

Message from our Chair



2019 was another busy year for our organisation, with change on a number of fronts for us. We welcomed on board **two new trustees**, Philip Hearfield who has now and on a permanent basis, taken on the mantle of Honorary Secretary from Roger Parrott, a founder member of the organisation who stepped down last year, and Rhiannon Wilson who replaces Eula Hersey who we were also sorry to see step down. **Staff changes** during the year saw Janice Eastwood take over as Administrator, Sam Moggan as our Tarporley OPAL Club Organiser, and Jackie Clegg appointed in the newly created role of Volunteer Co-ordinator. Jackie has since moved on but made an invaluable contribution to the development of the role which we thank her for; we are currently recruiting a replacement.

My gratitude goes to all our staff who work over and above their hours and make a massive difference to the organisation. I also need to acknowledge the amount of work undertaken by our trustees who work so hard in a voluntary capacity to add value to what we do.

I would also like to express my thanks for the support received from **Cheshire West Voluntary Action** via their SkillShare scheme, where professionals offer their services to charities free of charge. Most recently we have received help with website development, redesigning our logo, name and style, and the development of a stock of images that we can use for our publicity. Business consultant Ceri George has helped us with our rebranding activity, and local photographer Warren McLennay has been busy taking some very positive images of activities happening within our services, some of which are in this newsletter for you to see.

On the 13th November we held **our AGM** at Cheshire View in Waverton. It was well attended by our staff team, trustees, local councillors, lots of our volunteers and a few carers and members. The meeting allowed us to reflect on what happened throughout the year and to be aware of some of the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for us.

Special thanks were given to all who support us in so many different ways, including our staff, trustees, volunteers, members and their families, and those who fund and commission our services.

The meeting received a report of accounts from our Treasurer Mary Thompson, and our external examiner Rebecca Ellams from Livesey Brown declared that she was very happy with the state of the accounts and the way they were being dealt with.



We finished the evening with a very interesting presentation from Tom and Kathy Barham who have developed an exciting approach known as the Book of You. Recently featured on Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*, the Book of You is a social enterprise based in North Wales, working with older people and people living with dementia, to improve their wellbeing through digital life stories and reminiscence. This is an idea we are hoping to explore further with our service users in the coming year. Our next AGM will be on 11th November 2020.

We're changing our name in 2020!

We've been working hard behind the scenes over the last year to enable us to rebrand ourselves so it will be much clearer who we are and what we do. We recently changed our name formally from Rural Community Services to **OPAL Services (Rural West Cheshire)** and are now known simply as **OPAL** on an everyday basis. Although we are in the process of an image change, we remain the same organisation.

This will be our new logo which was chosen as we feel it comes closer to representing all that we are about. We will continue to work on the rebrand over the next few months, enabling us to go fully live in April. To officially recognise the rebrand, we will be holding a Celebratory event on March 18th at Ashton Hayes Village Hall from 4pm onwards, more details to follow so watch this space!



With Best Wishes, Jane Colville

What's New? OPAL Clubs

2019 has been an extremely busy year for all our Opal Club Organisers who have arranged a variety of activities and outings. These include pottery making, pressed-flower art, Origami, baking jam, tarts, gingerbread men, salt dough wreaths and mince pies, flower arranging demos, chocolate tasting, talks on WW1 and the home front, visits from owls, llamas, therapy dogs, brass bands, choirs, Vikings, and trips to garden centres, canals, and cafes!! Here are just a few recent highlights from across our Clubs!



What's New? OPAL services

Branching Out

Branching Out is the new name for services we are able to continue and develop with thanks to a grant from the Marshes Community Benefit Fund. Our Thursday morning drop-in at Frodsham Library continues to offer support to people looking for new local activities to try. This year they included New Age Kurling and health walks, as well as opportunities for a drink and a chat. We also run an Activity Café at the King's Church in Helsby with activities such as crafts, table games and GoOnLine. Members from all our services attend and meet new people, and new members from the local community are also welcome. Gentle chair based exercise is being added to the programme in the New Year. For more information, please contact Julie Ennis on 07512-632515 or email julie.ennis@opalservices.org.uk.

GoOnLine

Our popular IT drop-in sessions continue to run, where our experienced volunteers help individuals with any aspect of using their mobile phones, laptops or tablets. In 2019, we held 88 sessions with over 90 regular clients coming along. We offered services in Ashton Hayes, Cotebrook, Farndon, Frodsham, Helsby, Oakmere and Tattenhall, and from January we will also be running sessions in Malpas. They are sociable as well as informative, with one of our main objectives being to ensure that everyone is safe online. For more information please contact Jean Toyn on 07923-425239.



