



Round Table Story Based Impact Report

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Ruth Jackson | RJS Solutions



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Executive Summary

For 95 years members of Round Table Great Britain and Ireland (RTBI), also known as Tablers, have been supporting local communities through charity activities, events, volunteer hours and more. We have known anecdotally that the work and effort put in by our members has had a huge impact, but we wanted to know and understand more about what we do, who we help, how much we help and why we help.

During late 2021 and early 2022 RTBI commissioned Ruth Jackson to conduct an Impact Study on our behalf. Her remit was to understand both the quantitative and qualitative impact of RTBI's members and the results are far greater than we ever expected.

Over the following pages you will find the results of Ruth's work, the data and stories she has extrapolated from surveys, emails, calls and interviews. Broadly speaking it is split into two core areas. The first where she identifies "how much" RTBI's member do for their communities and the rest of the UK as a whole; the second where she tells stories of individual Tablers, their motivations and success stories.

This research demonstrates:

- That our members raised in excess of £3,955,000 in 2021 despite the challenges of COVID.
- That during the same year members donated more than 157,780 hours of their time – which to put in perspective is 6,575 days – or 940 weeks – or 18 years!
- Using the average national hourly wage of £15.95 this represents a further £2,516,591 of value.
- All combined RTBI members therefore contribute in excess of £6,471,000 for local communities.

The figures detailed about and explained throughout the report are presented alongside detailed stories and reports from individual RTBI members supporting their communities. These stories provide an insight into the individuals within RTBI, their motivations, their success and their reasons for being a part of our movement.

The results are an incredible achievement by a group of young, willing and able volunteers all across the UK. It represents in just a handful of numbers the incredible impact Round Table has on communities and is a testament to the hard work and commitment demonstrated by Tablers. Well done to you all. RTBI is a unique organisation and these numbers combined with the heart-warming, heartfelt and incredibly honest stories show that as an organisation we really #DOMORE.

Alan Collins – National Community Officer 2021-2023

Paul Thompson – National President 2021-2022 and Immediate Past President 2022-2023



Researcher Selection

It was of paramount importance that this report be researched and compiled externally to ensure that the results would be considered entirely valid and true reflection of the impact of RTBI and Ireland. In fact, this feeling was so strong that at one point we considered maintaining the external brand of the researcher across this report. However, in line with the accepted norm for charitable and sector-based impact studies it was agreed that providing the details of the external researcher, along with the tender process and research methodology would be considered sufficient.

In 2021 we approached three organisations to provide proposals for an impact study across the activities of RTBI. From those three RJS was selected. Their proposal included:

- An overview of the research and stories discovered and explored - key findings both qualitative and quantitative
- Detailed stories (expected 10) covering the three key themes being explored with diversity as a key consideration for selection
- Quantitative, qualitative and comparative data showing the range and type of impact and achievement across The Round Table network (including visuals)
- Detailed notes, surveys and additional information generated during the report production Identification of additional findings to guide future developments
- Recommendations on potential value and promotional opportunities of report, stories and findings Recommendations for current and future learning potential from the research (including legacy)
- A written and visual summary to support future research and development plans
- Summary Presentation Materials for sharing with local Round Table groups and available for the future research process



Introduction

In February 2022 I was invited to tender for the opportunity to produce an Impact Study for Round Table Great Britain & Ireland.

I knew very little of RTBI, its history or activities beyond a cursory awareness of particular local events or activities such as their operation of a Santa's Sleigh at Christmas or Beer Festival during summer months. I had no clear understanding of RTBI's values or culture but felt this was potentially a valuable position from which to approach the research - I had everything to learn!

I made my Story Based proposal and was delighted to be invited to conduct the research and produce the report.

During March and April I have, with the support of Alan Collins (National Community Officer) and Paul Thompson (National President), distributed and received a great deal of information from across RTBI's entire area of activity. I carried out something in the region of twenty detailed conversations / interviews and produced a range of relevant data and findings.

Although I have been able to collect and report on a great deal of relevant and important material, some areas have been more problematic meaning that certain research objectives have been revised or realigned.

In carrying out this research and participating in the conversations with Tablers and those associated with their work and activities, I would like to comment on the kindness and generosity of every single conversation and thank all those who supported me to complete this task.

Ruth Jackson, RJS



Story Themes

The following themes represent the areas we asked each Table to respond to with their stories; and they represent the basis for selection from the entire submission set of the personal stories. To ensure diversity we added additional filters of geographical and demographic representation

Theme ONE

The difference each Table makes to the individuals, families and organisations in their local communities (through the dispersal of grants and gifts but also direct community support e.g. food parcel delivery).

Theme TWO

The difference each Table makes to its own members, how members might learn from, help or support each other (identifying and supporting new members to get involved, building friendships and supporting each other through hardship) or learnt from their experience as a Table member.

Theme THREE

The difference made when different Tables come together, collaborating for various reasons on a one off or extended basis (sometimes greater numbers or coverage is needed, times when joining together means greater impact and support).



Research Approach and Techniques

Stage One - Templates

In conjunction with the national team I designed and distributed two templates to every Table across RTBI. It was agreed that these would be promoted by area representatives to improve completion and return rates at a very busy time of the Table year.

- Template 1 was used primarily to collect hard data around money generated, hours contributed and activities undertaken.
- Template 2 was used to collect stories, with Tables encouraged to think about their own experiences within each of the three identified themes.

Although both templates were effective in collecting certain data it has not been possible to collect significant amounts of detailed comparative data from Template 1 due to the fact that not all forms were thoroughly completed. We might say this was impacted by the busy time of year in which we were carrying out the research: e.g. many Table AGM's are held in April, a reluctance to complete forms, or certain information simply not being available

However, key data from Template 1 such as funds raised, hours contributed, and the kinds of activities undertaken were available and have been used to produce the results

Information from Template 2 was extensive and expansive, and I was able to create a potential list of stories for further exploration with the intention of using them within the main body of the Impact Study. These stories were presented for consideration and a scope shift was agreed. My original intention was to limit the stories to around ten, with the expectation that this would be sufficient to demonstrate and illustrate the range and diversity of Table activity and impact. However, in reviewing the range of stories submitted and short-listed, we revised this view and expanded our list to circa twenty stories, allowing us to better match the true range and value of RTBI's activities, its members and their impact.

Once the new scope was agreed, I moved to contact all the relevant Tablers to carry out conversation based interviews before producing drafts for their consideration. In line with my own research standards all those interviewed were given first drafts for consideration and final approval before inclusion in the report proper.

In the final stage all of the data and stories have been reviewed and additional findings and suggestions have been made.



Facts and Figures

Funds Raised

Looking across RTBI, using a range of different geographical areas and social and economic profiles, we can project that over the course of 2021 Round Table GB & Ireland raised and distributed in excess of £3,955,000.

Hours Contributed

Looking across RTBI using the same range of different geographical areas and social and economic profiles as used above, we can project that over the course of 2021 RTBI contributed over: 157,780 volunteer hours to local, regional, national and international communities.

Value Of Hours Contributed

Using the average hourly rate of £15.95* we can conservatively calculate the value of the hours contributed to be in excess of : £2,516,591.

Value of Funds And Hours Combined

In excess of: £6,471,000.

**£3,955,000 raised and 157,780 hours
contributed**

**Overall achievement of more than
£6,471,000**

**Source: ONS average weekly earnings figure for April 2022 of £598. £15.95 is based on 37.5 hours at that rate.*



Stories

Why Tell Stories?

When evaluating projects and demonstrating impact, numbers are reassuring. They are quantifiable, they link directly to bank accounts, to assets and objects that we can touch and move; and they are certainly important in understanding an aspect of what RTBI is doing within its many communities.

However, what we consistently find is that those numbers fall very far short of explaining the difference that the money, and more importantly, the people collecting and distributing the money make.

Significantly, if we only look at the numbers and hard data available RTBI would be failing to recognise the extraordinary impact it is having on many individuals, families and communities, an impact to which we cannot attach a price tag or number.

You will read many stories in this report that are deeply touching and represent significant contributions to communities with long reaching impact. However, what consistently underpins the stories is the kindness and generosity of time and approach that has been life changing and even life saving for some people affected by their contact and relationship with RTBI.

It has been a pleasure to collect and tell these stories, I hope in these few short pages I have been able to do them justice and I hope it helps you all appreciate the amazing work you are doing and the impact you make. My hope is that by spotlighting these stories as just a tiny sample of the work that is going on, it will encourage all Tables to be more ambitious. It will encourage them to share their experiences and be more active in sharing their stories to ensure more young men learn about RTBI and the wonderful opportunity it could be for them. It is an opportunity not only to build friendships, develop personally and professionally and to make a difference on their own door step but also on the larger stage, regionally, nationally and internationally, should they wish to do so.

Having worked with you all over these past few months I feel RTBI is a hidden gem, an amazing network of men coming together to achieve so much, helping other people, supporting each other and really valuing the importance of camaraderie and fun in a world where friendship is becoming an increasingly rare commodity. I hope this report does something to demonstrate the incredible value of all of these aspects of the work you do.



RTBI Stories

Raz from Lytham's Story - It's Not What You Think

Raz has his wife to thank for his involvement in the Round Table and for the huge change it has brought to his and his family's life. She rang the local number, explained that she thought her husband might be interested in joining (said nothing to him), which led to a text message invitation and decision that has literally changed his life at pretty much every level.

