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Issue 11 - June 2021

MATTERS

A message from Jane

Well, Summer has finally arrived and we are all naturally hoping to eventually be able to get out more and enjoy others company following such a long period of time. The journey out of lockdown has so far been massively helped by the success of the vaccine programme and OPAL throughout has been carefully planning its route to the 'new normal', which will see us getting out more and meeting people in a planned and careful way. In this issue of OPAL Matters we are able to report on some of the exciting things that have started to happen and reflect on recent successes that we have been able to achieve in extraordinarily difficult circumstances.



As Matters goes off to print, we have had to recognise that we need to apply the brakes once again whilst we support everyone in managing the so-called Delta variant that is now very much in evidence in west Cheshire. This has meant we have had to postpone some of those things we were all looking forward to until they are safe for us to pursue.



It seems so long ago that we really didn't give any thought to how many people we bumped into in a shop or how close they were to us when we were talking. Now it's become part of our routine to put a face mask in our purse or pocket, to edge away from people if they are getting too close and to open and close windows as if we are in the middle of a heatwave regardless of the temperature outside! Life has become very confusing. Changes happen so quickly and the advice can shift, so that the art of keeping up with it all becomes a necessity. The way ahead surely lies in us staying positive and supporting those around us whilst at the same time being watchful and exercising great care. In OPAL we will continue to try to provide good support to our members, carers and

volunteers as we all negotiate this rocky path. We remain hopeful we are gradually getting closer to a life which feels more like it did and that despite there being more twists and turns en route we are becoming better at managing the bends and potholes that appear.

Jane Colville
Chair of Trustees

QUEEN'S AWARD FINALLY OUT AND ABOUT....

It's hard to believe that a year has gone by since OPAL volunteers were awarded the Queen's Award for Volunteering. We were able to thank our wonderful volunteers with afternoon teas delivered to their doorsteps during the pandemic, and the Lord Lieutenant David Briggs very kindly attending our virtual AGM in November to officially hand over the award and certificate.

We are still planning to hold a face to face event in the future to bring all our volunteers together and say a big thank you to them, but in the meantime, as services begin to open up the Queen's Award will be going 'on tour' to ensure everyone has the opportunity to admire this well deserved tribute.

First stop at the beginning of this month was at our carer volunteers meet ups in Kelsall and Waverton, followed by a visit to our carer event in Tarpoley during Carers Week.



CARERS WEEK

At OPAL, we try to help our carers feel visible and valued all year around, but it was great to be able to join with the nation to officially recognise and thank all the carers across Chester and Cheshire West.



OPAL were part of the Inter Agency Carer Group who planned three events on Thursday 10th June to bring together carers across the area. These took place in Ellesmere Port, Northwich, and Tiverton near Tarporley.

We also organised a coffee and catch up for carers and the person they care for at Tiverton earlier in the day and delivered picnic boxes to those who couldn't attend any of the events.



7 - 13 June 2021
Make Caring
Visible and Valued

carersweek.org

BREAKTIME PLUS UPDATE

On 1st April, we commenced our new service BreakTime Plus. Jean and Sam, our Carer Organisers have been busy contacting carers across Cheshire West completing their personal assessment plans. Here's an update from Sam on how the project is progressing....

"In some cases, our reviews have taken place over the telephone, but where there has been an opportunity to meet up we have done just that and it has been lovely to actually see carers, and the person they care for, face to face once again. Feedback so far tells us that our plans for club style sessions on a regular basis across the area would be very welcome, with volunteer support for the cared for so carers can relax, have a coffee and chat or join in with the activities including board games, crafts and Tai Chi. We've had some really interesting responses to our individual session options – with requests for furniture upholstery, golf and complementary therapy sessions to name but a few.

Our sitting service will continue as soon as restrictions allow and this will give carers the opportunity to take some time out from their caring role whilst our wonderful volunteers stay with the person they care for at home.

Over the next few weeks we will have completed the reviews and then a plan of our regular gatherings will be produced - of course these are all subject to COVID restrictions but Jean and I are both very excited to get going with the new services and once again offer opportunities for carers to have a break from their caring role."

**JOIN OUR
TEAM!**

OPAL are recruiting two new Organisers to join our team. Each role is 14 hours per week and further information can be found at

<https://uk.indeed.com/jobs?q=ORGANISER&l=cheshire&sort=date>

SOFT OPENING

Club Organisers are assessing current and new locations to start holding "support group" sessions for up to 6 members as soon as restrictions allow. These will be half day meet ups and a great way to start bringing our members together before we can safely return to full day clubs in the future.

Meantime, we are catching up with members in their gardens or at outdoor locations. Pictured right are a few members and volunteers meeting at the parks in Helsby and Frodsham for a "social stroll" – a chance to catch up with old and new friends - and either walk or sit on a park bench to chat.



ACTIVITY PACKS

Our latest Activity Pack was a postal version - but that didn't stop it being packed full of fun and interesting things to do including colouring, reminiscing, word searches and a special health section on teeth care from our newest Trustee, Lesley. Delivered to all members via post it is also sent out to our email recipients online.

