

MATTERS

A June message from our Chair, Geoff Hope-Terry

Early June is an important time for charities because the first 7 days are designated as National Volunteers' Week. Volunteering is reckoned to be worth over £25 billion annually in the UK, and some 10 million individuals are involved, but the real value comes from the drive, commitment and enthusiasm that volunteers bring to the role. At OPAL we are blessed with an amazing group who excel in all 3 of those qualities. Numbers go up and down of course, but we regularly have 200 volunteers on our books, who willingly give up some or, in many cases, a lot of their spare time to help our members. Without those fantastic volunteers we would not be able to operate and the trustees (who, themselves, are volunteers) organised a special event in the wonderful surroundings of the Abbeywood Estate on 7th June, to say a big **"thanks"** to everyone. There was a wide range of presentations and activities in a full and fun packed programme and, of course, there was cake! We concluded with a performance by the highly enjoyable 'Handbag of Harmonies Choir' and everyone left on a high. Abbeywood management kindly offered a discount for anyone who wanted to visit their colourful gardens in the afternoon and a number of volunteers enjoyed a trip round in the bright weather. OPAL only has a small staff team, but they are all brilliant and it was great that most of them were able to join us on the day.



On the subject of saying 'Thank You,' OPAL is indebted to Councillor John Leather, the outgoing Lord Mayor of Chester, for naming us as one of 3 charities to benefit from fund-raising activities during his year in office. The others were the Chester Mystery Plays, and Fallen Angels Dance Theatre, both of which are equally worthy causes. John, who has been a long-time supporter of OPAL, together with Heather his wife, the Lady Mayoress, worked tirelessly throughout the year promoting tourism in Chester and visiting a wide range of charities and other organisations.

I was fortunate to attend a number of the Lord Mayor's events and I was particularly impressed by the range of topics included in John's many speeches. They were always different and always interesting. Plus, OPAL got a key mention, every time. I confess that, if it were me, I would write one speech and just change the first and last sentences to match the occasion. That's one of the many reasons why I will never be Lord Mayor. We don't know, yet, how much has been raised but, regardless of the amount, we will be forever grateful for the excellent support given by John and Heather.

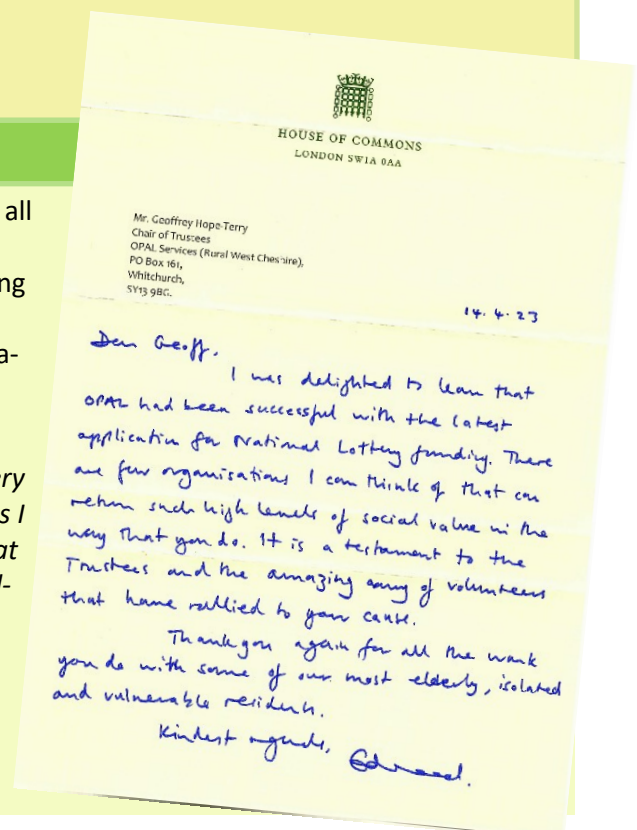
Accolade for OPAL Volunteers

This issue of OPAL Matters celebrates our wonderful volunteers and all the good things they do keeping OPAL services going. In 2020 they were recognised as award winning volunteers by winning the Queen's Award for Volunteering, an honour we still hold. More recently we received a letter on House of Commons headed paper. The letter is from Edward Timpson MP who writes:

"Dear Geoff

I was delighted to learn that OPAL had been successful with the lottery application for National Lottery funding. There are few organisations I can think of that return such high levels of social value in the way that you do. It is a testament to the trustees and the amazing array of volunteers that have rallied to your cause. Thank you again for all that you do with some of our most elderly and vulnerable residents. Kindest regards Edward."