Raz's wife was worried about him, he was increasingly depressed and struggling with a range of challenges he couldn't see past. "I had to do something, I was really worried about him, he was getting lower and lower and I just thought I have to try something."

As a first generation immigrant from Pakistan he was experiencing a number of difficulties, racism was very common and very direct, even at work he found himself challenged. And he was without many of the normal support mechanisms that people might use to get them through. His wife and children were amazing but the rest of his family were in Pakistan and he had only one other friend who had also come from Pakistan to talk to outside his immediate home.

Raz himself says "I was the one laughing at these guys, dressed up, taking a sleigh round the streets at Christmas. I had no idea what they were all about."

"I had to do something, I was really worried about him, he was getting lower and lower and I just thought I have to try something."

Everything changed dramatically though as Raz was introduced to the Round Table in his area. Given the invitation he decided to reach out and give it a try. You might say on the basis that he had nothing to really lose. "It was hard to walk into that room the first time, but the guys were great, so friendly and welcoming

Now he talks with huge warmth and appreciation for this group of men who have become friends and who continue to support him on a daily basis.

"There are about thirteen members in our Table, they are all friends but I'd say I'm close friends with four of them, which includes families going on trips together and knowing they are there for me no matter what. And I'm sure they know that I am there for them too" "We've all gone through tough times, but they were made easier because the Tablers were there for each other, there to listen but also to lend a hand in practical situations. I know this isn't the common view of the Round Table, it's seen as a very white organisation running Beer Festivals and Fun Runs but it is so much more. It has made an incredible difference to me and I know other Tablers feel the same - the friendship, the acceptance and the sense of belonging have been amazing and I'd encourage anyone to



think about joining. It's a brilliant social space for genuine friendship and support, it has helped me with work, encouraged me to achieve more but it also does amazing things for charity and to support our community."

I ask about the Santa's Sleigh, "Are you still laughing at them?"

Raz smiles broadly and admits it is one of his favourite parts of being a Round Table member and proudly explains that Helpers just used to put a Santa's Hat on. Now Raz is involved its full costumes with him affectionately named Chief Elf.

"It's a brilliant social space for genuine friendship and support, it has helped me with work, encouraged me to achieve more but it also does amazing things for charity and to support our community."

There is a lot of laughter in our conversation but it is really clear to see that this young dad, doing everything he can to support his family and give back to his community, has faced some terrible times and that his mental health has suffered. Too many stories like this end badly, but for Raz, and thanks to his wife too, this version is so much more positive. Through connection, friendship, helping others, working in the community and being part of something bigger, everything is a whole lot better. There is a lesson there for lots of other organisations and institutions. It is in friendship, connection, laughter and understanding and working to help others we build better lives and communities

Raz also sits on the National Council of The Round Table UK & Ireland while continuing to spread positive energy and effort in his local area.



Andrew from Carrick's Story – One More Christmas

The Santa's Sleigh is very much a central aspect of RTBI. I guess people will have heard or seen how Table organises Santa and a Sleigh to travel around different communities collecting money, gathering and distributing gifts. There's only one Santa (obviously) but other Tablers will take turns over a number of nights to act as Santa's Helpers, connecting with the community and sometimes talking about Round Table. Many members will talk about deeply moving moments on these journeys, precious moments with children and families; times that demonstrate just how kind and generous we can be and the difference that kindness can make to families struggling to make ends meet.

However, Carrick in Scotland's Santa has another special visit that the local Table are particularly proud and dedicated to. Their Table area includes a place called Whiteleys Retreat. The Retreat specialises in support for children and their families who have cancer and/or life limiting illnesses. It came into being several years ago as a result of several major corporate partners and volunteers recognising the need for it when a larger centre closed in a nearby town.

"It's so often not about money, the work we do, it's the difference we can make to individuals, families and communities by being there, by showing up or by thinking a little differently about how we might be able to help."

Carrick Table originally got involved by visiting Whiteleys to find out more about it and subsequently did some extra fundraising - though they acknowledge the centre is generally well provided for. It was through discussions with the team at Whiteleys that the Santa's Sleigh plan was formed. The Sleigh was something quite magical that Carrick Table could offer to really make a difference to the time a child and their family have together.

And so, for the last three years, always working around COVID restrictions, Carrick Table has taken the Sleigh, pulled by a very accommodating farmer and tractor down the drive, to the doorway of Whiteleys. The families are ready and waiting, properly consulted and prepared to spend time together talking to Santa, sitting in the Sleigh, taking photographs and enjoying the magic.

"We share out Helper duties with only one or two accompanying Santa to ensure a calm and intimate atmosphere is preserved. Everyone wants to help but all know how hard this can be." Andrew Thorne a local Tabler and police officer talks of Table members being amazing with families and then walking away with a lump in their throats given the emotion of such moments."



“It’s so often not about money, the work we do, it’s the difference we can make to individuals, families and communities by being there, by showing up or by thinking a little differently about how we might be able to help. We know this makes a difference to the families, sharing this precious Christmas together, but it means so much to us too.”

“Christmas is important for every family but for those going through these kinds of experiences it is even more significant and the Round Table help make it so very special. It is the absolute highlight of the family’s time with us during the Christmas period. Everyone appreciates it, the families are just so delighted by the whole thing but the staff team too, we just love it! The guys, in their fantastic costumes are so enthusiastic and put so much effort into making it the best it can possibly be. The sleigh looks amazing, Santa and his elves look fabulous. It’s incredibly emotional and we know it is making precious and joyful memories that will mean so much.” *Maxine Allan, the CEO of Whiteleys Retreat*

It's Just an Old Building - Remembering Community and Building Community

In talking with Andrew he also shared another wonderful Table story from Carrick. It started when a very active Table member some years earlier, was sadly killed in a road traffic accident. Well known for his love of sport, energy and the enthusiasm he had contributed, Carrick Table responded by building and naming a Sports Pavilion after him.

Over a number of years, the Pavilion had fallen into disrepair with his name barely visible on the signage. And that might have been the end of the story if Andrew had not been looking through an old Minute Book and seen the origins of the building.

A number of things then came into play, the Table felt they wanted to do something to avoid this important story being lost, the local Junior Rugby Team were looking for a new place to practice and the local community and council were recognising the importance of promoting sport and exercise for everyone, but particularly young people.

So, in a very Round Table way, they got people together, created a plan and put it into practice. Working with the Carrick Sports Hub and local authority, funds were secured and raised for the Pavilion to be refurbished. Local builders did the main structural work but Tablers followed in offering their time and energy to clean, paint and decorate until the whole thing was ready. It included new signage naming the pavilion in honour of David Sommerville, the Round Table member they had lost.

But Carrick Table didn’t stop there, they worked alongside the rest of their community to create the “Sommerville Sports Festival” - an open day showcasing all the local sports



clubs and groups that invited the local community and young people to come along and have a go.

"It's a fantastic way to introduce young people to new sports, they can have a go, meet the people already involved and it works as a wonderful way to recruit new people which is great for the clubs and great for the young people too. We are careful to put the Archery Club well away from the other activities and the Carrick Rugby Club Assault Course is always popular."

When the Pavilion was officially opened and the Festival launched everyone was proud but the Table had gone even further. After first checking in with David's surviving wife they had contacted his sons and invited them along. It was quite a journey for Paul who now lives in South Africa but what an amazing thing to see and be part of. All those years on his Dad and family still remembered and part of this important community.

Andrew added that one of the Tablers involved in the renovation is now involved in running the Junior Rugby Club and membership has increased seven-fold. Another example of what people can do when they work together, recognising the importance of friendship and community across time and miles.

Andrew Thorne was introduced to Carrick Round Table in this rural part of Scotland when he was newly moved to the area and didn't really know anyone. A local farmer spoke to him and invited him to the pub to meet some friends who were also Table members he describes this as a lovely gentle introduction, and he's been a member ever since. As one of a dozen men in this Table, he speaks about the kindness, friendship and camaraderie of Table, the difference it makes to him and the difference he sees it making in their community.

"Another example of what people can do when they work together, recognising the importance of friendship and community across time and miles."



Andy from Redditch's Story - Just Hanging Around

When we were discussing the important elements that The RTBI National Board wanted to explore through this impact study, there was a very clear interest in capturing the full breadth of activities and experiences that RTBI is involved in. This was not to be a simple celebration of the biggest, the best and the most financially significant – it was to genuinely explore and record those stories that captured what members of Round Table believe make a difference. This story feels like one of those!

For reasons best left to the past, the Table in Redditch were apparently, and unknown to them, unwelcome at a local community festival. As families were emerging from the worst of COVID this festival represented one of the few opportunities for the Table to get out, promote themselves and to do something, so they got in touch to see what was possible.

“When I came to this town I really didn’t know anyone. I worked from home and didn’t have much chance to meet or make friends but when I spotted a neighbour dressed as a Snowman helping Santa’s Sleigh that year it was just wonderful. He invited me to meet some of the other guys in the Table and I soon became a member. Friendship is so important and a chance to build friendships at the same time as help other people is just great, it binds people in the best way. Can’t recommend it enough”

After a brief conversation between Table members and the Festival Committee Redditch Round Table was offered a pitch, and that’s when the fun started! What could they do to compete with other stalls and activities, attract attention and ideally raise some money? After many rejected ideas they hit upon something other local Tables had done previously that had worked well – The Hang-bar Challenge - Hang for 100 seconds and win a hundred pounds. (What is missed from that description is the fact that the bar sits within a moving socket with bearings rotating the bar every time the person hanging there, moves even slightly.)