What's Cooking?

We continue to run What's Cooking groups in Frodsham, Helsby and Farndon. Each friendly social group is led by volunteers and based around food and cooking. Group members contribute ideas and a varied programme is then offered. All groups enjoy food demonstrations and tastings, and have sampled a wide variety from soup to salads, and curry to cous cous. In the summer, Frodsham enjoyed a visit to the Walton Lea Walled Garden project, and Farndon were recently amazed by a talk from a local beekeeper. Helsby reminisced with the help of some old cook books, and made a delicious retro banoffee pie!



To join us, please contact Julie Ennis on 07513-632515 or email

julie.ennis@opalservices.org.uk.

Carer services

Our Breaktime and Carers Connect services were busy in 2019 with volunteers supporting over 40 carers. We are delighted to have welcomed many new Breaktime volunteers on board, who along with existing volunteers do an amazing job supporting carers in their homes.

Those who take part in our Carers Connect sessions have enjoyed a range of different activities from Tai Chi, mindfulness and complimentary therapies, to craft sessions and visits to art centres. Not forgetting our ever popular garden centre social gatherings where we like to sit, drink tea and catch up with everyone's news. We held a lovely afternoon tea event during carers week in June, which was attended by carers from both services, and we are looking forward to another busy year in 2020 starting with some New Year celebrations.

Volunteers

2019 saw us make some big changes in terms of volunteers. We recruited a volunteer coordinator who has worked hard all year recruiting new volunteers for all of our services, as well as implementing new processes to ensure volunteers are getting what they want from their volunteering. We had a great response to our volunteer satisfaction survey, so thank you to everyone who took the time to complete it, we value your feedback and it helps us improve your volunteer experience.

One of the biggest changes is that we no longer need to carry out DBS checks for the majority of our volunteers due to our services not fitting the requirements for the checks. The main advantage of this is that volunteers can now start within 2-3 weeks of applying.

Another development has been the introduction of the **Time Credit reward scheme**. Every Opal volunteer is entitled to join the scheme where for every hour volunteered, they earn one Time Credit voucher. These can then be redeemed against a number of leisure activities and experiences, both regionally and nationally. We are delighted to be part of this national scheme as it allows us to recognise and thank our wonderful volunteers with a tangible reward. For more information please visit www.timecredits.com.



We start 2020 with **215 volunteers**, delivering **419 volunteer hours every week**, so thank you to each and every one of you! The enthusiasm and dedication of all volunteers really does ensure we deliver the best service to all of our members, and we know from their feedback that what we do is absolutely invaluable to them.

Fundraising for OPAL

We pride ourselves on providing a high quality service to our members, and are always looking for new ways to bring money in to fund this. Alongside the money our fundraising team secure from grants towards our core costs, we also have to organise fundraising events throughout the year. This means we can go beyond just the basics and provide many extras, such as days out, parties and Christmas gifts for every club member.

In October, we held a Fashion Show in Tattenhall hosted by Chameleon Style who showcased a beautiful selection of clothes and accessories. Despite the awful weather, there was a great turnout and we raised over £800. Thank you to John Huxley and Malpas OPAL club for donating the sausage rolls and mince pies!



In December, we held our Grand Christmas Draw which raised an amazing £3,600!! Thank you to everyone who bought tickets, and to all the generous individuals and businesses who donated an array of fabulous raffle prizes. The draw was made at the Malpas Opal Club Xmas party, all winners have been notified.

We also had a stall at the Ho Ho Helsby community event, raising £300 from a bottle raffle, thank you to everyone who donated prizes and to the volunteers who kindly ran the stall.



Kelsall OPAL Club is currently one of the local causes chosen by the Co-Op Local Community Fund. There is still time to join the scheme and choose us to help raise funds by visiting www.membership.coop.co.uk/causes/41978.

There will also be some super fundraising Quiz Nights in a village near you very soon so watch this space!! Follow us on [Facebook/OpalServicesCheshire](https://www.facebook.com/OpalServicesCheshire) for more details!!

Other ways you could help...

We are very lucky to be supported by many families and friends of those who benefit from what we do. One way to support us long into the future is to consider leaving us a legacy in your will, or to ask family to pass on funeral donations. Many who use OPAL services have done this already and their generosity has made a real difference, benefitting members enormously. If you would like to discuss this further, please speak with any member of the OPAL staff or trustee team.

To find out more about the work we do please visit www.opalservices.org.uk or [Facebook/OpalServicesCheshire](https://www.facebook.com/OpalServicesCheshire)
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