OPAL Volunteers can be proud of their reputation.



Volunteers celebration 2023

Volunteers' Event Abbeywood Gardens 7th June

OPAL's 'thank you' to our volunteers this year took the form of an event at Abbeywood Estate and Gardens on 7th June. It was attended by 60 of our 200+ volunteers. The event was a great success. The gardens at Abbeywood were in full bloom and there was a full programme to get through. We heard from Lesley and Janet about the results of the survey of volunteers which took place in March and from Geoff our Chair about OPAL's plans for the future. Everyone divided into groups to discuss some of the more challenging scenarios that might confront a volunteer working for OPAL services. The discussions were thoughtful and informed. A highlight of the morning was the award of certificates to a number of volunteers who, our records show, have been OPAL volunteers for over 10 years. What an achievement! Congratulations to them and to all our brilliant volunteers no matter how long they have been with us. OPAL is so lucky to have so many talented and committed supporters and we hope they enjoyed being serenaded by the fabulous choir 'Handbag of Harmonies'. A most fitting way for OPAL to say 'Thank you'.



OPAL Volunteers Survey 2023—The results are in!

Staff and other volunteers are always friendly and supportive which makes for an enjoyable time.

I think I get as much from Opal as the Members – lovely people and friendly atmosphere

I enjoy the interaction with the clients and feel this is beneficial for both of us.

92% of OPAL volunteers feel valued and appreciated by their Organiser.

96% of members/clients appreciate the help and support OPAL gives them.

89% feel that their role is important and valuable.

94% feel it's easy to sign up for sessions and share their availability with their organiser.

84% feel they have received recognition or thanks for being a volunteer in the last year.

64% feel they are involved in the decisions that may affect their volunteering .

79% feel well informed about changes within OPAL and events.

91% would recommend volunteering with OPAL to a friend.

I feel an excellent framework is provided in which both the client and Volunteer can participate in a constructive and enjoyable manner to the fullest of their capabilities..

A well organised, interesting and caring environment, and staff providing a safe haven with activities for the elderly.

I enjoy my time speaking with the members and it is often the highlight of my week. It is hugely grounding and humbling. I am thankful I have the time, even though I often feel insignificant.

Carers Week Celebrations 2023

8th to 14th June is Carers Week and on Tuesday 6th June, Carers from the OPAL Breaktime Plus group enjoyed a wonderful afternoon tea with live music at Cheshire View in Christleton to celebrate their role as unpaid carers. The event was organised by The Carers Trust. OPAL continued its celebration of our Breaktime Plus carers with a cream tea at the new Kelsall Wellbeing Hub on Wednesday 7th June when Carers and those they care for enjoyed a lovely afternoon of socialising and making new friends.



Funding successes

National Lottery Community Fund award

OPAL is delighted to announce that our small charity has been awarded £10,000 by the National Lottery Community Fund. This is amazing news as the money will be used to maintain services in the areas of west Cheshire where we already operate and it will contribute to the further development of OPAL GoOnline and OPAL Branching Out.



NFU Mutual Supports OPAL in 2023

Each year NFU Mutual nominates a local front line charity to support and they recently asked their farming members to propose a local front line service charity. OPAL is amazed and delighted to learn that this year we have been nominated. Stuart Chacksfield, one of the 3 partners at the NFU Mutual insurance and farming office at Chester & Hanmer wrote to us to say 'I'm pleased to say you were nominated by a member who has used your services and spoke very highly of your charity, so we propose to make a total donation to you of £7,000.' OPAL is delighted to accept this money which will be put to very good use supporting OPAL services in 2023.



Change of name for OPAL What's Cooking

OPAL What's Cooking becomes OPAL 'Food for Thought'

Organisers Lynda and Alice replace the much missed Julie Ennis and OPAL What's Cooking has undergone a name change and is now known as OPAL Food for Thought. However, it is our volunteers who make it all possible. Kind, funny, talented, and always ready to give their time and energy to make life just that little bit better for our members each and every week.

Thank you to all our volunteers who give their time so generously and as a bonus can also cook delicious food!



Farndon Foodies Flying High!