The morning of the Festival dawned warm with clear skies, Andy and some of the other Tablers hopped into the large van they had borrowed from a family member and headed for a lock-up holding the equipment they were borrowing from another local Table. Heavier than they had anticipated they eventually made it to the pitch and got the whole thing assembled.

Andy talks about the fun they had, all the Table members taking turns to help on the stall as well as to miserably fail on the Challenge themselves. The Ladies Circle also supported them, helping to encourage people to have a go and talking to people about the work of the Round Table and how to get involved. Lollies went to children as they waited for Mam’s, but mostly Dad’s, to give the Challenge a go.

“There was a hairy moment. This guy came up, really slim and incredibly muscular, I think he was a free climber. He got up on the bar and was making it look so easy, even joking



with those watching, doing pull-ups at the same time. We were all looking at each other thinking, this is it, we are going to have to pay out. But 80 seconds in he dropped and no one else came close”

“We have three new members directly as a result of that day and I think the reason is that everyone could see the power of having fun, laughing, sharing time and friendship. We were sunburnt and knackered by end we all remember it as being the best fun. We made about £100, it wasn't about that, it was about being together again and remembering the importance of connection, friendship and community. It was great that it boosted the membership but what was even better was what it did for all our mental health and wellbeing.”

Virtually There

Redditch also built some great friendships and managed to travel the world from the comfort of their own town when they created a Virtual Sports Challenge with other Tables from around the world who shared their Table number of 181.

Gathering Teams from India, Germany and South Africa they challenged themselves to travel the distance between the first UK Table established and the first International Table established – from Norwich to Copenhagen.

Teams could walk, run, cycle or row and by using a special App they could all track each other's progress though none of them were in fact leaving their own locations in line with COVID restrictions.

“Even taking the dog out for a morning walk could be added to the distance. Though as the competition ramped up we may have been walking a little faster than normal and another Tabler and I spent one afternoon just riding loops on our bikes to get the distance in. What is also nice is that we heard about another Table member in our area who had been not so active and feeling quite down but this Challenge really motivated him, got him out on his own and with others and he's kept that up since the Challenge ended. Really good to know the difference it made to his wellbeing and the lift it gave to his mental health”



“This challenge captured each Teams imagination and united us across the world. People in other countries became friends, we shared lots of laughs as well as learning from and supporting each other. Once the International Challenge was complete we did a similar challenge for our Area Tables and at our Area AGM we presented trophies to acknowledge the magnificent work done on this as well – building friendship, supporting each other and keeping fit.”



Colm from Hartlepool's Story - Christmas Crackers

In carrying out this research for and with RTBI I have heard and read many Christmas and Sleigh stories. "Sleigh" as it is fondly referred to is probably one of the most unifying factors across every one of the 300 plus local Tables. Traditionally this involves Table members dressing as Elves and escorting Santa Claus (the real one obviously) around the streets of their area in a beautifully decorated Sleigh. Children, families and pretty much everyone else come out of their houses to participate with many children getting close or on to the sleigh to tell Santa just what they are hoping for in their Christmas stocking.

Widely advertised and supported this event is a central part of Table and their communities up and down the country. Tablers carry buckets which are filled with donations that are in turn used to help other families or community members, buying Christmas presents for those without, or paying for events and activities in the following year.

There are variations, in some areas Santa has gone high tech with tracking devices and on-board cameras to let people know when the sleigh will be appearing, while more rural areas often have Santa being pulled by a Tractor - a double delight for many children! However, as COVID took hold in March 2020 it was clear that Christmas had to change.

So, in a manner that seems very "Table," many areas tipped the idea on its head and looked for other ways to ignite the Christmas Spirit in those dark days and ensure a little magic was still available to families who were desperately in need of it. Hartlepool Round Table was one such example and they came up with two cracking ideas that brought some very much needed joy to both their members and members of their community.

"If we couldn't get Santa to the kids in the real world, maybe we could do it in the digital one"

Colm the current President of Hartlepool Round Table: "We were just sitting around talking about how sad it was not to be able to do what we normally do and naturally started chatting about what some alternatives might be. Not going to lie, some ideas were completely daft but the Christmas Calls and the Christmas Wishes just made sense."

"For the Christmas Calls we just let parents know that they could book a virtual Santa Visit and organised a few simple details. The right time and link and remember to save the number as Santa! Parents took different approaches, some children knew they would get a call from Santa, some were expecting their grandma or some other regular call and were blown away when the camera came on and Santa was sitting waiting for them. But every single call was amazing. We did it over four different nights and the smiles on those kids faces were just brilliant. Of course, Santa knew their name, their place on the "Nice" list and just the sort of things they might be hoping for, which made it extra special."

And while the Christmas Call was very much directed at children and families, the Christmas Wishes idea reached a little wider across the community. "We put out a notice



on our Facebook page and other social media asking for nominations and suggestions, who deserves a Christmas Wish granting and what would that wish be?"

This was just a wonderful way to spread some joy and get lots of different people involved. And the amazing thing was that the wishes weren't huge, it wasn't really about the money, it was about recognising someone, having people say "We See You" especially during some of those really difficult times. Of course, it included some special Christmas bikes for children who had been through a lot but it also included a washing machine for a local lady struggling without and who was also caring for others, we even managed to grant a small wish for one of our own Tablers, whose wife contacted us to let us know a little help was needed."

What is great about this story and many other that have been shared is that it often is not about the money. RTBI clubs do make and distribute a great deal of money, which is fantastic and many of these stories explain the difference that the cash makes, but very often the impact and difference made is also about the Tablers' ability to understand and respond to the community they are so clearly rooted in - the 2021-2022 Presidents Year of Office Motto was "Rooted in Community". Ultimately, it is about the connection and relationship they have with their communities and their ability to really "see" what is happening and to respond positively to it with their time, energy and commitment.



Andy from Thornbury's Story - Rooted in Community

Andy moved to his Table area around four and half years ago. He had a quite clear ambition for the way he wanted his life to be, and that was in a community. He explained that he wanted to be able to walk down the street, walk into the local pub and to know at least one person. He wanted to have that sense of belonging that comes with friends and familiarity, from having people to talk to and to lend a hand if the occasion requires along with knowing you would do the same for them. As it turned out his Father-in-Law had been Round Table member, but Andy hadn't known until he made the choice to reach out to a group of Tablers at his local Fireworks Display. "They were doing something good, putting on the display for the whole community, collecting funds to give to other local groups and they just looked like they were having the best time" And that is how Andy was able to achieve his ambition in no time at all.

After making contact Andy went along to meet everyone and was soon a full member and taking a more and more active role.

"We all know about the issues around men's mental health and I know for a fact the difference it has made for several of our members that there is always someone there if you need them."

"We do the big events that I suppose people are aware of, things like Fireworks and Sleigh but we also do lots of smaller things that mean a lot to us as Tablers but maybe people aren't so familiar with. During lock-down when restrictions had lifted a little, we started meeting up in our local park, meeting at benches two meters apart – a couple of times we had a beer and some cheese. It was about having a break, taking some time and looking out for each other. More recently we've been doing some night walks along country lanes, again they are absolutely brilliant. Might be just six or seven of us, not the whole Table, but we see some amazing things and we get time to talk.

I think the fact that we invited a specialist in wellbeing and mental health to talk to our whole group on Zoom during the early days of COVID really helped us all open up and be able to talk about stuff when it matters. We all know about the issues around men's mental health and I know for a fact the difference it has made for several of our members that there is always someone there if you need them. We do have a laugh, we do go to the pub but it's about so much more than that."

Pints Plasters & Poppadoms

Beyond talking about mental health and wellbeing Andy and other Tablers got to thinking about how else they might support the men in their community in other ways and once again in true Table fashion came up with a brilliant mix of fun, camaraderie and practical help in the form of Pints, Plasters and Poppadum's!

A special evening to learn about first aid for babies and young children with curry and a beer thrown in for good measure – other drinks were available and only after the practical session was complete! The evening was held with the support of the local



landlady and funded by the Table who have since gone on to also fundraise for, and place, two additional defibrillators within their local community (at the local pub and local shop). Working to save lives is not necessarily what you think of when someone mentions the Round Table but in this case the work quite literally is.



“Many of us Tablers are young Dads so it was brilliant to be able to learn really valuable lifesaving skills but to be able to share that with other Dads in our community was also great. We learnt and we had such a laugh at the same time. We’ll be doing the same again this year but we’ll need a slightly bigger venue – we didn’t expect so many to get involved. It’s an important lesson, never underestimate men!”



Rob from Hoddesdon's Story - Not Lacking in Ambition

The courage possible in camaraderie is extraordinary and certainly reflected in these stories. This one demonstrates an energy and sense of humour from Hertfordshire where ideas come big, brave and funny!

Starting with the notion of sailing a peddalo across the British Channel, the team were forced to revise their plan slightly when the French Authorities refused permission. Maybe the prospect of a peddalo carrying four big blokes across one of the roughest and busiest shipping channels in the world at a very sensitive time was not the wisest of choices.

Undeterred Table 695 reviewed their options and came up with another "workable" alternative! To Peddalo the Thames, navigating water and locks to break a world record. Lechlade to Teddington Lock – a 128 mile stretch.

This may not seem such a challenge until you factor in members of the team not being allowed to leave the boat once the challenge has begun and the average speed of a peddalo being just 3 miles per hour.

So, did they break the record? Well of course!

