



opalatters@opalservices.org.uk

Issue 8 - September 2020

# MATTERS



## OPAL RECOVERY PLANS

*A message from Jane Colville, Chair of Trustees*

*The coronavirus pandemic has forced us to make changes to all our lives which we could hardly have imagined 6 months ago. Like the rest of the country OPAL has been making strenuous efforts to regain some kind of normality. We know how important this is to our OPAL community. We know too that many of our members and volunteers have been unable to socialise for many months and within government guidance we are working as hard as we can to find lively alternative ways of keeping our community in touch.*

*It's not simple though. It feels as if we are in the middle of a giant puzzle where the rules keep changing and the obstacles facing us are formidable. We have started to plan our recovery and we have been building on the steps we took when lockdown began. We introduced a few alternative services as soon as it became clear we couldn't bring people together face to face in the way we have always done.*

*Our weekly news sheet 'OPAL Reach' has quickly become an important point of contact for the OPAL community, as has our telephone befriending service which keeps our members and carers in regular contact by telephone. We have also been running our OPAL Carers Connect and OPAL GoOnline sessions remotely. The latter also to help our members stay in touch with family and friends even if they are not always accustomed to using technology.*



*We are delighted with the feedback we have had from those using our new services but many of you tell us you also yearn for the services we ran before the pandemic. What everyone wants is to be able to go back to having face to face contact with friends, volunteers and staff too. Sadly, we think it's going to be quite a long time before we can meet together in larger groups again but we are looking very carefully at how we might meet in smaller groups, maybe for shorter time periods, while still keeping everyone safe. But even these look difficult given the latest reduction in numbers of people who can meet together. So, as a consequence, we are exploring a number of further new service possibilities.*

*We are investigating the possible use of a minibus to help provide transport for some of our services and deliver items such as our Activity Packs. We think this could enable more people to take advantage of the opportunities we do have on offer, such as small group meet ups once we are able to do so again.*

*Our aim is to begin pilots of our ideas over the next few weeks, with a view to delivering services that look different but have the same goals in mind. To that end we are planning carefully, taking full account of the stringent health and safety requirements, ensuring that where we have contractual relationships with the Council they are prepared for us to provide a different looking service and making sure we have any necessary additional funding in place.*

*So, it's a case of 'watch this space'. We will make sure all stakeholders are informed as soon as we are able to move forward with our further proposals and we will let you know the ways you may be able to help.*

*Meanwhile, in this edition you will find information on what we are currently doing and what we aim to do, in the medium and longer term.*

*All of this is of course against a backdrop of the ongoing pandemic with all the changing restrictions it has brought us. Stay safe.*

*Jane Colville*

### KEEPING IN THE LOOP...

CWAC is bringing together a network of Community Champions so they can play their part to keep communities safe, share important information and advice with residents and report any feedback they may have.

We have two appointed Community Champions on our OPAL team enabling us to keep our community regularly updated.



## OPAL IN TOUCH...

We are living in extraordinary times and one of the big stories from the pandemic is how quickly people in general have turned to technology. Online meetings and online shopping have quickly become the norm for many.

For older people however, the picture is different. Social isolation and loneliness in older people has always been an issue, especially in our rural communities, but for many, coronavirus has made the problem much worse.

OPAL is working hard to respond to this issue. As soon as lockdown began, we reviewed our services and devised several that lent themselves to being delivered remotely. This suited some, but we are aware that a significant proportion could have had greater engagement had they had access to and been able to use technologies such as Skype, Facetime and Zoom.

To assist this group, we hope to introduce a new OPAL in Touch service to help us reach out to our older people and their carers who currently have limited or no access to the digital world.

We are actively seeking funding to offer a variety of technologies which can keep them connected and meanwhile, a pilot group is being set up with OPAL members, carers and volunteers. Our plan is to provide a simple device that is tailored to the needs of each person, members of the pilot group will have one-to-one mentor support and we will engage with families to offer further assistance.

In 2019 of the 4 million people in the UK who have never used the internet, 94% are aged 55 and over, 84% were over the age of 65 and 62% over 75.

[www.ageing-better.org.uk/blogs/how-are-older-people-adapting-digital-technology-during-covid-19-pandemic](http://www.ageing-better.org.uk/blogs/how-are-older-people-adapting-digital-technology-during-covid-19-pandemic)

## GETTING CRAFTY....

When lockdown started, everyone became aware of the importance of keeping busy and finding enjoyable ways to pass the time and it was fantastic to see all the things people were doing to help others – making scrubs, bags, masks for local hospitals to enjoying having the time to indulge in hobbies.

OPAL Branching Out members had previously enjoyed participating in the “Social Butterfly” project so when Age Friendly Cheshire West proposed a follow on project, Creative Kindness, we took up the challenge. In addition to inviting members who had participated in the first project, we invited members and volunteers from the other OPAL services in the Frodsham and Helsby area. As a result, craft activity packs were delivered and over 50 kindness cards were made.



Following the success of this first pack, further packs have been made available. As OPAL knows that many of our OPAL community enjoy knitting and crocheting, in August a “knitting for OPAL” project was launched. A knitting activity pack is available for members and volunteers who want to return to the pastime and there is something for everyone from knitting and crocheting squares to more complex patterns.

## WE’LL MEET AGAIN - OPAL GARDEN VISITS

Some OPAL members and BreakTime carers and their volunteers have thoroughly enjoyed trialling our OPAL Garden Visits over the last couple of weeks.

Following COVID guidelines, our volunteers have visited members in their own gardens. With brolly, sun hat, cardigan, rug and deckchair at the ready, several hours have been spent having a good old catch up. As we know all too well now, nothing beats chatting face to face and some fresh air and sunshine have lifted spirits too.

