, Pat, are that button. Thanks to you, this world is that much better of a place to be in.

So thank you, for being a wonderful person, a great table tennis player, but most of all, thank you for being my friend.

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P.S. Best of luck in your new role as Table Tennis England Female Ambassador. I am sure you will be great, just like in everything else.

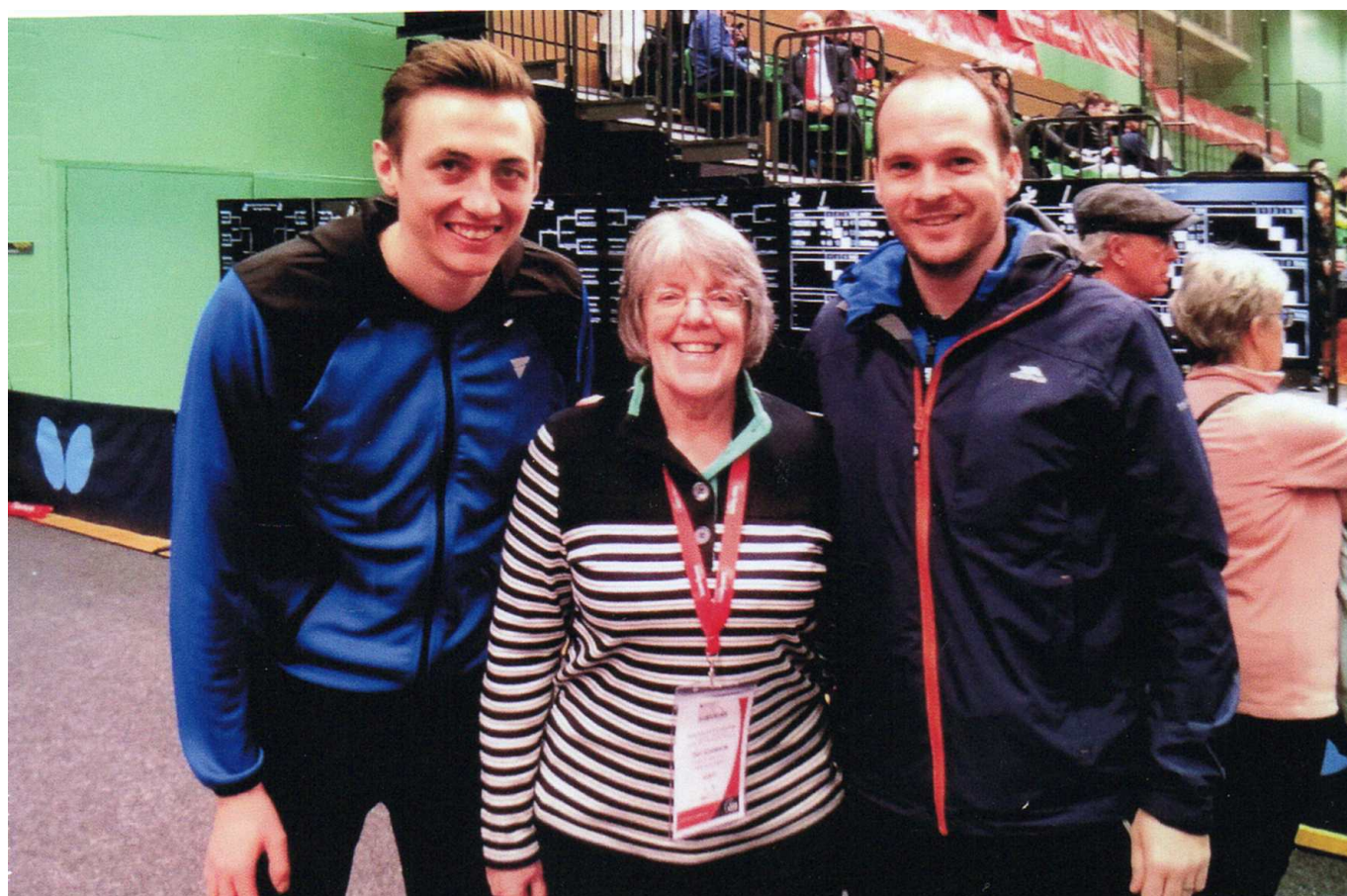
"As volunteers we bring whatever strengths into the club and have time to ensure everyone is included and organise social events for everyone to enjoy interacting with each other. Some University students I met were so keen to play they asked to come with me to the club. I could not resist so my husband and myself took them in two cars and they visited weekly enjoying every session."

What was it like to win a Pride of Table Tennis Award?

"Having been chosen as one of the finalists for The Pride of Table Tennis Volunteer Award, I was absolutely delighted to be given the opportunity to represent all the work done to support this sport and the recognition of all the hours and dedication I had given to get me this far."



"To be invited to the National Championships in Nottingham was brilliant and I was grateful that the top players were so approachable and even happy to be in photographs – something some players I meet when at clubs tell me they envy.



I had the most amazing weekend, really well looked after from arrival to departure and to be presented on court with the Award was awesome! I hasten to add the support for me was a really special experience as Ryan Morton from the club offered to do the driving to keep me safe, a fantastic gesture.

"An experience I will always remember with fondness. A marvellous turnaround from where my mental, physical and social well-being was previously heading."

What would you say to encourage clubs and leagues to nominate volunteers for a Pride of Table Tennis Award?

"I would recommend Clubs and Leagues [nominate and celebrate their volunteers](#) in this year's awards as the feeling of recognition for all they work they do, helping create a successful club environment is priceless. Everyone benefits and every small part played by the volunteers in connection with each other will eventually make such a difference. It is a good feeling to know you are a trusted and valued member of your club."

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