But it really was a huge challenge and involved lots of members, partners and family support. In truth the task was both gruelling and painful for the on-board team, taking a massive amount of commitment and energy to complete.

Day one started at 4.30 am and ended at 11pm while the next day was an even greater challenge. The peddalo Team (Rob, Andy, Stephen and Mark) set off at 5am and they didn't stop until they reached their destination and completed their task at 5am the following morning. Taking 48 hours and 40 minutes to get the job done. "It's just what we had to do if we were going to break the record," Rob said.



It would have been impossible if it weren't for all the brilliant support, teams of people from our Table and the surrounding area who kept us fed, watered and motivated. The encouragement was what made the difference, people appearing at 3 o'clock in the morning to open lock gates, bring refreshments and give us the boost we needed. The banter and laughter were amazing and made up for all the pain and discomfort. It was a brilliant experience!"

"The world record was icing on the cake though, the real reason we did it was for a fantastic local charity we wanted to help, The Mudlarks, and we managed to raise over £6,000 to support their work."



The Mudlarks is a charity for young people and adults with learning difficulties and mental health problems offering meaningful learning and work opportunities in the community. They offer pocket sized allotments, fresh food and cookery lessons as well as a café supplied with the fresh produce. Also, gardening support to people in the community no longer able to do it themselves (their Special Branch team) and a forest school supporting open play, learning and awareness in the young. The Tablers identified it as an amazing organisation they wanted to support.

“We were all just so moved by their kindness. They reached out to us because they really appreciated what we are doing and wanted to help. They came down and met with us, they helped with all the social media and press releases, they wore our T-shirts to promote our charity. It was just wonderful and of course the money makes a big difference, helping us all to continue what we are doing.” Sarah Milton from Mudlarks

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Building Other Bridges

There’s another amazing outcome from this challenge that’s also worth reflecting on. When putting their plans together they found another crew had recently completed the run which included Alex Gibson, a previous UK Olympic athlete who now suffers from Motor Neurone Disease. Andy, another Table and team member, reached out to them to try and learn a bit more about the experience. “Alex was great and their team gave us loads of great advice and encouragement. We feel a bit bad because we took the record from them, but we were all there doing our best to raise funding and awareness and the friendship and support from them was amazing”

Just another example of the wonderful bridges and connections built across communities through the Table approach and attitude and another perfect reflection of the motto of “Rooted in Community”. In the Mudlarks case, quite literally!



David from Ilfracombe's Story – Different Sized Splash

Time and again throughout this research, I am hearing about the acts and activities happening in communities and built on trust. Ilfracombe is another brilliant example of the possible extremes of this approach. Showing the seriousness of it alongside the silliness, and how being able to combine those two things is a wonderful characteristic of Table.

Depositing £250 with five local grocery shops does not at first seem like a particularly noteworthy story until you start to consider the context of COVID and poverty in our seaside communities and the theme at the time calling for Random Acts of Kindness.

During lockdown, Ilfracombe, along with pretty much every other Round Table, were thinking carefully about how to best help local people who were struggling with lost income, furlough and limited access to support.

Many Tables got active with food banks and food distribution, but this area needed a different and more targeted approach and so Table decided to hand over responsibility to their local grocery shops. They asked each one of the five selected to use their local knowledge, knowing their customers and who was most in need to use their discretion to pay for some or all their purchases, to be sure they were ok and wouldn't go hungry.

It's a very simple solution to a complex problem but describes brilliantly the way Table can work. Using its own discretion and local knowledge to respond quickly and discretely to support local people and communities. Because it is part of a known and trusted network it can do things within hours or days that other organisations might spend weeks considering. And this work represents much of the "quiet" impact of Table, dispensing cash and kindness not as a Victorian benefactor but rather as brothers and friends, alongside, not above, with and not from.

This relatively small splash act that it is unlikely anyone beyond the shops and direct beneficiaries know anything about is complemented by the rather larger splash that Ilfracombe Round Table are better known for – The Birdman Competition! Very much the highlight of the Table's calendar and involving much of the Tables work for the year.

Birdman Splash

A £20 deposit will ensure the chance to throw yourself from a specially constructed "Jumping Platform" which acts as a runway from the pier either to the sky for those who can fly or the water below for those less fortunate at the Ilfracombe Birdman competition.

"It is about playing, having fun, making fools of ourselves and each other in the best possible way" David Williams from Table 327 explained. "We stopped charging an entry fee a few years ago, we wanted everyone to be able to come and knew that more visitors meant more income for other local businesses.



We have live music, stalls, a bar, it's an absolutely brilliant day that brings the whole community together." The last time the event was staged properly saw between 14,000 and 15,000 visitors and David hopes to see those numbers again when the event hopefully returns in its full glory later this year.

"It raises money that we are then able to distribute to other local charities and to help people - like with the grocery shops; but it's about much more than that. It's about the whole community being able to have fun together, it's about the Tablers really working hard and doing something for the community and it's about being together, feeling like we are part of a bigger thing, trusting in each other."

"I joined Table at 18 because of Birdman. I'd grown up watching it and saw the guys who organised it having the best time. Eventually I just went over and asked if I could help, and it has been absolutely brilliant."

"It's about friendship and banter, it boosts your wellbeing and it's also about personal and professional development. I've learnt so much from other Tablers who have really helped me"

"I also had a really low point a little while back, I put a message out on our shared WhatsApp group and straight away another Tabler contacted me to talk. He wasn't even from my Table, he was from miles away, but he just took time to talk to me. That means so much – knowing you can depend on people and that they are there for you. During lock-down we were all reaching out and helping each other like this – we did daft things like visiting loads of other Tables on Zoom we even created a new digital Table named after a Call of Duty location (that is still going strong with over 40 guys connecting from all over the place.)"

David is keen to share the backgrounds of his Table to show what an open and inclusive space it is. From Traffic Wardens to Electricians, Armed Forces and Police, Surveyors and Artists, the Table represents a space to combine having a laugh, building friendships and supporting your home, neighbourhood and community. Because he joined young David has time to continue in his Table work, he has already been part of the National Council and has lots more to contribute but is really enthusiastic to ensure more people understand Table and think about getting involved.



Adam from Cirencester's Story – Shall We Dance?

Cirencester Round Table is seventy- two years old, Adam Baggs has been part of that tradition for the last twelve after accidently bumping into the idea and reality of Round Table at one of their big community events. “Here was a bunch of guys clearly having a great time, laughing, loads of banter and carrying on while raising thousands of pounds for local charities and their community. I remember thinking I want to be part of this.”

Adam describes a very real transformation because of making that decision to get involved. He’s been through some tough times but says being part of Table has been amazing, the personal support he has received has made a tremendous difference as well as building his skills.

“I was quiet, I didn’t have much confidence amongst such an outgoing, banter filled group of guys - but over time and with some really brilliant encouragement I took on more and more challenges and believe I’m now able to help others in return.”

Adam was secretary for three years before becoming the Chair but no matter what role he was playing he said that one of the high points in everyone’s Table year is the “Old Folk Supper.” A meal arranged for around 150 older people from around the town, including those who might not be getting out so much or might be a little isolated or lonely. All are welcome and most are identified via other local charities and organisations to make sure no one is left behind. The Churn Project locally particularly do a lot to ensure the most isolated and vulnerable were included and able to get involved.

The formats have changed slightly over time but the one held in March this year was particularly moving. “We had to change the location. Our usual place is now a COVID testing centre so we relocated to the Baptist Church Hall and for various other reasons the event became an afternoon tea rather than supper.”

We all went to a lot of effort to ensure the hall looked lovely and that all the tables were beautifully set. We had not been able to hold the event for last two years so everyone was really excited to be able to make this special. There were sandwiches, scones, cakes and biscuits to be made before, and fresh on the day.



The logistics of picking everyone up who needs a lift and getting them there at the right time can also be a challenge. All the Tablers, and their partners are involved - and this year (as ever) the Rotary Club also lent a hand.

Partners and family members are guest volunteers, sharing in the feast workload and offering help to whoever might need it. Children ran between tables, there was so much chatting and laughing, the atmosphere was wonderful, like a big family party. And when the old time dance music was played many left their seats to share a gentle waltz accompanied by one of the Table members.

Over 120 older people were part of the afternoon tea this year, encouraged to attend, transported where required, fed, watered and entertained before being safely returned to their homes.

Many spoke of this event being their first time out after the lock downs and restrictions of the last two years - the first time they had danced in many years - or even the first time they had ever drunk Pimms. However, Adam was particularly moved by a lady he had provided with a lift and had the pleasure to share a dance with. "In the car on their return journey to her home the lady confided that she had had a wonderful day and believed it was the first time she had really smiled since her husband had died during the first lock-down."



"I was so moved and so proud that we had been able to do this. The event is paid for from money we collect during the Christmas period doing Santa's Sleigh but it really isn't about the money, it's about all the effort and time we all put into it and it's about these moments. I know we make a difference, we really are "rooted in community" and it makes sense that the Sleigh, which is so much about children, supports this event for our older community. And I love that the event embraces us all, all generations from all over our community."



James from Ringwood's Story - Saving Christmas

Food poverty in the UK is increasing. More children living in poverty and rising costs mean more and more families are under pressure. Christmas coming and the impact of lock-downs and restrictions just made these things worse and there was a very real sense of loss around the things that just would not be possible last Christmas.

Many, many Tables recognised this challenge and did amazing things to support their communities – as you can see we are picking out a few examples of the work that was done to demonstrate RTBI Clubs' impact in this important area.