These visits will continue and increase until the good ol’ British weather stops play!



## STILL REACHING OUT...

At the beginning of lockdown, we began our OPAL Reach newsletter and we've been sending it out weekly to our OPAL community. We had fantastic response to our survey in June asking for views on the newsletter, with over 95% stating they felt receiving it had made them feel less isolated during lockdown. Our supplements are also being warmly received. Topics of these have varied from cooking and gardening to VE Day and holiday memories, along with our transport special which featured our partners, Farrall's Group.



All issues of OPAL Reach and its supplements can be found on our website - [www.opalservices.org.uk](http://www.opalservices.org.uk)

## OPAL NEEDS...YOU!

OPAL has a strong and effective Board of 9 trustees - all of whom are volunteers, committed to bringing different skills and experience to the table. We are currently looking to recruit one or two more trustees and are looking for people with some spare time and who are prepared to commit to us as a charity that supports older people and carers living in rural West Cheshire.

As a Board of Trustees, we have recognised our need for greater diversity and have also identified a few skill areas that would help us make a difference. This includes marketing and communication and governance.

We also need, within the next six months, to appoint a new Chair. In respect of the latter we would be happy to consider someone with experience of that role - even though they might have no current links with OPAL. If you are interested or know someone who might be please contact our current Chair, Jane Colville on 01829 752607 or email [jane.colville@opalservices.org.uk](mailto:jane.colville@opalservices.org.uk)

*Trusteeship gives you the opportunity to put your skills to work in a creative way with a team of passionate and dedicated volunteers who are making a real difference to the lives of older people in Cheshire*

***If you'd like to learn more about other volunteering roles at OPAL please contact our Volunteer Coordinator on 07592 464856 or email [janet.handley@opalservices.org.uk](mailto:janet.handley@opalservices.org.uk)***

## KEEP CALM, AND CARRY ON TRAINING...

Like everyone since the pandemic arrived, OPAL has needed to adapt and adjust its 'normal' working practices. Training has been no exception. OPAL has always recognised the importance of on-going training and has ensured that staff and volunteers have continued to be able to keep up-to-date - albeit most sessions have been delivered 'virtually'. Zoom, webinars and YouTube have all been invaluable in keeping us updated during COVID-19.

Online refresher training in adult safeguarding has been a high priority during pandemic, along with training in cyber security and we are looking forward to training in Outlook following our transfer to Office 365 just as the pandemic began.



**Rhiannon Wilson, OPAL trustee and Safeguarding Lead explains why this training is more important now than ever...**

***"Protecting people and Safeguarding Responsibilities is a duty and Governance Priority for OPAL services. It is a fundamental aspect of how we operate as a charity for our members' benefit. As part of fulfilling our trustee duties we take all reasonable steps to protect members, staff and volunteers from potential harm or abuse. It is important that any concerns they might experience can be raised and be listened to. We endeavour to create a safe and welcoming environment in the support we provide in Befriending and Delivered Activities."***

## FUNDING SUPPORT...

OPAL is delighted with the recent generosity of our supporters. You may recall from our last issue the grant we received from **Vivo** for our electronic Book of You project. Book of You is a reminiscence project that is widely used with older people and it is ideal for keeping people engaged. One of the beauties of the Book of You is that it can be produced remotely as long as there are tablets to use, and the Vivo funding enabled this to happen.

There are already several books in preparation in a few OPAL Club areas - Frodsham and Kelsall and Tarporley - and other books are in progress. One is collecting memories of OPAL members on VE Day, and another producing a contemporary record of OPAL members during lockdown.



We were also just one of three recipients of a generous grant from **INEOS** across the NW of England. INEOS is a

global chemical company and recently they have turned their hands to the international production of hand sanitiser products....

INEOS made a contribution of £10K towards the costs of the salary of our Volunteer Co-ordinator.

OPAL is a volunteer-led charity, and the pandemic

has generated a need for more volunteers with specific and different skills. Having a dedicated member of staff tasked with recruiting and supporting our volunteers has contributed to our recent award, the Queen's Award for Volunteering.



We also received a second significant donation from **The Marshes Community**

**Benevolent Fund (MCBF)** for our work across Helsby and Frodsham, in recognition of the significant achievement of our first year of support from MCBF. Finally, we would

like to add our grateful thanks once again to **Farrall's Group** for their ongoing support for OPAL Reach, and to **Jo Morley** whose on-line wool and knitting business was so generous to us in the contribution of wool for our Activity Box project.

*"This generous award provides financial security, enabling us to plan for, recruit, train and support volunteers, both now and in readiness for life after coronavirus."*

*John Webb, OPAL trustee*

## HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT OPAL?



In case you are reviewing or altering or adding to your Will, and you are thinking about leaving a gift to OPAL, it is simple. All you

have to do is include the following:

OPAL Services (Rural West Cheshire), charity reg 1143753.

Share this with your solicitor. You can be confident that OPAL will use your gift in years to come to benefit the OPAL community.

*OPAL thanks you.*

**Save the Date!**

**OPAL AGM**

**Wednesday 11th November**

**Virtual event - friends and members of the public welcome.**

**To register your interest please email : [matters@opalservices.org.uk](mailto:matters@opalservices.org.uk)**

Kindly printed by



**FARRALL'S GROUP**

**Think about me, not my age**

**OPAL Services (Rural West Cheshire)**

**PO Box 161, Whitchurch, SY13 9BG**

[www.opalservices.org.uk](http://www.opalservices.org.uk)

© 2020. OPAL Services (Rural West Cheshire)

Registered Charity No: 1143753  
Registered Company No. 7521625