The fabulous Food for Thought volunteers in Farndon became flight attendants and delivered First Class meals to their "passengers" without anybody having to tackle any busy airports or suffer a delay! Together they celebrated wonderful Greek holiday memories with James, as Sue and Gina prepared Moussaka and Greek salad with Baccalà to finish. Jo Preston from "The Reader" shared a wonderful story about cooking and coffee in India while the volunteers helped bring the story to life by serving a delicious chicken curry and tiramisu.



Branching Out in Elton

From 12th June, a new OPAL Food for Thought group starts at Elton Community Centre. This will meet fortnightly on a Monday from 12:30pm-2pm. It will be an opportunity for people of the Elton area to get together and chat about food with a drink and a bite to eat. Watch this space! If you are interested to volunteer with the new group in Elton, then please contact Alice on 07512632515.

Up and Running in Ashton Hayes

Excitingly an OPAL Food for Thought has recently started in Ashton Hayes. Local people interested in food and cooking can now meet and enjoy lunch and the company of others who share similar interests.

The clubs are run by volunteers who share their own knowledge of cooking and food to create sessions which are interesting and stimulating, whilst keeping a relaxed and friendly atmosphere for participants. The sessions are offered fortnightly on a Wednesday 11am-1pm at The Pavilion Café, Queen Elizabeth II playing fields, Ashton Hayes. Please contact Lynda on 07779283591 for further details.

Changes at OPAL GoOnline

Our OPAL GoOnline services are changing to meet demand. In the last few years we have increasingly found that the numbers of those seeking support with their devices at our GOL sessions has decreased whilst the call for "at home" services has increased. We are responding to this and will continue to run the sessions, albeit at a slightly reduced level. We are very fortunate to have a group of volunteers who are both loyal and are adapting to these changes. Equally we are delighted to have had some new volunteers join the service.



Coronation of King Charles III

There was great enthusiasm among OPAL members for the King's Coronation and everyone was keen to join the celebrations. The OPAL Clubs had special in-house events and Kelsall Club ran a session which was combined with a Bring and Buy sale. As part of the Big Help Out, an invitation was extended to local people to come to support OPAL and maybe offer to be involved in the future as volunteers. Nearly £300 was raised for Kelsall Club. Thank you all!



OPAL Carer Support and OPAL Branching Out (Frodsham) had a Coronation tea



for the members on 2nd May at Sandiway and Cuddington Village Hall and the 'Farndon Foodies' donned patriotic party hats and glasses and enjoyed a feast of traditional British sandwiches, scones and cakes, all of course fit for a King! A little glass of bubbles was raised to wish the new King the very best of luck on his journey ahead and there was a moment's reflection to remember his Mother, Queen Elizabeth II and her contribution to our country.

"Amazing morning, thanks to you and all the ladies".
Eileen Blackwood, Farndon member.



Frodsham Club members were served by the 'royal family'

New staff member: Debbie de Kock

Debbie replaces Joy as Carer Support Organiser. She has worked as an events organiser for a number of charities and until recently was a carer for her own Mum, so has great empathy for people who are looking after a loved one at home and the value of support from others in the same situation. Debbie is enjoying organising events for carers and those they care for, discovering the many cafes that west Cheshire has to offer, visiting places of interest and sharing fun activities. Welcome Debbie!



Invitation to a Midsummer soiree

Join us for tea and cake in the gardens and as the evening unfolds, enjoy a glass of fizz as you wander around.

**Thursday 22nd June
from 5pm –7.30pm**

**Nicholaston Lodge, Cross Lanes,
Oscroft, CH3 8NQ**

£12 per person plus raffle

Get your tickets online at
www.buytickets.at/opalservices

Or email Juliet Compston at
Juliet.compston@opalservices.org.uk

A date for your diary!

**10th October
Wine tasting, details tbc.**

New staff member: Alice Leech

Alice joined OPAL in 2023 to run the Branching Out sessions in Frodsham and Helsby and has been busy starting up a brand new Food for Thought initiative in Elton. Busy on many fronts, Alice also replaces Joanne as Organiser for Tarporley OPAL Club. She tells us she feels very lucky to work with such a fantastic group of volunteers and lovely members. When not working at OPAL, Alice likes walking her dogs and exploring with her four year old son. She also enjoys getting outside and growing vegetables and edible flowers for local restaurants. Welcome Alice!



Think about me, not my age