

A photograph of two men laughing together outdoors. On the left is an older Black man with white hair, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt. On the right is a younger white man with a beard, wearing a yellow t-shirt. They are standing in front of a white picket fence and green foliage. The text "Time Together" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Time Together

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Welcome

Hello. I am delighted to be introducing this second edition of Time Together. The last time we sent the magazine the world felt like a very different place. Back then, I asked you to get in touch using the Meryl's Memo page. Your comments gave me a real insight and much food for thought. I hope we can use your ideas to grow and develop some new projects, especially now that life has changed so much and we need to think of other ways to help you keep in touch.

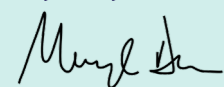
Not surprisingly, you were loud and clear about how much you value our volunteers. In normal times, these are the drivers who pick you up and have tea with you and the hosts who welcome our groups into their homes. Now, the volunteers are keeping in touch by phone. Regardless of their role, our volunteers are the backbone of the organisation - and none of this could happen without the vital work of the coordinators who run the groups. Across the UK there were more than 12,000 volunteers involved with Re-engage last year. I am grateful to every single one of them for making our charity's work possible.

Now I would like to ask you to help us by nominating volunteers for an award. We want to hear from you about the volunteers in your group who have gone above and beyond to make a difference for older people. You can use the enclosed Meryl's Memo and the envelope provided to tell us about your nominee. Final decisions will be made by a panel of judges which will include our President, Lady Jasmine Cavendish.

In this edition of Time Together we share some of the very positive things our volunteers have told us and we give you an update from our Community Christmas campaign. Kit Ching McKeown, one of our guests, relates her life story and we also have an insight into one of our well-known volunteers, Alice Beer. Alice is best known for her work as a consumer affairs journalist appearing on This Morning and Watchdog. But she is also one of our volunteer drivers and here she is profiled by her daughter Phoebe Pascoe.

Do keep the feedback and ideas coming in: we want to include features on the issues that interest you in future editions.

My very best wishes



Meryl Davies
chief executive, Re-engage



Seize the day

Kit Ching McKeown, one of our guests in Glasgow, has a life story that spans two continents.

Kit was born in Hong Kong in 1940. Aged 19, she came to England to train as a psychiatric nurse. She and her late husband met in the hospital where they were both studying and later moved to Scotland. Kit has four children, 14 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren but, sadly, none of them live near her.

As a small child during the war, Kit already had an eventful life. During a Japanese air raid, Kit, her mother and her sister were outside in the street. Kit's mother ran into a building with the children, but it was hit. Emerging unharmed with both her daughters, she wandered around shocked and confused until Kit's father found them. Kit says she can still taste the dust in her mouth from that fateful day.

Kit has seen at first hand how changes in society affect the generations. In Hong Kong, her grandmother lived with the family and was at the centre of everything. Now, families are more dispersed and older people have had to become more independent. She also recalls the long-gone custom of wives and daughters in Hong Kong having to hand over their unopened wage packets to the man of the house. Independence comes in many guises.

As a self-confessed young rebel, Kit was determined to say yes to the

scholarship she won to train abroad, even when her family weren't keen to see her go. Maybe the lucky escape from a wartime bomb has been part of why she has continued to seize the day. After retiring from nursing, she went on to work for Epilepsy Scotland and set up their national phone support line. Nowadays, Kit enjoys friendship with her Re-engage group.

But life can be far from easy at times. After caring for her late husband, Kit met a new partner in the years that followed, who she also cared for and who she has also sadly lost. Kit says, "Life is perpetual challenge and perpetual opportunity." Nothing sums it up better than that.

Do you have a life story you'd like to share? Why not get in touch via Meryl's Memo.



Staying alert to scams

Sussex Police enthusiastically and generously supported Re-engage over the last year. They have also been helping us to raise awareness about fraud prevention. Bernadette Lawrie, the force's financial abuse safeguarding officer, has shared some top tips with us.

"Fraud accounts for almost half of all crime committed and losses can be huge. Fraud can go unreported as people may be embarrassed to tell anyone, but there is no reason to feel this way. The good news is we can all do simple things to protect ourselves.



Tip 1 – Stop, think, ask

One of the most common types of fraud suffered by older people is impersonation, often over the phone but also on the doorstep. If someone visits or rings up saying they're a courier, or from the bank, police, tax office or other organisation, be on the alert, especially if you're asked for any personal information such as your bank details, PIN number or password. No real official would ask for those and you should never give them out. Fraudsters can be clever actors who draw people into friendly conversation on the phone. Just put the receiver down and don't worry about seeming rude.

Always tell someone, particularly if you're in a situation where you're being pressurised to hand over money. Trusted friends, family, and volunteers can help you put a stop to it and report it to the police.

Tip 2 – Be a healthy sceptic

Beware of unsolicited offers. Something that sounds too good to be true probably isn't true. You might receive a call or email inviting you to invest in a financial scheme – or someone might knock on the door and offer to fix the roof or prune a tree. It's always best to seek your own financial advice and quotes from reputable organisations and tradespeople. Cold calls can often start small then grow into a big problem.

Tip 3 – Report and seek support

If you have any concerns, you shouldn't hesitate to contact your local police, even if you're unsure. In an emergency always call 999.