Ringwood Table were very aware of the struggles of individuals and families around them, they knew Sleigh would have to be different because of restrictions so they put their collective heads together and redesigned their plans in an effort to Save Christmas!

“We knew many children just wouldn't get to see or visit Santa at all this Christmas and that seemed terrible. We just had to find a way to get the Sleigh out, but do it safely. It wouldn't be the same as other years, but we believed we could definitely do it.”



“Various options were discussed but in the end we created something that worked brilliantly.

“In the end, we collected over 2.8 tonnes of food, the equivalent of around 2,500 meals. We completely filled our local food bank and then moved on to help others nearby. The Food Bank confirmed it was the biggest donation they had ever received and would make a massive difference to so many families in our community that Christmas.”

We couldn't have children coming right up to the Sleigh but that didn't mean they couldn't see Santa, or catch a glimpse of his Elf helpers. We took lots of tips and inspiration from Winchester Table and we put out our route on Facebook and used the Glimpse tracking app so families would know when we were coming close and could get the children to their windows, doorsteps or to the end of drives. But the question remained, what could we collect and how could we collect? The answer was food.



We could share information about Santa alongside safety instructions and food collection details. We would take anything but we also liaised with the local food bank for what was needed and gave examples and shopping lists for what would be ideal.”

We are quite a new Table and every Sleigh year has been special but this last year was extraordinary. It felt like everywhere we looked there were bags and bags of shopping. There are some very affluent areas near us and they were brilliant but it was just the same in poorer areas, everyone gave what they could and it was just so moving. Seeing everyone pulling together to help each other. In the end, we collected over 2.8 tonnes of food, the equivalent of around 2,500 meals. We completely filled our local food bank and then moved on to help others nearby. The Food Bank confirmed it was the biggest donation they had ever received and would make a massive difference to so many families in our community that Christmas.”

Serious Play!

"Doing Sleigh is completely brilliant” is the kind of quote I see and have heard repeatedly in this piece of research. It seems to combine some essential elements of the magic that make Round Table special in the community and support landscape, elements that should not be underestimated.

Humour and playfulness seem to be so rich within Table, deep camaraderie (caring for the welfare and wellbeing of each other) and wide spread care for community, and all the other people living and working around the Tablers.



Colin from Mold and Buckley's Story - A Feast for All

RTBI's geographical landscape has changed over time. You might have imagined that COVID and Lockdown would have had a devastating impact on membership and activity but this has been anything but true in many areas. In speaking with different Tablers the needs and challenges that COVID represented seems to have spurred more people to get involved and to make a difference.

I spoke with Colin Devitt who at the beginning of COVID was feeling the impact of Lockdown and thinking that getting involved in something locally would be a good idea. He knew the then Chairman of Deesside Round Table who invited him along to a Beer Tasting session on Zoom and he decided to give it a go. "I didn't know a lot about Round Table, but it seemed to be a lot about friendship and getting on and doing things to help people and that appealed to me".

David took part in a few of the zoom "Get Togethers" but it was in supporting his community and being part of a team delivering care and support packages to local people that he really felt he was contributing and most enjoying himself. There were various phases as restrictions changed. Early on the focus was more on the older people, getting their shopping in and making sure they had what they needed. During the summer of 2020, very much inspired by the Marcus Rashford's campaign, highlighting how tough it was for many families to feed their children and themselves the Table expanded their work and contacted local business and supermarkets starting to offer food and emergency support packages to local families. "We were fortunate in that Wales kept their commitment to the children who would have received free school meals and continued that support through the summer holidays, but we knew from our own members, some of them teachers, that the need ran deeper and wider than the Welsh government were able to respond to."

"Being with other Tablers and sharing the highs and lows was probably the best thing I have ever done."

"Iceland who have their headquarters nearby were amazing, giving us over 1,500 ready meals along with other food, the other supermarkets joined in and offered as much support as they could and we in turn went about distributing it to those most in need. It was tough but incredibly gratifying. We knew these families and individuals were really having tough times and it was so lovely to be able to support them and see how much they appreciated what we were doing."

When Christmas 2020 came around the picture was different again but we made a big push to support older folk and households struggling to bring Christmas together. On the 21st of December, just before Wales went into its next lock down, we delivered full Christmas Dinner ingredients to over 50 homes followed by another local guy bringing all kinds of gifts to complete the day. Logistically it was a real challenge,



as we worked with social services and a local charity called Homestart to identify those most in need and then worked to ensure each delivery had every bit of Christmas Dinner in it, from Turkey Crown to Pigs in Blankets, from Christmas Pudding to the custard it was everything and the trimmings!”

Over the entire and intensive period of COVID the two Tables worked together to help over 120 households make it through and formed a whole range of wonderful new friendships, recognised in their communities for being there no matter what. Masked and physically distant but in real terms incredibly close to their communities throughout.

Making Connections

But the story doesn't end there. One of the recipients of support from the Table became aware of an upcoming New Members Night for the newly chartered Mold and Buckley Round Table. She was a mother who had seen the kindness and friendliness of the guys who had supported her and her family through lockdown and who thought their organisation, the Round Table, could be just what her son needed. “She got in touch with us explaining that coming out of lockdown she thought her son could really benefit from being more active and building friendships. She explained that he hadn't had such a good time at school and had found some situations extra difficult as he also has Asperger's Syndrome. It was a no brainer and with encouragement Sean came along to that first evening in the local pub.

“Sean was quiet, but many new members are. It takes time to build confidence and to get to know people but that is what is so great about Table, we are there to help and support each other and it's been brilliant seeing Sean develop and change, doing more and more things. The Table has turned and he is now also helping others and having a great time himself.”

“I had no idea what I was getting into when I first got involved but I can honestly say that I have loved every minute of the last two years of being involved with Table and particularly Christmas 2020, even in the worst of the pandemic and through all the hardship, helping those individuals and families, delivering amazing Christmas Dinners and seeing their responses and their appreciation, being with other Tablers and sharing the highs and lows was probably the best thing I have ever done.”

Deeside and an embryonic Mold and Buckley Table (Buckley is where David lives and was without its own Table at that point) led across a range of activities during the worst of the pandemic period and Mold and Buckley is now a new chartered Table Number 399!



Simon from Isle of Wight's Story - The Great Pie Off

It started so innocently. The first meeting of the new year would involve Tablers bringing any interactive or game like Christmas gifts to show and share. Wouldn't some food be a good idea? A couple of Tablers made pies for everyone to share and as Simon said, "before you know it, it's got competitive, but in the nicest and funniest way."

So now, every year when January rolls round it's oven gloves on and time to push the Tabler's culinary talents to the limit at the Great Isle of Wight Round Table Pie Off.

I was interested to know what the "Pie Off" rules might be as I have noticed a very open and flexible approach to much of the things Table does. "To qualify as a pie it has to have both a pastry top and base, yeah, that's about it, that's the only rule"

The Pies are laid out across the tables and all carefully viewed before being cut, shared and tasted. Past pies have included Full English Breakfast, Baked Bean, Curry and even a pie that included Rustlers Burgers! "Depending on the year and what is going on for people they will have more or less time to spend on their creations, but everyone joins in, it's really inclusive."

"It's probably the funniest night of the year, there is so much banter and though some pies would be best not repeated, others are amazing. Every member has two votes, one for the look of the pie, and one for the taste and eventually, after a lot of fun and laughter we end up with a winner."



This seems to me to be an excellent example of the "playfulness" that seems central to the character of RTBI. The ability of Table members to take on tasks and develop activities that are about having fun together. They are often also about doing good for others, supporting or encouraging other people but they recognise and value fun and laughter, sharing their triumphs and failures and recognising that an ability to find laughter in even the darkest moments can be enough to lift them.

I asked Simon about his involvement with Table and he explained that his uncle had previously been a Table member so when his job moved him to Malton and he didn't know anyone he reached out to the local Table and quickly got involved. When work



brought him to the Isle of Wight he was able to transfer and once again benefited from a ready-made group of friends, a real sense of community and a brilliant space for personal and professional development. Members are able to learn from the tasks and activities they are involved in but also from each other, sharing experience, understanding and practical skills from communication and presentation to planning and logistics.

“Members are from all walks of life but there is a huge level of trust, respect and generosity. Tablers are able to really rely on each other.”

And that extends to other national and international Tables. “We host our equivalent German Table every other year, and they us. We stay in each other’s homes and learn so much from this experience.

“It has made a huge difference to me, joining Round Table was one of the best things I have ever done.”



Matty from Cardiff's Story - All Around the World

Cardiff Round Table is ninety-two years old, the 26th Table Chartered in Great Britain and Ireland, but is still showing all the energy and enthusiasm of any of its younger counterparts, particularly in relation to its international relationships. In 2019 (pre-covid) the Table hosted an event for fourteen different international Tables (all the 26th numbered in their respective countries). Many were from Europe but the group also included Tables from South Africa and India.

Matty the current Chairman, was part of the Table organising and managing the logistics for the event and he spoke to me about the experience: "It was absolutely brilliant. It brings together Table members and their families so it has a wonderful atmosphere over the four days. Day one, Thursday, is a welcome party where everyone arrives from all over. Friday begins with some sports and games that everyone can join in with, followed in the evening with "Home Hosting" - with all the different families joining the home of one of our Table Members for that night and doing whatever the host family has planned.

