



opal matters@opal services.org.uk

Issue 9 - December 2020

MATTERS

A MESSAGE FROM JANE COLVILLE, CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

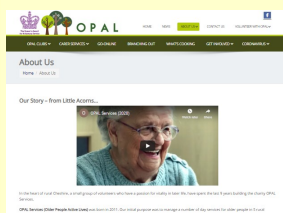


As 2020 draws to a close it leaves behind for all of us memories, emotions and experiences that a year ago we would never have imagined. I sincerely hope that 2021 is a very different year, one that is full of hope and with a steady return to life as we all knew it before the pandemic. OPAL would like to wish everyone connected with us in any way a Christmas that will bring some joy and cheer and the promise of much better in the months to come.

The last few months have been particularly busy for OPAL. We held our Annual General meeting on 11 November and this year it was preceded by a presentation to our volunteers by David Briggs, the Lord-Lieutenant of Cheshire, of the Queens Award for Voluntary Service. His accompanying speech was insightful and very positive, full of recognition of the role and importance of volunteers and very complimentary about OPAL as an organization. We would like to thank the Lord-Lieutenant for taking the time and trouble he did to make the presentation in such a thoughtful way.



True to form, OPAL is never content to simply stand still and will always rise to challenges that face us. The trustees have for a few weeks now been working with a consultant who was introduced to us through the CWVA Skillshare scheme. This has involved a review of the governance of our organization, its structure and sustainability. Our efforts to achieve more diversity within the Board continues as does our aim to recruit more trustees who can offer additional skills and experience. We are actively seeking a new Chair, one with a passion for our mission and who will come with new energy and ideas. We will be continuing this search into 2021.



Part of the work being undertaken in all of this has been the updating of OPAL's Story which provides a summary of our beginnings, our journey and our aspirations for the future. 'Our Story' can be found on our website <https://www.opalservices.org.uk/about-us/> for anyone interested to know where OPAL came from and what is planned for the future. If anyone wants it in paper form please ask one of our staff or trustees and we will arrange this.

To finish I'd like to wish everyone a very safe and enjoyable Christmas and a New Year that brings with it the promise and the reality of much better for all.

Jane Colville

BACK TO THE FUTURE—HOPE, VACCINES AND 2021

The very latest development in the twists and turns of 2020 is the approval of vaccines to help us beat Covid-19. The excellent news is that the rollout of the Pfizer vaccine began for the over 80s in Frodsham and Helsby on 14th December with the second dose starting on 4th January.

We welcome this development and are cautiously beginning to plan for what it might mean for a resumption of OPAL services. This is great news for our older members and we look forward to a time in the not-too-distant future when all our members, our staff and our volunteers will also be protected so we can move into the future with confidence.



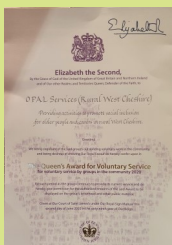
CHESTERSTANDARD.CO.UK
Tarvin woman, aged 92, first in Cheshire to receive the Covid-19 vaccine

'SPREADERS OF HAPPINESS'

Our Annual General Meeting was a very different experience from usual for two reasons. Firstly of course the pandemic meant we had to hold the event virtually and secondly we had the wonderful opportunity of inviting the Lord-Lieutenant of Cheshire, David Briggs, to join us at the beginning of our meeting to officially award our wonderful volunteers with their Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

"You are a special charity. Of 4,000 charities in Cheshire only 4 received this Award. Making you all truly one in a 1000!"
David Briggs,
Lord-Lieutenant of Cheshire

With support from our OPAL GoOnline volunteers, we had fantastic turn-out for the event with over 60 participants joining us via Zoom. Mr Briggs gave a very well researched speech commenting on the amazing role our volunteers provide to the community and calling them 'spreaders of happiness'.



Following the presentation, Jane Colville, Chair of Trustees, officially opened the AGM and the business of reviewing the year 2019/2020 commenced. Jane complimented the annual report which has this year been created for online purposes and utilises the new branding introduced during the last twelve months.



To view a copy of the report please visit

<https://www.opalservices.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/OPAL-Services-Annual-Report-October-2020.pdf>

SPREADING SOME CHRISTMAS SPIRIT...

It's hard to believe we have just delivered our third Activity Pack to our club members - where does the time go? This time it was a real bumper bag, filled with our calendar, activities, gifts and homemade treats.



As organisers, we try very hard to make the packs interesting, original and thought-provoking and the feedback we have received has been wonderful. We have also put together a short video entitled 'The Activity Pack, a journey' which features our very own 'first' as May the horse delivered a pack for us! The video can be viewed at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2Kumq-80o>

This time the packs included quizzes, colouring, Christmas craft-making ideas along with a pack of cards and lots of single player games. Plus lots of other activities to keep our members amused over the Christmas period. Because we were released into Tier 2, our wonderful volunteers were also able to have a doorstep chat when they made the deliveries, and even the rain and cold didn't stop them taking place. We are so grateful to our volunteers for helping us complete this task with over 100 delivered this month.

Of course, we couldn't make the packs as great as they are without the wonderful contributions others offer and we would like to thank everyone involved for their amazing support. Here is some of the feedback we have received.

"I love receiving my Activity Pack—I take my time going through each thing one by one—it's like a treasure chest"

"What you are doing is making a real difference. She really appreciates your efforts, as indeed do we as her family."

"Calendar was lovely and the grandchildren read out the bits on each page."

"Another big thank you. She is thrilled, Father Christmas came yesterday with parcels of gifts."

"Opal has certainly surpassed all expectations."

"Did puzzles with the family and made crackers with the grandchildren."

"Overwhelmed, loved everything."

