



opal matters@opal services.org.uk

Issue 19 - December 2023

# MATTERS

## A December message from the Chair of OPAL - Geoff Hope-Terry

The brilliant team at OPAL make Christmas a special time for our members, helped by generous donations from local councils, businesses, and individuals. We're tremendously grateful to all of them for their support. The festivities started in November when we held our Christmas Fair in Bickerton. A big thanks to the many volunteers, members of staff and trustees who put it all together and made a great event. There was a wide choice of brilliant stalls plus, of course, one of OPAL's famous afternoon teas to enjoy. The raffle and tombola had great prizes and I'd like to express my gratitude to the amazing people who regularly provide them. Events like this are lifelines for OPAL in terms of raising money in the current climate.

Staying on the theme of Christmas, I was bowled over by the response to our Christmas Card competition. It was really hard to pick a winner but, eventually, the one featuring snowmen from the fingerprints of Tarporley Club members came out on top. It has everything! You can view a selection on our website.



We held our AGM recently. It was lovely to meet and chat with many of our supporters and in addition to the formal proceedings, there were presentations on OPAL's 3-Year Plan and Age Friendly Cheshire. The 2022/23 Annual Report was approved, and this is also available to read on the website.

One of the joys of my role as Chair is meeting many people from different backgrounds. Something they all have in common though; everyone loves OPAL! If they know us already, they seem to have nothing but praise and admiration and if they haven't come across OPAL before, within 5 minutes of describing our services they are sold on how great we are. An example of this was OPAL's inclusion in the October edition of Cheshire Life, who happily gave us a two-page spread as one of their Good Causes features. I'm very grateful to Debbie and the lovely carers who were enjoying lunch in The Lost Barn Cafe, when I arrived in a panic, needing a photograph to accompany the article, with the deadline fast approaching. I'd also like to thank the Lost Barn team who didn't mind us taking over and snapped the actual photos, which were excellent. As I say, everyone loves OPAL.



Sadly, a couple of members of staff left us recently; one retired and one is commencing an exciting new venture. Jean has been with us from day one, whereas Lynda joined much more recently, but both had a big impact on OPAL. Good luck to them for the future and it was great to catch up with them at the Christmas Fair, still highly involved in OPAL's activities. Meanwhile, I'm pleased to welcome Fiona to the GoOnline team, and I know she will continue the excellent work undertaken by that service.

*I wish you all a wonderful Christmas and let's hope for a better world in 2024.  
Best Wishes Geoff.*



## Passport to Care - A New Initiative



In collaboration with a local charity Snow Angels, OPAL has been awarded a grant for £150,000 under the Government Levelling Up scheme to promote work in the care sector. This will provide valuable skills and experience for those wishing to pursue a career in the wider health and social care areas.

The 'Passport to Care' programme will be delivered by OPAL, partnered with Snow Angels, two organisations with a wealth of experience supporting older people in Cheshire West and Chester. Both charities can offer a range of volunteering opportunities for people taking part.

The 'Passport to Care' programme offers volunteering experiences with older people and carers. This may take place in community settings, in older people's homes, and via the telephone. There will also be a series of training opportunities for example, first aid, dementia awareness, safeguarding, and an understanding of grief and bereavement available to those involved. This structured volunteering programme will provide volunteers with skills and knowledge which could lead to a career in care.

It is hoped the programme will support vulnerable communities in Cheshire West and Chester by having a positive impact on the wellbeing of older people and their access to health and social care services. The programme will provide practical help and support to reducing social isolation and loneliness. It will also support the sustainability of local VCS organisations who will deliver training where relevant.

The scheme is open to a variety of volunteers and, for the first time, we are inviting volunteers who are aged 16-18 to join our volunteering team. We kick started our publicity programme by attending three Career Fairs each attended by over 1000 students from all over west Cheshire.



## Funding Success

In August, OPAL received the grant agreed earlier in the year by Cheshire Community Foundation for £15,000 to part fund a new project that OPAL are running. This project will provide an improved and more responsive form of carer support to unpaid carers of older people with dementia and the people they support.



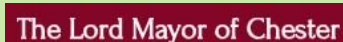
During late Summer, OPAL learnt that it had been chosen as one of two local "good causes". OPAL will, as a result, benefit by 2p in every £1 from purchases made by Co-op members. Co-op members across the country can register and choose OPAL as their "good cause". October 2023 saw the start of what will be 12 months accumulation of donations. We thank the Co-op and its customers for this opportunity.



In September, we were delighted to receive, from the Skipton Charitable Foundation, £3000 to contribute to both our Carer Support services and GoOnline services.



In October, we learnt that we had been fortunate enough to have benefitted from The Lord Mayor of Chester Fund in respect of the previous year when the Lord Mayor was Councillor John Leather. We are indebted to him for his interest in OPAL and this kind donation of just over £3,500.



## OPAL Donations



We'd also like to take this opportunity to thank all of our regular and one-off donors. We're constantly amazed when people choose OPAL to donate to and these donations, big or small, make a huge difference to what we do. Since June we have been grateful to receive donations from Hargrave & Huxley Happy Days, Ladies Who Lunch, St James Place, H Campbell, R Wyatt, B Fritton and Sanctuary Housing to name but a few. Thank you to you all, and those that support OPAL on a regular basis!



