



opal matters@opal services.org.uk

Issue 10 - March 2021

# MATTERS

## A message from Jane

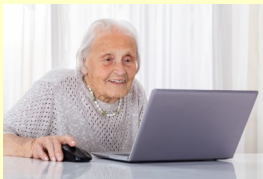


*Well, now we have a Roadmap out of lockdown, the vaccine rollout continues apace and the days are getting longer, at last we have reasons to be more optimistic about the future. We have had some excellent news on the funding front and we have appointed new trustees to strengthen our team.*

*Without underestimating the challenges ahead, OPAL is already working hard on plans for getting back to a new 'normal'. It's easy and so very understandable to feel fed up and frustrated when faced with the uncertainties we have all experienced over the last year. The future is still far from clear and we are doing our best to manage in a world which is ever changing and unpredictable, but be reassured, OPAL continues to do its very best to provide services that make a real difference.*

*We want in this issue to share with all our stakeholders the really heartening news that we have been successful in securing a contract with the Council to provide Carer Break services from April 2021 through to Autumn 2022. This service, called BreakTime Plus, will enable us to increase our offer to carers of older people in rural west Cheshire.*

*We have also very recently been offered some funding by the Council to enhance our befriending services through the next financial year. We provide a number of such services including our OPAL Reach newsletter, our OPAL Activity Packs and the telephone befriending our volunteers undertake. This funding will allow us to extend this whole offer and make improvements to what we do. It is very welcome news indeed and we know full well what a difference it will make to so many of the people we touch within OPAL.*



*In addition to all of this, we are delighted that we can now push forward with our very exciting new service - OPAL InTouch. This is an area where we have been struggling to gain funding to get it off the ground but it can now take place thanks to the Masonic Charitable Foundation (London Office), the Cheshire Province and from the Cheshire West LTTA fund. OPAL InTouch will address one of the clearest messages of the pandemic, that older people must not be left behind in the use of new technology.*

*Jane Colville*

## BACK TO THE FUTURE—HOPE, VACCINES AND 2021

In the last edition of OPAL Matters we were excited to announce that vaccines had begun to be administered in some areas of our community to the over 80s. In this edition, we are delighted to announce that many more have also received the vaccine and shortly the programme will begin to administer second jabs for those who haven't already had them.

Well done everyone working so hard to make this happen (including some of our very own OPAL volunteers). This progress means that our volunteers and staff will soon be ready for the easing of lockdown.



## INTRODUCING...BREAKTIME PLUS

Our new contract for carers, BreakTime Plus, means that we are now in a position to provide more services across the Cheshire West rural communities. We can now help even more carers access support, learn new skills or just enjoy some company. Here's a snap shot of our new offerings— due to commence in April (and of course subject to COVID restrictions).

**PERSONAL ASSESSMENT PLANS** - carers joining this service will receive a personal assessment plan and, together with their organiser, will develop their bespoke twelve month plan. Regular reviews will be undertaken to ensure the carer is accessing and enjoying the services offered.

### ACTIVITY focussed breaks – groups

Weekly social gatherings indoors and out, small and large groups, across Cheshire West. These breaks will include club style gatherings with multiple activities during the session, visits to local attractions, smaller coffee and catch up gatherings - to name but a few.

### BESPOKE ACTIVITY focussed breaks – individual

A series of sessions for a carer (and the person with care needs if preferred) to learn a new skill and attend lifestyle and wellbeing resources.

### EDUCATIONAL – group based

Complementary Therapy sessions, GoOnline session providing IT support, What's Cooking demonstrations, First Aid courses and lots more.

### TELEPHONE BEFRIENDING

Regular phone call with a selected volunteer to build a long-term relationship.

### SITTING SERVICE

Regular breaks for the carer whilst an OPAL volunteer sits with the person with care needs.



Current Carers Connect and OPAL BreakTime carers will be contacted during April and May for assessment and develop their personal plan. For further information, please email [sam.moggan@opalservices.org.uk](mailto:sam.moggan@opalservices.org.uk).

