



opal matters@opalservices.org.uk

Issue 7 - June 2020

MATTERS



Queen's Award

We've had to keep a very close secret here at OPAL over the last few weeks but we are now delighted to inform everyone that we have been awarded a prestigious Queen's award for our 'valuable contribution to voluntary work'. The Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire David Briggs, M.B.E., K.St.J, will honour OPAL with the highest award a voluntary group can receive in the UK - along with a signed certificate from the Queen and an invitation to the Royal Garden Party next year. This is an amazing honour and a fabulous nod to our amazing Volunteers—well done everyone.

"OPAL Services truly is a remarkable organisation which provides what I can only describe as a lifeline for older residents in rural villages throughout West Cheshire. Thanks to their team of very special volunteers it puts smiles on people's faces and it brings happiness and purpose back into the lives of many."

Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire David Briggs, M.B.E., K.St.J

What a great time to say thanks!



Volunteers' Week is an annual celebration of the contribution millions of people make across the UK through volunteering.

At OPAL we are lucky enough to have over 200 volunteers who between them have given over 419 hours per week in the last year to help prevent social isolation in older people in rural West Cheshire. Our Volunteers' adaptability during the COVID-19 crisis has also ensured that our Members have continued to feel supported in these uncertain times.

As a way of saying thank you, and to celebrate Volunteers' Week, we have delivered a goody bag to all our Volunteers which includes amongst other things an afternoon tea, a certificate and one of our newly branded OPAL badges. We'd like to thank the Co-op, Berry Fresh Bakery, Malpas Community Minibus and Clotton Hall Dairy for helping to make this possible.

Thank you to all our Volunteers—you really do make a difference.



A message from Jane Colville, Chair of Trustees

What an exciting time for us all and so much for us to celebrate!

Firstly we are celebrating Volunteers' Week, an annual event which is held across the country to thank all those who volunteer their time and effort to support and inspire others. And, if that wasn't enough, we have just had announced that OPAL has been given the Queen's Award for Volunteering. This effectively means that all our wonderful Volunteers have earned this very prestigious national award in recognition of their hard work, commitment and skill. It is such an honour to receive an award of this kind.

Due to the pandemic we will not be presented with the award until later in the year at which time this will be performed by David Briggs M.B.E, K.St.J. —the Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire. Meanwhile, keep an eye out for an increase in publicity about OPAL and the work we all continue to do to keep OPAL a success even in these very difficult times.

Once again very well done. We should all be proud of ourselves. Thank You.



GoOnLine

Our GoOnLine sessions across the Cheshire West area had been growing rapidly before COVID-19 with many new venues being introduced. Unfortunately, we had to put a stop to these during lockdown so instead we have implemented our remote GoOnLine service. This remote service helps individuals in many different ways - some through online virtual platforms, such as Skype/FaceTime/Zoom and some by phone. Our Volunteers have been fantastic in adapting to this type of service.

New members are always welcome to join us, but more than ever during this time when the use of technology has become a lifeline for many. Please contact jean.toyn@opalservices.org.uk for more information.

Introducing OPAL's newest project.....

A new and very exciting project will be commencing in late June at OPAL and we are all very excited to get started.



'The Book of You' is an online reminiscence tool where, with the help of our Volunteers, members will be able to

record and build their own stories and memories of the areas they live in for everyone to share.

We will be introducing this initially into a few of our OPAL Clubs and expanding out to our other services later in the year.

This project is generously funded by the Vivo Fund.



Caring for the Carers



8 - 14 June 2020

Next week (8th—14th June) is 'Carers Week' and the theme is 'Making Caring Visible' for unpaid carers. In the last survey of carers (2011) there were over 37,000 unpaid carers living in Cheshire West.

Caring can be rewarding but also difficult and many carers are currently dealing with more challenges than ever before. It is important that carers know how to look after their own health and wellbeing, and that we all recognise the contribution that carers make. Caring impacts on all aspects of life, from relationships and health to finances and work. This should not be underestimated, and caring without the right information and support can be tough.

We run BreakTime and Carers Connect, supporting carers living rurally and we will be making sure all our Carers are recognised during this special week with different events taking place - including holding a virtual afternoon tea party for all our Carers.

It's Good To Talk....

To help stop the spread of Covid-19, we knew that we would need temporarily to close all services where groups of people meet - at our Clubs and the GoOnLine, What's Cooking and Branching Out sessions. So that's what we started to do on Wednesday March 18th - before the official lockdown came into force. This was a difficult decision for our Trustees, knowing that the OPAL community - whether they be older people or volunteers - gain so much from meeting others socially.