# A YEAR OF FUNDRAISING.....



This year we have increased our fundraising efforts, with a mixture of longstanding favourite events and a few new initiatives.

During March, we held our extremely popular Soup Lunch at Kelsall Community Centre. Raising over £500, the lunch was very well supported by our members, volunteers and the Kelsall community.

In June, OPAL held our "Midsummer Soiree", kindly hosted by Felicity Pochin, a volunteer on our recently expanded fundraising team. We were blessed with wonderful weather and our guests had a lovely time wandering around Felicity's beautiful garden, with music, tea and fizz afterwards. The Soiree was such a success that we are already planning next year's event having been offered a venue by another volunteer. We were overwhelmed by our guests generosity and raised over £1,000 over the course of the evening.



In July, OPAL had a stall at Frodsham in the Park and had a great day raising just over £200.

October saw the return of our knitted chocolate oranges. OPAL volunteers and members knitted some lovely ornamental and chocolate orange pumpkins to suit the autumn season. The knitting continued into November ready for our Christmas chocolate oranges, so far our seasonal pumpkins have raised over £500.

In November, OPAL's Christmas celebrating began in full swing with our Christmas Fair and Afternoon Tea. We were joined by stallholders from across the region to display their wares and enjoy a lovely afternoon of crafts, tea and of course a lot of cake! Thanks to your support we raised an amazing £1,250.



"Thank you to all the volunteers who have helped at our fundraising events over the past year and to all those who have come along to support us. We now have a very active Fundraising team who oversee our events. If you'd like to know more, please get in touch".

**Juliet Compston**  
Trustee / Fundraising lead



Every week one player wins a cash prize of about £12 and a chance to win up to £25,000 on our OPAL Lottery.

Since July 2021, our supporters have raised over £3,500 for OPAL.

[www.onelottery.co.uk/support/opal-services](http://www.onelottery.co.uk/support/opal-services)  
Tel: 01865 678679

## Fundraising Save the Date

**27th March - OPAL Fashion Show, Abbeywood Estate & Gardens, time tbc**

**19th May - National Open Garden Scheme, Manley Knoll, Cheshire, time tbc**

**May - Summer Soiree, details tbc**

Send an e-card this Christmas for a small donation to OPAL.

This year's pictures were submitted by some of our amazing volunteers!

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



# STAFF SPOTLIGHT ON OPAL

With the festive season upon us, we asked our staff team what it's like to work for OPAL Services.



## Alice

**What do you love about working for OPAL?** Spending time with members, seeing how much they enjoy socialising.

**Describe your volunteers in 3 words?** Invaluable, caring & fun.

**If you could change one thing about OPAL, what would it be?** Being able to do more for our members without worrying about funding.

**What activity have you enjoyed organising the most?** Taking the members on a "Summer holiday".



## Alison

**What do you love about working for OPAL?**

The members without a doubt and their appreciation of the service we provide.

**Describe your volunteers in 3 words?** Amazing, fun & dedicated.

**What have you learnt from your current role?** Things have a habit of changing last minute!

**If you could change one thing about OPAL, what would it be?** Less admin to free up time for the members.



## Beverley

**What do you love about working for OPAL?** Meeting all the people, all diverse with fascinating lives!

**Describe your volunteers in 3 words?** Patient, understanding & essential.

**If you could change one thing about OPAL, what would it be?** Remembering that older people have lived a life and that it is never too late to learn new skills.

**What activity do you enjoy organising the most?** Our pop up events.



## Debbie

**What do you love about working for OPAL?**

Working locally with a creative dynamic team of talented staff and trustees.

**Describe your volunteers in 3 words?** Compassionate, supportive & fun

**What have you learnt from your current role?** Things we do that seem small, can make a big difference to carers' lives.



## Fiona

**What do you love about working for OPAL?**

Helping older people become familiar with technology.

**Describe your volunteers in 3 words?** Generous, hardworking & helpful.

**What activity have you enjoyed organising the most?** I loved organising the cybersecurity training with Cheshire Police. It's so important these days that older people know how to protect themselves online.



## Janet

**What do you love about working for OPAL?** Empowering our volunteers to make a difference and be more confident.

**Describe your volunteers in 3 words?** Dedicated, passionate & supportive.

**If you could change one thing about OPAL, what would it be?** To expand our area. We often get calls for people just outside our area and it's frustrating not being able to help.



## Maria

**What do you love about working for OPAL?** The range of activities we are able to arrange for our carers and the relationships we have built with our group of carers and their cared for.

**Describe your volunteers in 3 words?** Kind, helpful & amazing

**What activity have you enjoyed organising the most?** My favourite activity was the Beekeeping talk.



## Moe

**What do you love about working for OPAL?** Using my skills for a good cause, popping into the clubs & chatting to the members.

**Describe your volunteers in 3 words?** Hardworking, committed & flexible.

**What have you learnt from your current role?** How reliant a charity is on funding and fundraising.



## Zoe

**What do you love about working for OPAL?** New members who are perhaps lonely, isolated or shy, flourish after coming to our sessions.

**Describe your volunteers in 3 words?** Generous, thoughtful & imaginative.

**What have you learnt from your current role?** To adapt and be flexible to changes in plans, member needs and volunteer availability.



Think about me, not my age