## EXPANDING OUR REACH

New OPAL services implemented during the pandemic have been recognised by the Council as beneficial to older people in our communities now and in the future. They have awarded OPAL additional funding to continue and expand our telephone befriending service, OPAL Reach newsletter and OPAL Activity Packs services. We are delighted that our work has been recognised in this way and that we will be able to provide even more people with support, both during and after the pandemic restrictions are lifted.



At the very beginning of lockdown, back in March 2020, we quickly acknowledged that we needed to find alternative ways to communicate with, and continue to help our community feel less isolated, even with the restrictions we found ourselves facing. We tasked our volunteers to join us in our telephone befriending project - contacting our club members at least once a week for a good natter and catch up. To complement this activity, we distributed our first copy of OPAL REACH, a weekly newsletter providing news, local updates, quizzes, fun trivia and lots more. Our telephone befrienders often use OPAL REACH as a talking point during their calls.

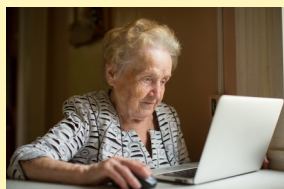


On 24th August 2020 our first OPAL Activity Pack was delivered to our club members and since then we have expanded this to users of all our OPAL services. Throughout the last twelve months we've continued to adapt, initially delivering packs during doorstep visits and latterly delivering them via post as lockdown was reimposed.



The feedback we receive continuously from both our members and our volunteers is always positive and recipients really look forward to the different methods of contact we provide. We are all obviously looking forward to a return to our pre Covid services but recognise that some may prefer to continue with the current services in the short term or even as an alternative to our clubs and this additional funding will ensure we can continue to do so until March 2022, whilst also being able to invite even more older people and carers to benefit too.

## AND THE GOOD NEWS CONTINUES....



We all know that loneliness and social isolation are widely recognised as among the most challenging issues facing an ageing society. And as reported in our last edition, the COVID-19 pandemic has made OPAL acutely aware of the high percentage of older people with little or no experience of communication technology and who, as a result, have sadly been unable to connect to others through technology during this time. After a lot of hard work from our funding team, we are so pleased that we have been awarded

funding through the Masonic Charitable Foundation (London Office), the Cheshire Province and from Cheshire West LTTA fund so that we can commence our very exciting new service - OPAL InTouch. The service will be run through our very successful GoOnline service and will provide an opportunity to transform the lives of older people caught in this circle of isolation. OPAL InTouch will provide older people, who currently have limited or no access to the digital world, an opportunity to sample a variety of communication platforms selected against their individual needs. Each client will be appointed a volunteer who will support them on their IT journey. The service will commence in April 2021. Please contact [jean.toyn@opalservices.org.uk](mailto:jean.toyn@opalservices.org.uk) for further information.

## KEEPING BUSY IN LOCKDOWN 3

With the New Year starting with a third lockdown, coinciding with cold weather and dark nights, at OPAL we were determined to help people keep busy and put a smile on their faces. Unable to deliver our usual OPAL Activity Bags we refined our activities to fit into Postal Packs. We also increased their frequency and managed to fit them in with our OPAL Reach Newsletter, which has meant posting to 150 members and volunteers, who aren't on email. All OPAL Activity packs include a range of activities designed to cover topics relevant to our target age group and we adapted the activities in the postal pack to continue to offer engagement across a variety of subjects as well as encouraging differing levels and types of participation.

Each activity is presented as a short article which can be read and enjoyed, but activity ideas include offering the opportunity to expand cognitive engagement by writing, creating and making. The quizzes can be a challenge so to "ask a friend" is definitely allowed and not cheating! We try hard to capture memories to include in the reminiscent activity plus stimulate discussion with family and phone befrienders. This work will also link into OPAL's 'Book of You' project.



## KNIT FOR OPAL

Volunteers and members continue to keep busy through the OPAL knitting activities and a small group have started Knitting Zooms! One of our current projects is knitting 'twiddlemuffs'. A twiddlemuff is a tube of knitting that has various colours, textures, and added extra bits such as buttons, ribbons and zips sewn into it.



These can then be given to somebody with dementia who may enjoy feeling and fiddling with the muff. We will be distributing them within the OPAL Community. The photo on the left are of two beautiful muffs made by Anne and the photo on the right features our OPAL trees made by Maggie.