Saturday is our AGM with every Table talking about and sharing what they have been doing, different activities and how much money they have been able to raise for their communities, the family members do something much more fun while we talk "Table", before we all join up again for an evening Gala Ball. Finally, a gentle Day four with goodbyes until we will hopefully meet again next year in another country with a different host Table. We all get to share ideas as well as learn about each other's different cultures – it is good to remember that we are people first and being social together gives us the impetus to spread that goodwill across the world."



One great idea that grew out of this collaboration was news of Cardiff's equivalent Belgian Table who organise an enormous Duck Race in their home town. The streets are closed, the crowds come out and the whole thing is a major event with so much support that the Table are able to give away a new car amongst other prizes. "We know we have to build up to that but we now have our own Cardiff Duck Race which we started this



year, encouraged and supported by our friends in Belgium”. This kind of sharing of time, information and camaraderie is clearly having a significant impact on the lives and development of individual members, area Tables and on to the international Table community, promoting understanding, connection and collaboration – broadening horizons and extending international sympathy.

“It’s been challenging at times, organising the logistics for such a large group of people over that many days, ensuring everyone knows what to do and where to go is demanding but we work as a team, all look out for each other and we certainly have some laughs at the same time”.

“We all get to share ideas as well as learn about each other’s different cultures – it is good to remember that we are people first and being social together gives us the impetus to spread that goodwill across the world.”

Matty went on to speak a little about his experience of Table, having been a member in Dursley, Cardiff, Oxford and Cardiff again, and the difference it made to him. He told a story that feels very common yet still very precious across the Tables, of finding a community of good people, a reliable network meaning no matter where you go there are people to connect with and to get support from, and of a brilliant way to gently and informally develop a whole range of personal and professional skills that are invaluable.

This year will hopefully see a return to the Table 26 International Union of Clubs (IUC) with the next host country Denmark and guests having the chance to once again meet, learn and share with each other.



Dave from Heswall's Story - Boots on the Ground

The need to “Do Something” appears very strong in Tables when faced with difficulties or challenges and many tables responded to the need for food and support for individuals and families during the various lock downs caused by COVID by co-ordinating, supporting, collecting and distributing in a range of different ways.

Heswall took a similar approach but in a very targeted way. Painfully aware of a very particular problem in their area for children and families receiving free school meals but otherwise outside support services, Table 557 took drastic action. As a teacher in one such school Table Member Jordon Scott could see the very real risk of certain families falling through the cracks and ending up in serious trouble. He and Al Thompson who provided IT support to some of the other schools likely to have vulnerable students brought the matter to Table and collectively they created a plan. With incredible speed and efficiency, given the lack of other food charities working in this area they got to work!

They contacted Lidl who agreed to partner them along with other local business and funds contributed from the Table itself they set up their own Food Bank – in Jordan’s flat!

“It was a great example of what we do best - working together and with other local groups and people to get something done and it was really good for Table Members too.”

“It was the quickest and easiest way to get the whole thing up and running once the schools closed their doors, but it meant so much work and effort from Dean who was the main person sorting and packing the bags for delivery as well as keeping the lists updated. Working with all the different schools and keeping track of the families needing extra help. Depending on circumstances some households would come off the delivery lists while others were added – but every week, without fail Dean, Al and the rest of us were there to ensure no-one fell through the gaps if we could help it.”

They worked closely with other schools in their area to identify the families most at risk to get them through that first tough period before extra funding came online and other organisations and agencies were able to develop their response and offer a joined-up support system for those most affected by COVID, meaning the Table could concentrate its help elsewhere.

This food support programme ran for around twelve weeks with between 35 to 50 drops offs each weekend, leaving enough basic food to get families through to the next visit. “We would meet outside Dean’s house and then on to various carparks to collect and then split out the food parcels to other members for wider distribution.”

“It could be really upsetting” Dave explained “families who were clearly struggling and so grateful for everything we could offer. It was so obvious that we just needed to do this to make sure these kids didn’t go hungry.”



“It was a great example of what we do best - working together and with other local groups and people to get something done and it was really good for Table Members too. Lots of people really struggled during lock-down because of feeling lost and isolated, stuck in doors not knowing what to do but we all knew we were doing something important and really helping people. That made a difference to me and I know it did to the others, especially Jordon and Al who knew some of these kids and their families personally. They knew how bad it might be if we didn’t do something straightaway.”

It was Dave’s wife who suggested he contact his local Table when he moved North. His wife had been introduced to the Ladies Circle so had an idea it might work for him.

He joined in 2017 and hasn’t looked back, having already been both vice chair and chair. “It’s a great community, people looking out for each other and a wonderful way to build friendships, try new things and help other people.”



Ash & Emily from Beeston & District's Story - Walk for Ukraine

The following story is not, strictly speaking, within the scope of this Impact Report as it happened earlier this year, 2022. However, given the range and scale of this initiative and how it worked to galvanise efforts for Ukraine and reflected the power of inter-Table connections Nationally and Internationally we felt members would want it to be included.

“We could because we were part of something bigger.”

That’s what Ash replied when I asked him about the courage it had taken to set off on the incredible walk he and his wife Emily completed this spring.

Ash and Emily were at a Round Table Dinner when a challenge was set to try to raise £95,000 toward supporting Ukraine and its people. £95,000 by the time the organisation reached its 95th anniversary which was just two weeks away.

Driving home Ash and Emily had talked about the target and started to consider how they could contribute. In speaking to Ash, it reflected a tone I have heard from many other Tablers, one of energy, commitment and urgency, a trust in each other and a “let’s get this done” attitude. Much less about meetings and more about action. And Ash and Emily were about to get a great deal more active. Within hours they had hit on a plan and within days were putting it into action.

They decided to walk from the Table’s head office in Birmingham to the Ukrainian embassy in London, 126.8 miles in order to raise money and awareness for the Ukraine plight over four days.



It’s not about us doing the challenge, it’s not a vanity project, I don’t think we would have done this if we weren’t part of the Round Table Family - Emily is part of the Ladies Circle.



We could do it because we knew we would have so much support from other Table and Circle members, and we were so right. Setting off from our home at 4.30 on a Thursday morning we were met in Birmingham by other members wanting to see us off or walk with us for the first few miles. We had someone doing the social media which meant people knew where we were and would come and walk with us.

Often there would be ten or fifteen other members walking by our side, bringing us treats, keeping us laughing and our spirits high. Individuals would walk with us first thing in the morning before going to work then come back when they were finished – it was amazing.

There were low points, when the weather was dreadful and we were walking at the side of busy roads, HGVs passing so close it was scary, but we managed to keep going because of the support and because we were all working together to raise money to help Ukraine.”

Sadly, on day four things go a lot worse for Ash. The miles, conditions and the damage done to his feet became overwhelming. Suffering from constant and violent shakes and severe pain as a result of badly infected feet Ash was advised to stop and, for a short while it looked like the challenge might be lost. Except of course, Round Table and its related organisations, Ladies Circle, 41 Club and Tangent were not about to let that happen. Within a few short hours other individuals came to the rescue, ready to walk with Emily and to finish what they had started. Emily walked on with Ash in the support car – joining in again whenever he could, even for a little while.

Eventually around at lunch time on 19:00 on day four the couple and the amazing support team around them made it to their end-point, the Ukraine Embassy.

Initially there had been no plan other than to complete the journey and raise as much money as possible but while the whole challenge had been on-going wheels were in motion. An ex-Circler who is now an MP, Jane Hunt MP had become aware of the walk and contacted the foreign Office who had alerted the Ukraine embassy who insisted on welcoming the party on their arrival.

Conscious of what terrible times the Ukraine was experiencing only four names were put forward for the welcome so as not to cause a burden. However, Ash was overwhelmed by the welcome they received. There were around 20 Round Table Family members outside the embassy and all were invited in due the wonderful Ukrainian hospitality.. They were all welcomed and thanked and spent time talking with the Ambassadors wife



and the Deputy Ambassador before taking their leave and heading back home for rest and time to recover.

“We believe we raised around £20,000 for Ukraine, £16,900 went into the dedicated account created for the walk but we know other money was sent direct. That feels brilliant, we are so proud to be able to help and so grateful to everyone who was part of the team that made this happen. It’s hard to explain just how great it feels to be part of the Round Table Family and to be able to do what we do. It is so supportive and encouraging. It means you can have the courage to do brilliant things and means that there are always people around to help and encourage you.”

Its Personal

Once we had discussed the detail of the Ukraine walk Ash went on to talk more about his personal experience of getting involved with the Round Table. “It has completely changed my life for the better, and all because of a single google search that brought up Round Table GB & Ireland” Ash reflected on the 24/7 friendship and support he knew he could rely on and the difference it makes “you don’t ever have to feel alone”.



Findings

It's not what you think....

Over the months conducting and considering this research, reviewing written materials and conducting conversation based interviews with those in, connected to and benefiting from RTBI I have been able to observe and confirm a number of significant findings.

Funds Generated

Using a number of techniques to extrapolate the amount of funds generated we have conservatively estimated that even during the heavily COVID 19 impacted year of 2021 RTBI members generated nearly 4 million pounds of funding that it was then able to distribute to individuals, families and other charitable organisations mostly in its own communities but also to other important concerns.

Volunteer Hours Contributed

Using techniques consistent with those applied to funds generated we went on to calculate the number and value of volunteer hours. Using the average hourly rate as standard we calculated that the value of the hours was in excess of 2.4 million pounds.