However, thanks to the hard work of our Organisers contacting all our Volunteers and the people who use our services, we were able to set up a full operational telephone befriending service within 10 days. This has been a great success and has enabled people, who are socially isolating and unable to see others, to have a friendly voice on the phone at least once a week for a good long chat.

We also have a number of carers and volunteers meeting up on a regular basis via their computer, iPad or tablet on Zoom and we would like to bring this activity to more people in the future. Currently our Volunteers are calling 97 people each week confirming it is, now more than ever, good to talk...

MEMBER QUOTE...

I am a member at Kelsall and would like to say what a lovely time we have.

Zoe is a fantastic leader and we have a lovely set of helpers who look after us. They have been especially nice during the lockdown and ring us every week to chat which is very welcome. I'm sure they enjoy it too - it's nice to keep in touch. We have missed our meetings and hope things will soon be back to normal...

To stay in touch with our brilliant team of Volunteers during lockdown, we are using Zoom to have fortnightly catch ups with our different volunteer groups. These popular sessions help us gather feedback on our services and are a really important way for all our Volunteers to feel connected. We've been supported by our experienced GoOnline team to help those who were unsure of the technology to be able to join in the chats.



Volunteering Numbers!

Our Volunteers keep very busy at OPAL—here's some interesting facts and figures....



What some of our Volunteers say about volunteering at OPAL

To say I love it is an understatement. I can't wait to get back.

I enjoy working with a team with the other volunteers, everyone brings different skills and it works brilliantly.

I know I'm doing a lot of good for a charity locally. Often when I'm out shopping people stop and tell me how much their relatives are enjoying the club, which is lovely to hear.

During Covid-19 befriending, in my phone calls, I have learnt so much about the members and the local area. What a delight!

I love giving something
back to society and
you get as much back
as you give.

It's lovely to meet new people and the members become friends too. When you go home at the end of the day you feel you've done something good.

If you'd like to learn more about volunteering at OPAL please contact our Volunteer Coordinator on 07592 464856 or email janet.handley@opalservices.org.uk

The show must go on....

As a registered charity, we depend upon income from various funders for the resources we need.

During the Covid-19 period we have developed services we can deliver at a distance - and we have sought funds for this. A grant from CWAC and The Westminster Foundation has enabled us to ensure that everyone in the OPAL community feels valued and supported.

The Marshes Community Benefit Fund has granted us funding for Branching Out for the next year in Helsby and Frodsham which will assist with both the recovery phase and also moving forward...

Our new service, a weekly publication, OPAL Reach, goes to everyone in the OPAL community. Thanks to the kindness of the Farrall family of Farrall's Group, Ashton, Chester, it is printed for us free of charge and a donation from Helsby Running Club helped us get up and running.



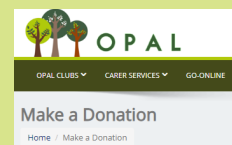
In Kelsall we are currently receiving the Co-op Community Fund's local charity donations, so thank you again to the Co-op and to local shoppers who choose to support OPAL. Previously both Tarporley and Malpas Clubs have benefited in the same way.

It is difficult to plan for fundraising activities during such uncertain times, but we have a plan for a major activity... all will be revealed in the next issue...

How can you help us?

Here is one way...recently a cherished member of the OPAL community passed away. She was not able to donate to us during her lifetime, but she asked her family to request donations in lieu of flowers at her funeral to OPAL Services (Rural West Cheshire). We are most grateful to be remembered in this way and it is kindness like this that makes a difference.

There are many ways you can support us. If you are a member of an OPAL service, feel free to hand a donation in a marked envelope to your Organiser. For other methods, please look at the **DONATE** section on our website– www.opalservices.org.uk



Partnerships

OPAL does not exist in a vacuum. We are part of a larger community and we benefit significantly from the creative and collaborative partnerships we enjoy. This is true more now than ever before, as we join together with neighbours and partners to tackle the issues that arise due to Covid-19, working with others across towns, villages and hamlets.

Currently we are joining with community partners – parish councils, health centres, local councillors and others to ensure that everyone has their physical needs met (food, medications, cash) and feels supported, through our other OPAL services. Locally we work effectively with a number of partners such as churches, libraries, community centres, local WIs and other social groups. OPAL has its finger on the local community pulse.

Looking ahead, we are collaborating with a wide range of strategic partners from CWAC, health agencies and third sector bodies to make sure we participate in mapping out services for our target audience. The short- term future is uncertain, but we are looking forward to playing a role in the recovery and reshaping of services for older people and their carers in rural West Cheshire.

Think about me, not my age