## OPAL VOLUNTEERS TAKE THE INITIATIVE

During lockdown our fabulous OPAL staff and volunteers have come up with great ideas to help and support older people and carers who are isolated at home. In one of the latest innovations, one of our volunteers, Roger, has created 'Shed Talk'. Roughly based on the 'Men in Sheds' concept, Shed Talk is aimed at getting men together virtually for a catch up and chat (a bit like you might do over a pint pre-covid). There is plenty of chat about cars, sports etc. and **everyone** is welcome to attend. The sessions are weekly every Wednesday at 10.30 until 12.00 and show how OPAL's reach continues to expand, currently with participants from as far and away as North Wales and Bedfordshire! Contact [jean.toyn@opalservices.org.uk](mailto:jean.toyn@opalservices.org.uk) for meeting details.

*The support from our volunteers at OPAL continues to amaze us as we approach a full year of COVID restrictions. We are pleased that our advertisement campaigns have continued to bring new volunteers into our OPAL Community, supporting a range of services.*

*If you'd like to learn more about 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)*



## THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

On the front page of this issue, Jane mentions that OPAL has received some really positive news regarding our fundraising efforts. It is now all systems go on several fronts, so 'Well Done!' to the all staff and trustees involved in these successful applications :

- ◆ A new contract with the Council to provide Carer Break services from April 2021 through to Autumn 2022. We will be reporting on our new BreakTime Plus service from April onwards.
- ◆ Further funding of £30,000, also from the Council to enhance our befriending services as we emerge from lockdown. This funding provides continuity for OPAL Reach, phone befriending services and our activity packs as we move tentatively towards a return to normal services.
- ◆ Funding to set up our new OPAL InTouch service – achievable only through the generous funding from the Masonic Charitable Foundation (London Office), the Cheshire Province and from Cheshire West LTTA fund and the LTTA (Lets Turn This Around) fund.



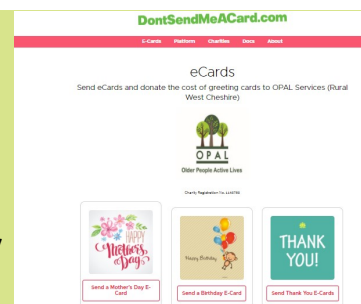
Thank you to all the funders for your new and continued support of OPAL. We know that these funds will make a great difference to older people and carers living in rural communities across our area.

## HELP US HELP OUR COMMUNITY

Whilst OPAL prefers to bring people together to have fun while fundraising - such as our pudding extravaganzas and race nights - our plans for 2021 are now focussed on what we can do using technology.

At some time this year we plan to launch an online lottery and we still invite you all to support us with donations through our OPAL charity e-cards. For the cost of a card and postage stamp you can send birthday ecards and thank you cards by visiting [Dontsendmeacard.com-https://www.dontsendmeacard.com/charities/PAOL](https://www.dontsendmeacard.com/charities/PAOL) .

And as restrictions lift we hope to return to some of the regular events.

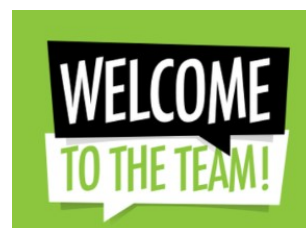


***We are also actively seeking volunteers who enjoy and have experience of fundraising in a digital world. If you fit this description and would like to join our award winning team of OPAL volunteers do get in touch. Please contact: [Janet.handley@opalservices.org.uk](mailto:Janet.handley@opalservices.org.uk) or call 07592 464856.***



## OPAL WELCOMES A NEW TRUSTEE

We are pleased to announce that Ian Bailey has recently joined our Board of Trustees. Ian has a background in industry and brings valuable knowledge of bids and bid writing.



## CENSUS 2021

**census 2021** Sunday 21st March is Census day in 2021. This year for the first time it will be filled in online. OPAL Organisers have been helping members who don't have access to broadband or the internet make sure they have paper copies of the census as it is really important that everyone is able to take part and be counted.

**Think about me, not my age**