

Interview with Anna Redshaw

Founder of the Blue Sunday Tea Party For M.E.

Champion fundraiser Anna Redshaw's Blue Sunday Tea Party For M.E. is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year and has so far raised over £70,000 for M.E. charities across the world.

Anna, who has had M.E. since 2010, was unable to take part in more 'conventional' methods of fundraising due to her ill health and wanted to hold an event that was accessible to all. In 2013, the Blue Sunday Tea Party For M.E. was born to raise vital funds for people with M.E. and break the isolation so often experienced by those in the community.

In this article, we interview Anna to find out more about her amazing event which has become an established occasion for the M.E. community.



Why did you start the Blue Sunday Tea Party for M.E. fundraiser?

As M.E. Awareness week 2013 came around I noticed there wasn't anything accessible that I could join in with. I wanted so desperately to do something and be a part of something, after having to all-but-remove myself completely from society after becoming so severely unwell in 2010. It didn't make sense to me that existing fundraising initiatives weren't accessible to the people living with the illness that was being fundraised for.

In November 2012 my family and I had asked our friends to send a photo of themselves having a cup of tea and a slice of cake to mark my birthday. At the time I was too unwell for visitors but seeing everyone's faces pop up on social media or via text was so heartwarming. That became my inspiration for creating Blue Sunday.



How much have you raised in previous years and what is your target for this year?

The 2013 event raised £200 for one M.E. charity. Last year's event raised £30,000 split between eleven charities across the world. To date, £70,000 has been raised by some of the poorest people in society and their loved ones.

I don't usually dare to say a target out loud but if we can match last year's £30,000, Blue Sunday will have raised £100,000 since it began ten years ago.

What do you think makes the Blue Sunday Tea Party such a successful fundraiser?

There aren't many occasions that bring people with M.E. together that are positive. We must constantly and consistently campaign for the removal of inaccurate and damaging treatments; something we have continued to do now that millions more are finding themselves disabled by post-viral illness as a result of the pandemic.

Blue Sunday is different because it unites us in far more of a celebratory way. These are people who would have been so within their rights to throw in the towel, and yet they remain hopeful that understanding will come; that treatment will come. It is a day of joy and happiness; a rare opportunity for those around us to show their support for us when there is so little else they can do to help or relieve our suffering.

With the influx of new patients suffering with post-viral fatigue illness as a result of the pandemic, more people than ever are realising that some people become unwell and never recover. But Blue Sunday continues to show people that they are not alone or forgotten, and that joy can come from even the harshest circumstances. All whilst fundraising for the charities who support us.

How do you feel about this being the 10th anniversary of the Blue Sunday Tea Party?

I feel incredibly proud and a little overwhelmed that such a simple concept has become so well loved and has continued to grow year on year. It's astounding but highlights how powerful inclusion is and how much people with M.E. want desperately to be a part of something. Anniversaries can become quite tricky when you're unwell but this one feels lovely.



Twitter: [@theslowlane_ME](#)
Instagram: [@teapartyform.e](#)
Facebook: [@theslowlaneME](#)
Anna's Blog: ['M.E. Myself and I'](#)

Why did you choose Action for M.E. as one of the charities to fundraise for?

I have had the pleasure of being in touch with several M.E. charities since my fundraising event began. The support I receive from [Action for M.E.](#) has been exceptional. There is something so validating in someone understanding that you might not be able to reply to an email immediately, for example. Every member of the team has an outstanding understanding of M.E. and that can be rare to come across. I have witnessed first-hand the sheer dedication of the Action for M.E. team, at every turn, to improve the lives of people living with M.E. Their involvement with the current [DecodeME DNA Study](#), and their role in making it a reality should not be forgotten.

[Action for M.E. Blue Sunday 2023 Fundraising Page](#)

How do people take part?

In whatever way works best with their own symptoms. Some people invite friends or family over for an in-person tea party. Others host a video call with their loved ones. Many spend the day alone in bed as they so often have to do, but they join us all online. The online/virtual aspect of Blue Sunday has been incredibly important to me since the event began. The very people living with M.E. must be able to join in in some way!

People from all over the world are invited to enjoy tea and cake at the worldwide Tea Party For M.E. and they share photos of themselves doing so. This means that even those who are alone on the day can feel a part of the event. People living with M.E. and chronic illness have been utilising the internet for connection and friendship long before the pandemic hit and made it a necessity for others.

