

The two redundancies have seen the friends grow even closer. "It suddenly makes you realise what a benefit they are to your life," says Claire, who adds that it was her friends who gave her the confidence to start out on her own. So, with the hotel budget looking rather shaky, the next girlie weekend will be at one of their homes. "We're just going to have loads of fun," says Charlie.

## The stitchettes

Who needs therapy when there is Stitch and Bitch, the stitchettes' weekly knitting night. "There's a huge emotional benefit to knitting. It's stress-reducing, and you don't always have to talk," says Purl Princess (aka Laura Davis, by day a market researcher). "But it's also nice to have a good moan," points out Knitting Ninja (or Joelle Finck, an English teacher). "We save up the 'Aargh' from the week," says Deadly Knitshade (the freelance writer Lauren O'Farrell).

In fact, distraction from life's worries was Stitch and Bitch's starting point. When, five years ago, Lauren was diagnosed with cancer, she decided to learn to knit. Her friend Laura and cousin Joelle got their needles out and others soon followed. Attending their meetings kept her going, she reckons. "The girls would take my mind off the horrible stuff. Laura tells everyone that knitting cured me."

With knitting the thread of their friendship, the stitchettes are all

pretty different, which they see as a good thing. "We all bring something unique to the group," says the medical researcher Jenny Steere (code name Startitis, for starting, but not finishing, lots of projects). Laura agrees. "We support each other in different ways. There's always someone there to understand."

With a group, the pool of boy totty is considerably bolstered, too. Fingers mischievously point to Joelle. "It's useful when the girls know your bloke," she says. "I can ask them what a cryptic text means, about their background. And they tell me if he's no good for me."

What about competing for airtime? Is there enough to go round? "It depends what's going on in your life," says Jenny. "If somebody's having a hard time, they get most of the oxygen." Currently, it's Doctor Stitchlove (Annisa Chand, a PhD student) whose needs are greatest — she was too busy writing about endocrinology to join last week's knitfest. "But none of us is a real attention-seeker," adds Jenny. "It wouldn't work if we were." ▶

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