CHRISTMAS CARDS FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL

Usually at this time of year, our clubs are delighted to welcome children from local primary schools to come and sing carols with our club members. Sadly, we were unable to arrange these this year but instead asked our local schoolchildren to make their own bespoke Christmas card for all our members. These were delivered to each member within their activity packs last week.

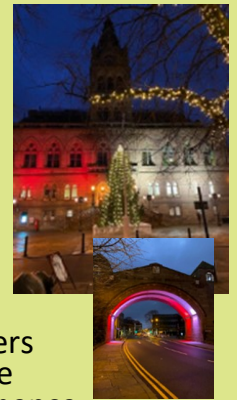


Thank you to all the primary schools who participated in this project and a particular thanks to Noah from Tarporley Primary School for his role in our 'Activity Pack - The Journey' video!



CARING FOR OUR CARERS

Thursday 26th November was 'Carers' Rights Day' and Cheshire West and Chester were the first council to light up their Town Hall and bridge in recognition of the amazing work carers do across the county. We were delighted to see this initiative taking place and hope it will be repeated, perhaps nationally, next year.



At OPAL, we held a 'Know Your Rights' virtual Zoom meeting with visitors, including CWaC, answering questions and advising how to access information.

It's been a difficult year for all our OPAL community this year, but for our carers it's been hard for us to run our usual carer breaks and group events. We have been running Zoom sessions throughout the pandemic and are keen to commence with outdoor meet-ups in the New Year—weather permitting of course!

On 21st & 22nd December, Carer Organisers Jean and Sam will be making doorstep Christmas catch-ups and leaving each of our carers with a festive treat pack to enjoy.

VOLUNTEER UPDATE

As mentioned earlier, as part of our AGM, David Briggs, Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, presented our volunteers with the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service which we received in June. The Lord-Lieutenant was thrilled to be able to congratulate so many of our volunteers personally for their achievement in receiving such a prestigious award.



Volunteering at OPAL, despite COVID, is still going from strength to strength. We have recruited a further 14 new volunteers to join our team of over 200 current volunteers. They have continued to show their adaptability through befriending calls, garden visits (restrictions and weather allowing) and now with their support in delivering over 100+ activity packs to our members every two months. They have also contributed photos for an OPAL calendar featuring Cheshire views and these are being given to members as part of their Christmas packs.

In October, our safeguarding training was well attended and was a useful insight into this vital area.

Looking forward to 2021, volunteers will receive their own quarterly newsletter to keep them informed of news across our OPAL community. Recruitment will continue for new volunteers to ensure we are sufficiently supported when clubs reopen in 2021.

We are also hoping to involve our volunteers with the creation of a Fundraising Events Sub Committee supported by staff to plan a calendar of OPAL fundraising events and activities.

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

FUNDING SUCCESSES

Since our last edition of OPAL Matters, we have had further good news on the funding front. The Anne Duchess of Westminster fund has awarded us £4,000 in part funding for our OPAL Reach Newsletter and the Marjorie Boddy Fund has awarded us £1,000 also for OPAL Reach. The CW&C Covid response fund has part funded our OPAL Activity packs for a whopping £6,000 which will keep us going until the end of the year and the Co-op through it's membership scheme has not only paid £2,185 for 2019/20 but has accepted us for 2020/21 too. We are also very fortunate to have support from James Timpson who has offered us an opportunity to be involved in their National Gardens Day on Sunday 23 May and to benefit from the income generated from this. We are very much looking forward to his event which will be publicised closer to the time. We would like to thank all our funders and supporters for their generosity. We really appreciate it.



PLANS ON HOLD

Sadly several applications for larger sums have not materialized to date. It is bitter sweet that where we have had feedback, we have been told we so very nearly succeeded – but not quite. This means that our important and more ambitious plans for OPAL on Wheels and OPAL In Touch will not go forward just yet – but we will not give up. We will continue to seek out sponsorship or grants. We know our ideas are good and keeping older people connected to their communities is just too important to be diverted from.

INTERNAL FUNDRAISING

More recently our internal fundraising activities have gone digital! With initial sponsorship from McCarthy & Stone who are about to open a brand new housing scheme for the over 50s in Malpas, we produced our beautiful, bespoke **OPAL Calendars** using photos of rural west Cheshire taken by our multi-talented volunteers. Initially conceived as a gift to our members, these are too good not to take advantage of and are now being offered for sale/in exchange for a donation to OPAL. If you would like to order a calendar visit <https://opal.sumup.link/>

Our stunning **OPAL Christmas e-cards** also feature seasonal photos of west Cheshire provided by our volunteers. They are available for a donation of what you might have spent on traditional cards. So if you want to be kind to the environment and send some last minute e-cards this Christmas, and help a worthy cause, you can do so now by going to: <https://www.dontsendmeacard.com/charities/PAOL>

In addition to these exiting schemes we are planning our internal fundraising programme for 2021 and are currently in the midst of setting up a planning team that we hope will include staff, volunteers and maybe members who will lead that important area of funding activity. There are already some exciting ideas about fund raising activities being shared and we look forward to a lively and interesting year.

OUR FUNDING TEAM – STARS!

OPAL would like to make a BIG 'shout out' to acknowledge the work of our tremendous funding team. They are constantly researching and searching for new sources of income and we reported on some of these successes in the last issue of OPAL Matters. This involves them making multiple funding applications, many of which are complex and time consuming. With the pandemic, this is subject to greater levels of competition so the chances of success are far less than they were. We have had some disappointments recently and some of our plans for the future cannot yet move forward but we applaud the team for all they have each achieved throughout 2020 and for what they continue to achieve for OPAL.

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Think about me, not my age

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