- Dust off your best cups and saucers, or your favourite mug
- Wear something blue
- Bake or buy your favourite cake, and enjoy a slice or two on the day
- Donate the price you'd pay for tea and cake to the Blue Sunday [donation page for Action for M.E.](#)
- Post a photo of your tea party set-up to social media
- Join others online as they do the same from their own homes. There is a Facebook Event to join or use the hashtags on Instagram/Twitter [#BlueSunday2023](#) [#TeaPartyForME2023](#)

Knowing that not everyone who would like to join in can enjoy tea and cake, I've had some Blue Sunday t-shirts made. The material is organic cotton in the hope those more severely affected might be able to wear one if they wish to. There is no obligation to buy one but I wanted the option to be there this year.



What will your Blue Sunday Tea Party look like this year?

As someone who remains more vulnerable to viruses and bugs as a result of M.E. damaging my immune system, I must remain mindful and cautious of the situation with covid-19. So, my Tea Party For M.E. will be a smaller, outdoor gathering again this year, with my family and a few close friends.



We love to see your Guinea pigs getting involved in the tea party! Will they be making an appearance this year?

They never fully cooperate despite my best efforts, but I hope to get a photo of them each wearing their blue awareness ribbons!

Do you have a go-to recipe you like to make for the day?

I'll be looking through Becky Excell's '[How To Bake Anything Gluten Free](#)' again. The shortbread is really good and none of my guests realised it was gluten free last year.

This recipe is taken from her [website](#).



INGREDIENTS

- 125 g butter softened (use Stork hard margarine if dairy-free)
- 65 g caster sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract optional – more important if making these dairy-free
- 200 g gluten-free plain flour
- 50 g cornflour cornstarch
- 1/4 tsp xanthan gum
- 100 g milk chocolate optional – only for chocolate dipped shortbread

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat your oven to 150C fan / 170C and prepare a couple of baking trays with non stick baking paper.
2. In a large bowl mix together the softened butter and sugar to combine. Then add the vanilla and mix once more – do this with a spatula, not a mixer.
3. Add the plain flour, cornflour and xanthan gum and mix once more with your spatula. It will be super crumbly, but once combined get your hands in to start bringing it together to form a ball of dough. It takes time, and you'll think 'it's not coming together, it's too dry' – ignore that thought, just keep going for a few minutes.
4. Once into a smooth ball of dough, roll it out between two pieces of non stick baking paper to about 6mm thick. Cut out 5.5cm rounds using a cookie cutter and place them onto your prepared baking trays. They don't really spread so huge gaps aren't necessary.
5. Sprinkle the dough circles with extra caster sugar and poke a few holes in the top. Make sure you re-roll your dough so you use it up.
6. Bake it the oven for around 18-20 minutes until cooked. Remember – we don't want any signs of browning! Allow to cool and enjoy!



What do you want people to know about M.E.?

I could write a whole essay on this!

I'd like those who are new to M.E., either the symptoms or the diagnosis, to know that there is so much comfort, power and support in Community. Just look at what we as a community have achieved through Blue Sunday! The shared wisdom and the validation of what you're going through can be a truly wonderful thing. I have no doubt that finding others online changed my poorly little life for the better. Life is likely going to be very different from how they imagined it and while hope of recovery may dwindle, hope can be for other things; acceptance, moments of respite or peace, online friendships, and even hope that you might be able to host your own tea party on Blue Sunday.

What do you enjoy the most about fundraising and why is this fundraiser so important to you?

I love the difference it makes to my friends living with M.E.; to see the happiness on their faces when their loved ones join in, and to hear how much it meant to them to be able to join in with something even if their symptoms haven't allowed them to get out of bed.

It is an honour and a privilege to witness their family and friends taking the opportunity to show their love and support. This illness does not just affect the person with the symptoms; it has a far-reaching, often all-encompassing effect. I know from my own family's experience that those around us feel so helpless. But Blue Sunday gives them all a chance to help simply by joining up and acknowledging that our cause is worthy.

With £70,000 raised since 2013 by some of the most debilitated members of society, Blue Sunday shows the power of online community in the absence of medical care or understanding. Incredibly unwell people desperate to feel a part of something after being omitted from society, are planning to come together again this year on Sunday 14th May.



Anna's Blue Sunday Tea Party raised nearly £10,000 for Action for M.E. in 2022, and over £70,000 for a number of M.E. charities since its inception. To join Anna in fundraising for Action for M.E., or to support the 2023 Blue Sunday Tea Party, you can visit [our fundraising page](#). As a charity, we rely on the generous support of fantastic fundraisers like Anna to be able to continue providing our vital support services for people of all ages living with M.E.

With huge thanks to Anna, for bringing the community together and supporting Action for M.E.