VOLUNTEERS' WEEK

The sun was certainly shining for volunteers across the nation as we celebrated National Volunteers' Week. Our very own award winning OPAL volunteers were sent a thank you letter and certificate for their hard work over the last year and OPAL trustees and staff created a video thank you as well <https://vimeo.com/556890981?ref=em-share>.

It has certainly been a difficult time for everyone and we are so grateful for the adaptability all our volunteers have shown and their continued support for OPAL.



VERSATILE VOLUNTEERING

The COVID pandemic forced our world very quickly to adapt and change the way we do things and our volunteers jumped straight into new roles from club helpers, cooks, carer support and drivers to telephone befrienders, activity pack and reach distributors, proof readers, article writers and lots more. Here's what a few of our volunteers who have added to or changed their role during COVID had to say about it :-



Although I had been a GoOnline volunteer for some time before the pandemic, I didn't know if I would enjoy working remotely with clients. But then I got involved with helping an OPAL carer with their new iPad and found it so rewarding working 1-1 to help them gain confidence and learn to enjoy technology.

JACKIE, TARPORLEY

I went from driver and club treasurer to telephone befriending & garden visits to members, projects for "Book of You" and 'Blast from the Past' for OPAL Reach. It was a steep learning curve for everyone but probably helped to keep me sane during difficult times. ALAN, FRODSHAM

I was a Key Volunteer at Tarporley Club but, for now, I am a telephone befriender to two of the club members and also regularly help with the envelope stuffing and posting for Reach. I'm enjoying these roles but am looking forward to getting back to seeing everyone at clubs once again.

MONICA, ASHTON

I was a driver before COVID - now I am a bit of a jack of all trades helping put together Activity Packs, folding Reach into envelopes and anything else my wife, Sam (Organiser), tells me to do! In fact, it's become a family affair with our daughter and son being roped in whenever they can! It's fun though and still makes me feel as if I can make a difference to someone's life.

RICHARD, TARPORLEY

WHY WEEKLY VOLUNTEERING WORKS FOR 'WELLBEING'

'Wellbeing' is one of those terms we hear about on an almost daily basis since the Covid pandemic. In general terms it means 'how we're doing' – or a bit more precisely as the dictionary says, 'a state of being comfortable, healthy or happy'.

'Wellbeing' is a tricky thing to measure – just how do you measure happiness?! This has not stopped social scientists from trying to do this and that's probably a good thing as a report that was published a couple of weeks ago made some interesting connections between regular volunteering and 'wellbeing'. According to a report entitled 'Faith, Hoops and Charity' produced by a UK organisation called State of Life, weekly volunteering (or taking exercise/playing sport or going to church) has a really positive impact on our health and 'wellbeing'. Apparently, the weekly dose is key – it seems that the seven-day cycle has been deeply embedded in us for thousands of years!

The link to the report is:

<https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/faith-hoops-and-charity-and-why-weekly-works-for-wellbeing/>

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

FUNDING UPDATE

Last time in OPAL Matters we were excited to report on a number of funding successes which have enabled OPAL to plan with confidence for the immediate future of some of our services. Sadly, not all of our services have benefited in this way though and our hardworking fundraising team continues to strive to make all of our services secure for the next 12 months.

We are once again highly delighted to confirm that OPAL in Touch is the beneficiary of further funding having been awarded £7,000 in the latest round of the Marshes Community Benefit Fund awards. This money will go towards developing digital inclusion services for older people and their carers in the MCBF area of Frodsham and Helsby. These participants will receive 1-2-1 mentoring support, tailored to their specific needs to help them benefit from online opportunities. OPAL's thanks go to the MCBF for their invaluable support.



In the last issue of OPAL Matters, OPAL was pleased to announce that it had received £2500 from the Cheshire West and Chester Council Let's Turn it Around fund, also to support OPAL In Touch. In April this funding was boosted by a further £1000 from the fund which will further assist us with this exciting new project which will support older people in rural communities develop digital skills.



If you know an older person living in a rural community across Cheshire West with little or no experience of using I.T. who might be interested in our project, or for further information, please email jean.toyn@opalservices.org.uk

OPAL WELCOMES A NEW TRUSTEE



Lesley was appointed as an OPAL trustee in June 2021. She has a background in dentistry and public health and has worked extensively with the NHS and Local Authorities in the North-West before retiring from her Consultant role in Public Health England last year. She is also an active member of the Methodist Church in the North Cheshire Circuit and looks forward to using her experience to support the work of OPAL.



FEELING LUCKY?

Our fantastic fundraising team have launched a lottery to raise funds. Tickets are just £1 per week and every entry has the opportunity to win the jackpot of £25,000. 50% of each ticket sale comes directly to OPAL to help us support older people and carers across our rural communities.

You can play the lottery online or over the phone and the details are below :

<https://www.onelottery.co.uk/support/opal-services>

Or telephone **01865 678679**

Please do support us and share the news with your friends, family and colleagues....

Think about me, not my age