Finally, do remember that while crime unfortunately does exist, the vast majority of people are honest. Together, we can do a lot to halt the spread of fraud."



So much more than tea and biscuits



Phoebe Pascoe is the daughter of Re-engage volunteer and broadcaster Alice Beer. Here, Phoebe writes about how volunteering has had a positive impact on the family.

Alice Beer, like most people nowadays, is very busy. So, one Sunday when she announced that a cohort of older ladies was coming round for tea and biscuits, our family reaction was admittedly not one of universal joy. Yet, it very quickly became clear that volunteering with Re-engage would not be just another commitment in an all too full calendar.

"It is the easiest and most rewarding volunteering I have ever done," Alice says. "It doesn't feel like volunteering, it feels like a social engagement and always a very interesting one."

Spending time with people of a different generation can be seen as laborious, with adults lamenting their mothers-in-law and children being forced to chat with relatives. Re-engage is the antithesis of this. As Alice says: "Instead of it being hard work, everyone is talking and laughing and loving it. I have never, ever met a more appreciative group of people."

By spending an afternoon with Re-engage you are not only contributing to the highlight of someone's month, but it will undoubtedly be a highlight for you too as Alice has found.

"I had no idea the very first time I picked up two ladies and took them for tea that they would become friends and that it would be so enhancing for me as well as for them."

The people involved in Re-engage in our area are mostly women, previously working women, and have a wealth of stories to tell – although not all are fit to be repeated here! Alice says: "They're still as interesting as ever (in fact, more so), but they are limited by what they are physically able to do." Driving for half an hour or making cups of tea at home is so easily done, and the difference it makes to someone who may be house-bound or lonely is unquantifiable.

So next time my mum suggests a tea party at our house I'll be the first in line because however busy we think our lives are, it is spending time with others that should top our to-do lists.



Be our guest

Often, loneliness is something we keep to ourselves. As a charity that focuses on ending loneliness among older people, we know how people who have lost their support networks and loved ones can be overlooked and forgotten.

We also know that a lot of older people don't want to 'make a fuss'. If only they knew the truth: older people make a huge difference to younger generations when they give the gift of their company.

We carried out a survey last summer to find out more about why Sundays in the company of older guests are so special to our volunteers. Here is what they had to say:



"It has greatly enriched my life. I feel that I am doing something useful and have met all sorts of interesting people."

"To see the joy and happiness when the ladies get together for tea and cake is something very special."

"It is a fabulous thing to be involved in. The people you meet are always lovely and it is a joy to spend a Sunday afternoon doing this."

"It has made a huge difference. It gets me out of the house and thinking of others on a regular basis. It also allows me to interact with people at other stages in their life, which is very interesting."

"I really love hosting and making a fuss of our guests and we have such a lovely time and a laugh."

"I enjoy planning our parties and designing invitations and activities to do."

"I really enjoy spending time with older adults and feel it has given me a sense of purpose."

"It has helped me through some difficult times."



Did you know?

There are two main reasons why our volunteers become involved with Re-engage. First, they love spending time with our guests and second, they derive a great deal of satisfaction from having a positive effect on someone's life.



Sharing the joy of Christmas

Loneliness can be most acute over the festive period – a time when as many as 170,000 older people could be having Christmas dinner alone.

We set out to tackle that through our Community Christmas campaign. One of our partners for the campaign was restaurant chain Prezzo. Prezzo invited customers to welcome an older guest to their table to share the celebrations – and some famous customers of Prezzo were keen not to miss out.

Fred, 89, a widower from Egham, Surrey had dinner at Prezzo with singer Josh Cuthbert, from the pop group Union J. Fred said: "It was excellent meeting Josh, I thought he was a very nice chap. We both said we ought to do it again and I hope we do!"

Meanwhile, Anne, 86, and Jordan Hames, a star of the TV show Love Island, met up at Prezzo in Manchester. For Jordan, Anne's company was a very happy reminder of the special relationship he had with his grandmother.

There were plenty of other Community Christmas gatherings nationwide. In Burnham, Buckinghamshire, guests and volunteers enjoyed a delicious festive lunch at The Pines, a beautiful family-run hotel. Thanks to hotel proprietor Simon and volunteer Anne who organised the day, it was a wonderful dining experience and a truly joyous occasion.

It's heartening to know that there are young people who understand the pang of loneliness and want to alleviate it. In East London, Nicky, 29, raised £800 to host a Christmas Day

lunch plus transport. In Edinburgh, students of Trinity Academy raised funds to hold a Christmas party for older guests in what is becoming a school tradition and highlight of the year.

Finally, it's hard to beat the novelty of Christmas celebrations in the unique setting of a laundrette. After hearing that one of her older customers usually sat alone in her front room on 25th December, laundrette manager Polly had a brainwave. Instead of their usual Christmas Day dinner at home, Polly and her family invited guests who would otherwise be on their own to share a traditional, home-cooked meal in the cosy laundrette, surrounded by festive decorations and a beautifully adorned tree.





100 years young

Jim goes to tea parties organised by one of our Epsom groups. In December, everyone came together to celebrate his 100th birthday in style.

Jim always looks on the bright side of life and tries to help others, whether it's giving people his time or helping ladies to their seats. We think the secret to Jim staying so young could well be his love of dancing. His positive outlook and chirpy attitude to life is definitely a real inspiration to us all. Happy birthday Jim.

Re-engage

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