

## What is a Happy to Chat Bench?

The Chemung County Department of Aging and Long Term Care is excited to announce the **Happy to Chat Bench Project**! This community initiative through partnership with Elmira Downtown Development and funding through the Community Foundation aims to bring attention to the growing challenges of social isolation and loneliness within Chemung County. By designating special benches as "Happy to Chat" spaces, we encourage our community members to greet and engage in friendly conversations with others who may occupy these benches. The project is a simple yet meaningful way to promote social connections and create a sense of belonging in our community.

These benches, placed throughout Elmira and nearby areas, will have clear markers identifying them as "Happy to Chat" spots. Whether you're looking to make new friends, or simply share a smile, these benches provide a warm invitation for positive interactions.

### Friendly Tips to Protect Your Privacy while "CHATTING"

While we encourage our community to connect and make meaningful conversations, we also want to ensure everyone's safety and comfort. Here are some friendly tips to help you protect your personal information while engaging with others on a Happy to Chat Bench:

- Keep personal information private. Avoid sharing details such as your full name, address, phone number, or any financial information.
- Use general topics for conversations. Safe topics to discuss might include the weather, community events, favorite hobbies, or local recommendations. This keeps the conversation light and open.
- If at any point you feel uncomfortable or if the conversation goes in an unexpected direction, it's okay to politely excuse yourself.
- The benches are here to promote positive, casual interactions, so there's no pressure to continue a conversation that doesn't feel right for you.

For more information on the Happy to Chat Bench Project, contact us at the Chemung County Department of Aging and Long Term Care (607) 737-5520 or email [ofa@chemungcountyny.gov](mailto:ofa@chemungcountyny.gov).

Together, we can foster a more connected, compassionate, and safer community. Thank you for being part of this initiative, and we look forward to seeing you at a Happy to Chat Bench soon!

Beth Stranges

Beth Stranges, Director  
Chemung County Department of Aging and Long Term Care