Total Monetary Value

If we combine the actual pounds raised with the value of the time contributed RTBI members have contributed in excess of 6.4 million pounds to their communities during 2021

First Impressions

Contrary to common perceptions, Round Table cannot be characterised as a "Boys Drinking Club" or an "Alternative Masonic Lodge". Over the course of my research, although I have been made aware of Beer Festivals being part of a number of fund raising calendars and pubs and restaurants being used for events, gatherings and friendly meetings, drinking and alcohol are not defining features of Table activity. Equally there is no reason, in my view to deny the community and social nature of pubs and restaurants in the fabric of our communities and within Table culture.



Social Connection & Friendship

Without exception the individual members with whom I spoke were extremely clear about the fundamental and significant impact that being part of the Table had had on their lives. This was typically referenced in relation to the friendships and camaraderie that they experience as a Round Table member. That they have friends (many joined because of a lack of friendship in their lives or the difficulty in making new friends when moving to new areas). That they are part of a 24/7 community in the real world and digitally via WhatsApp groups, Facebook, etc. That this local connection in turn is bonded to regional, national and international networks meaning they feel supported and have a sense of belonging wherever they go. This kind of security of connection is becoming increasingly rare for men in our society and in my view is one of RTBI's most significant characteristics and an area of highest impact.

Personal Development

Although not immediately evident when exploring stories through conversation, the value of the Table in supporting personal and professional development amongst members is substantial. Adapting my approach after this area of value emerged, there was a universal agreement around the role that Tables and their members have played in supporting younger Tablers to develop a whole range of personal and practical skills. However, interestingly, this skill development was further enhanced within Tables as members matured and were given the opportunity to teach, mentor and coach newer members. Obvious examples are around presentation and public speaking skills as well as organisational and logistics skills but extended much further at times to softer listening and support skills as well as things like baking and health and safety.

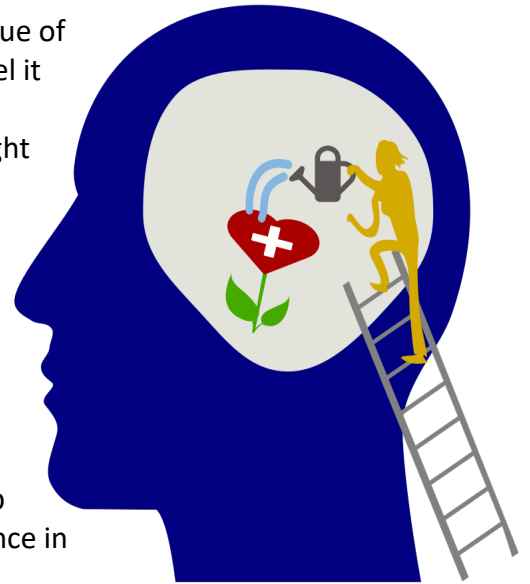
Although I heard of examples of encouragement to change career or find work this appears to be a relatively subtle theme rather than explicit professional guidance. Instead, the mix of activities and events and the space to develop new ideas with a tangible sense of it being ok to get it wrong, makes for a safe and supported learning space.

Again, this aspect of Table is not one the public might recognise and yet is having a significantly positive impact on members and has the potential to attract people to it, as part of its wider offer.



Mental Health

I have already raised the issue of the importance and value of connection and friendship in the context of RTBI but I feel it important to make some very important and specific comments about the value of Table where members might be experiencing extremely poor mental health and very high levels of distress. In this sample of conversations several individuals referred to periods in which they or another Table member were considering ending their lives due to difficulties they were experiencing.



They were able to categorically state that the existence of Table and the network of men ready and willing to offer immediate support, to get alongside them and help them get through was what ultimately made the difference in choosing to continue with their life rather than to end it.

This is a huge and important positive impact the value of which is monumental across lives, families and generations.

Fast, Efficient & Lean

In community terms, the Table network is almost mycelium in its ability to rapidly and effectively connect and reroute, identify and transfer resources and in its power to accurately understand what is needed and supply it with apparent ease.

Given its roots in community, its diverse membership and its helpfully low levels of bureaucracy it is able to respond to multiple requests, make tailored plans in sympathy with other local activity and also respond directly and rapidly to emerging needs and difficulties.

You will have read in these stories about a Table that set up a food bank in the actual home of one of the members because time was of the essence and that was what it took to be able to respond. There are also many other stories which we did not have space to include also demonstrating this "Let's get it done" attitude and a willingness to step up as well as being responsive to the requests of others.

In Scotland for example during the last bad storms it was Table Members who were out sourcing and distributing generators to remote locations to ensure the support and safety of local residents and it was Table Members delivering food to homes that were unreachable except with special vehicles.

In this instance the impact of the Table should be valued not just for its quality and range but particularly for its speed and adaptability.



Hidden Capability & Capacity

In discussing and considering future roles and activities that RTBI, in all its parts, might wish to develop or support, members would do well to fully understand and value their ability to listen to, engage with and mobilise local people and resources. At times of great hardship, difficulty and trauma, an organisation with loyal, able, committed and connected members, able to access a range of other diverse resources represents an amazing national asset.

Evidence of this is within the stories we have included but are also demonstrated in the language and character of individual members. Tablers speak with huge regard, affection and trust for Table as a whole. They are deeply connected to their friends in their own area Tables but this naturally extends to other Tables and members, not just within this Table framework but across the world. This highly accessible connected capability and capacity is what has generated significant impact across communities so far, but also has the potential for further exploration going forward.

Power of Family

This very same point reversed is what appears to enable individuals within Table to take on extraordinary challenges such as setting up a food bank in their own home, spending four days on a pedallo along the river Thames or walking to the Ukraine Embassy. "I could do it because I knew I could rely on others to support me, like a great family, I know they won't let me down."

Play-fullness & Laughter

Our current culture has largely lost its respect for the very important part that "play" has in the development of all human beings. We are now inclined to see it as a distractor for children rather than the crucible of the majority of social, emotional, cultural and creative development it actually is.

Sectioned and analysed we now know playing and playfulness not only teaches us new skills in a relatively safe environment but is also great for bonding and stress relief throughout the course of our lives.

In this respect much of what I heard from Table Members seemed to reflect an organisation that is actively embracing a sense of fun, creating positive space for this playfulness, banter and camaraderie. Out of this atmosphere comes an almost magnetic energy to drive activity forward and one that attracts Members and extends impact at an individual and collective level.



Social and Economic Impact

It is very easy to demonstrate the clear and quantifiable value of the significant money generated and time contributed to communities via RTBI. The numbers tell the story in one way while these stories clearly demonstrate the layered impact Tablers are able to have across respective Tables, Regions, Nationally and Internationally.

Individuals and organisations who have worked with and alongside RTBI, its clubs and members know and recognise the difference they are able to make and the unique position they occupy as both a flexible funder, enabler and actor within communities.

However, what is harder to quantify is the negative impact Table's supportive and preventative actions were able to avoid:

- Food parcels that avoid door-step loans
- Connections that stave off loneliness and isolation
- Friendships that saved lives
- Activities that improve health and avoid illness
- Donations that ease the pain or frustration of living and enable families to reunite

Though they are difficult to calculate these "Up Stream" actions are central to community, social and economic development and impact. Reaching out across age, gender, culture, geography and issue in such an open and flexible manner makes RTBI an extraordinary resource and asset, in its extended network and in relation to the other organisations with whom it is able to interact.

Human

At a time of extreme polarisation, when conversations are too often about what divides us and the challenges ahead may be the worst for several generations, it is wonderful to see and hear about an organisation so committed to being human. To doing what it takes in extremes but also knowing how to laugh and to care for one another.

I am aware of the Tables reputation for drinking, and clearly in discussions the social nature of Table has been made clear, but this is an unfortunate misrepresentation of the entire body and scope of the organisation - like saying London is defined by the Pearly King and Queen or Scotland by Haggis. My hope is that this report will help those in and outside the organisation recognise and effectively redefine itself in line with its true character.



Additional Opportunities

Resource Bank

Use digital and hard copy techniques to create a Table Bank of ideas, resources, checklists and contacts detailing the range of different activities and events that have been operated over time. This will enable any Table to access great ideas and practical information that they can then use to try it our themselves

For Example: Framework for specific activity or event e.g. Summer Festival

- Overview
- Checklists
- Resources
- Narratives
- Photographs
- Contacts for other Areas who have done it

A request for help around fundraising was raised by a small number of Tables during the research

Data Collection

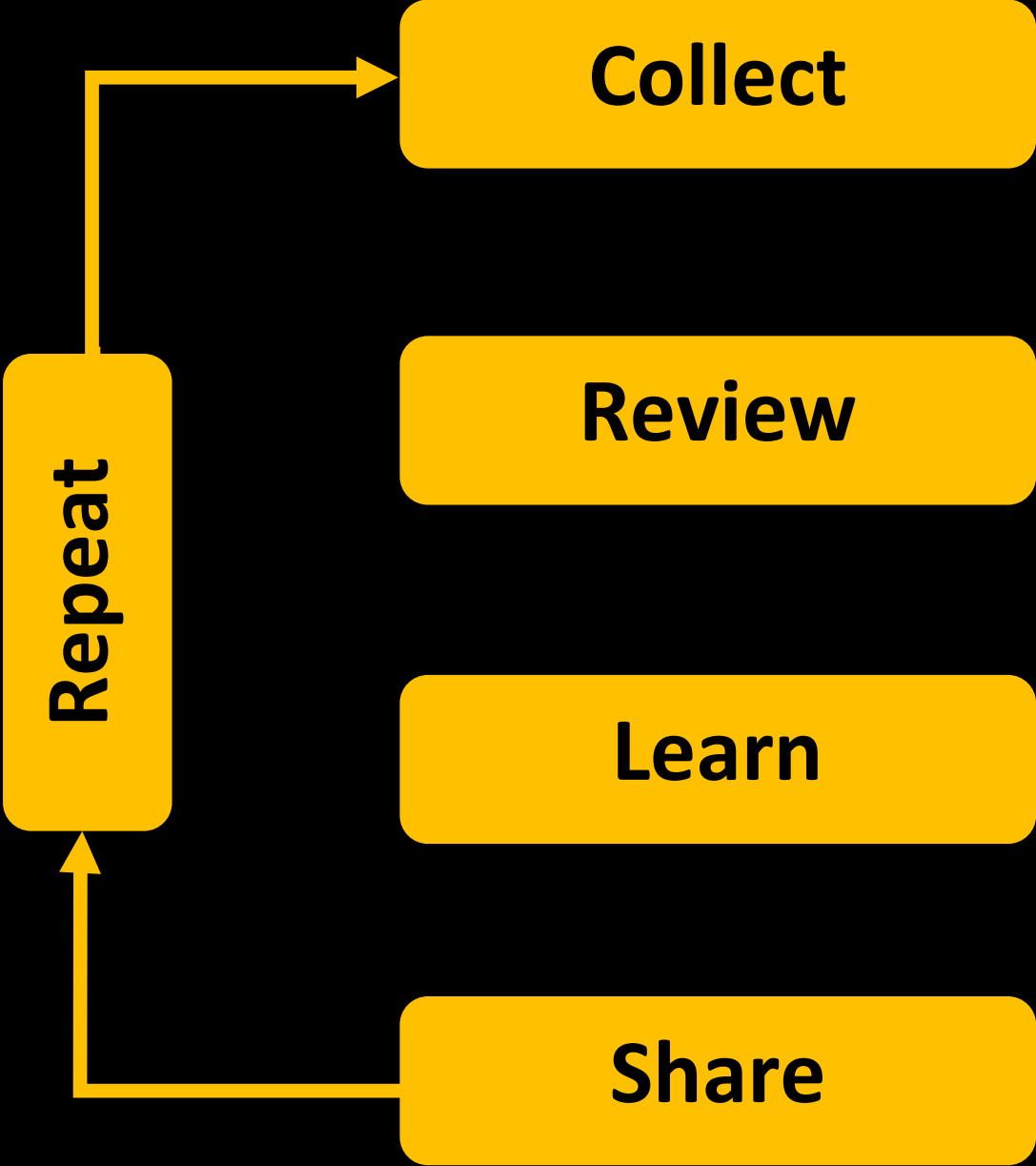
It has been a great pleasure to talk with members and to collect stories from across the Tables. However, as with many large organisations, it can be difficult to get extra information when members have many additional duties and calls on their time.

I would like to encourage RTBI to begin a regular Story & Fact Collection process to capture and share more of what they are all doing both for the purposes of celebrating brilliant work but also for the learning and sharing.

This might turn into a National or Regional Event to showcase the difference being made.



Optimisation



Potential Additional Impact

Based on experience to date and this research piece I believe there is significant scope for RTBI to explore extending and expanding membership based on its offer and profile.

In this way it might increase its impact as well as influence on local and national stages. Resources may need to be directed to support additional local involvement in national conversations to allow for a more active flow of information and ideas.

One early research candidate referenced the expense of involvement in national events and the potential for subsidies for smaller Tables.

Table Size and Limitation (e.g. age)

There may be an opportunity to discuss and support Tables as their numbers fluctuate over time. If an ambition of RTBI is to increase its membership then spreading different strategies as part of a "Bank" of resources might be valuable. For example: members recruiting their own replacement well in advance of their end date.

While acknowledging that there appears to be an ideal table size, perhaps between 12 and 18, I have heard during the course of this research about new Tables emerging from existing ones as numbers increase, allowing for healthy expansion. I have also heard about lower numbers (perhaps 6 or 7) that appear to add pressure to existing members and can lead to Tables becoming less active or even ceasing to exist.

My initial curiosity around "Ageing Out" was quickly satisfied with the realisation that members, when they reach 45 in the case of RTBI can transfer to 41 Club and that while in some instances this can be catastrophic for a Table if too many members "age out" within a short space of time, it also has the effect of refreshing the table, supporting the personal development of members and ensuring the entire Table structure and leadership can remain aware of and responsive to their age group, its interests and concerns.

Local to National

- Nurture extended local involvement
- Embed the sharing of local data and stories
- Resource response to "Ageing Out"



Diversity and Inclusion

In this research I have found multiple examples of RTBI being inclusive and of attracting men from different backgrounds, bailies, cultures, class and ethnicity. However, it is fair to say that the membership of RTBI is very much profiled as white, able bodied men with a lingering public perception that the organisation is "laddish".

There are many ways to challenge and change this perception and move to a more inclusive membership such that many more men are able to benefit from and contribute to RTBI's quality and mission.

I would like to propose a few options that you might like to consider:

Media, Web Site and Social Media

Ensure that the images shown reflect the membership and image you want to nurture. I believe that by broadening images and stories that more men would feel connected to will attract a more diverse membership over time. This should also contribute to a changed general perception among the public

Individual Member & Table Actions

From discussing routes to membership I heard about people googling groups in their area, individuals approaching members at Table events (e.g. Fireworks), existing members invitation and family member invitation. In an active conversation about inclusion you might task individuals and Tables to think about friends, colleagues and acquaintances from more diverse backgrounds to invite along. This personal route, in my opinion, is more likely to bring change in the short term.

Within this, Tables may need to consider extending some of their activity profiles to ensure a broad range of people can be involved in some, if not all. This does not need to be onerous, I heard specific comment from Tables referencing events that "everyone" could join in with (e.g. Pie Off on the Isle of Wight) regardless of money, health or ability.

Sense Checking

Because it can be very difficult to check and review content to ensure it is inclusive and would be positively viewed by a more diverse group of men you might consider creating a small "Sense Checker" group made up of members from diverse backgrounds. This demonstrates commitment and can support whole organisational learning as you move forward.

Direction of Travel

To this end you might consider setting goals for review as a means of measuring whether your strategies are working to change internal and external perceptions.



Other Valuable Research

- More detailed profiling of particular Tables to explore characteristics that are attracting and retaining members and / or generating high levels of funding and impact - who is doing what and why it's working so well.
- Local and area strategies and techniques for positive engagement and change to form the materials for a Round Table Bank - perhaps connected to similar Regional, National or International efforts elsewhere.
- Actively contact and engage with "quiet" or "resistant" Tables to explore any issues or difficulties they are experiencing in connecting with other Tables or with the Table infrastructure.
- More detailed research into the value of RTBI in terms of:
 - Men's Mental Health, its roots in connection, friendship and purpose and the role the Table plays in supporting its membership.
 - Personal & Professional Development for members and the role Table is playing in enhancing their profile and career development.
- What strategies, tactics and techniques would work to further enhance, nurture and support the free flow of information and stories throughout the Table network to enable greater engagement, impact and learning for the future
- How RTBI, feeds into, connects with and learns from Ladies Circle, 41 Club and Tangent for learning and impact.
- Base line checking of membership profile to be able to check improved diversity profile against.
- Although I would be more than happy to support RTBI with this additional research I believe much of it could be addressed through existing infrastructure and members. If you would like to explore this or any other aspect of this report then I would be delighted to discuss them with the appropriate groups or individuals.



Summary Findings

Four Key Areas of Impact across RTBI

Summarised findings across hard data and story-based research

Friendship Observation 1

- Friendship - Local, National, International
- Camaraderie & Trust
- Connection Purpose
- Playfulness & Laughter

Personal Development Observation 2

- Skill Development
- Mentoring & Coaching
- Career & Professional Enhancement
- National/International Network

Mental Health Observation 3

- Support in crisis
- Enduring connection
- Purpose in helping others

Rapid & Targeted Community Impact Observation 4

- Raising significant funds for distribution
- Significant community impact over time (usual)
- Crisis Response

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the individuals who have contributed to this report, giving up their time to submit information and to speak with me about their experiences.

In selecting the stories for inclusion in the report we were spoilt for choice and in the end increased the number selected to try and achieve the kind of issue and area coverage we were hoping for as well as doing justice to the stories submitted.

However, in any selection process we are forced to leave out many important and valuable stories simply because they have a similar content or scope to another. What matters is that these stories will remain part of the archive of this report and I very much appreciate all the effort involved in their submission.

I am also mindful of the Tables who might not have had chance to submit, knowing there will be many amazing stories, as yet untold in the national arena. I ask only that you all continue to collect and share these powerful stories that demonstrate the scale and quality of your work and that you properly celebrate the energy, effort and care you contribute to each other and your communities in such a lovely, funny and gentle manner.

You not what I was expecting when I began this piece of research and please be assured I have become a huge advocate for what you are doing and achieving.

Can I also particularly thank Alan and Paul (National Community Officer & Immediate Past National President) for their support and encouragement in completing this report. I hope it is all that you were hoping for and that I have accurately reflected and valued the impact of your many and varying activities.

Ruth

Contact

Ruth Jackson 07515 356771

ruth_jackson@me.com

RJS - Ruth Jackson Solutions (also Ntangled Consultancy)

