

Autumn 2021



Welcome

The lifting of restrictions over the summer saw some of our tea party groups make plans to get together for the first time in many months. Several of our quests had not been out socially for over a year and there have been many happy and emotional reunions. Every group is proceeding at their own pace and re-starting their monthly tea parties when they feel absolutely ready.



It was 50 years ago that our first tea party group began hosting monthly tea parties in Glasgow and today we have 140 groups across Scotland. In this issue, Kathleen and Karen, our cover stars, talk about how the West Lothian group have supported each other throughout the pandemic. The group has acted as a lifeline to Kathleen after she lost her husband five years ago.

Today we have 1,500 call companion matches throughout the UK. These weekly phone calls often span many miles and lead to lasting new friendships. You can read about how much Julia and Sharon get out of their calls, and the benefits that they bring to them, on page 8.

One of our core aims is to represent those over 75 so that you have a voice and feel heard. This means putting you at the heart of our decision-making so we can shape our future together as we develop new projects. Read about how we are doing this with the help of our advisory group on page 7.

And finally, a special thank you to all of those who replied to the Meryl's Memo insert in our spring edition of Time Together. Please do take a moment to complete our current insert and post it back to us in the envelope provided. Your views will help our important work to support diverse communities.

I hope you enjoy the read.

Meryl Davies chief executive, Re-engage

Cover photo: Elaine Livingstone

Spotlight on West Lothian

50 years ago, our first tea party groups began to meet in Scotland. Thanks to our wonderful volunteers, today we have 140 tea party groups and 128 older people matched to call companions.



Kathleen and Karen

Kathleen and Karen have been part of the West Lothian tea party group for five years. Karen volunteers as a driver for the group and was also a call companion throughout the pandemic. As an employee for the Royal Bank of Scotland, she also hosts annual tea parties at the bank's headquarters at Gogarburn.

Kathleen: Karen has become a true friend.

"After my husband died, I was devastated. I felt so lonely. I have a wonderful family who support me, but they've got their own lives. The Re-engage tea parties were a lifeline for me.

"I was a bit apprehensive at first, but I met other people just like me. I remember the time when a neighbour of mine from 30 years ago joined our group!

"I worked as a chemist dispenser for many years – I started out washing the bottles when I was 16. I loved my job and all the people I met. My hobby is people; both strangers and friends.

"Karen has become a true friend. I know that I can ring her if ever I'm worried about something; she's always there for me. I can't speak highly enough of her.

"I've really missed the tea parties during the pandemic, and I can't wait for them to start again."

Karen: I love spending time with Kathleen and our time together is precious.

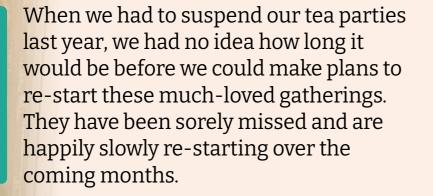
"Kathleen feels like part of my family. She's sociable and exceptionally considerate of others. I've watched her chatting to the other guests, they really enjoy her company. I love spending time with Kathleen and our time together is precious. Kathleen is always impeccably presented; she takes such pride in herself.

"Her family are a tremendous support to her, particularly since her husband passed away, and she speaks about them with fondness.

66 Loneliness can have such a devastating impact on physical and mental wellbeing.

"What we are doing isn't just a nice thing to do, it's essential and I feel privileged to be able to help."

Time to put the kettle on!



Whilst groups have not been able to meet, it has been heart-warming to hear how so many volunteers have gone the extra mile to keep in touch.

It hasn't been possible for all our quests and volunteers to stay in contact, but some volunteers made regular phone calls, letting their quests know that they were thinking of them and that tea parties would re-start when it was safe. With the help of volunteer drivers, others were occasionally able to deliver homemade treats or donations from local organisations.

> Irene, who is a member of the Thurrock group says:

"The afternoon tea treats have been such a lovely surprise. The Re-engage volunteers just cannot do enough for us – they all deserve a medal. I was housebound during lockdown and I wouldn't have seen or heard from anvone if it wasn't for their visits and calls. I so looked forward to the tea parties every month and I can't wait for them to start again. I'm truly grateful to everyone in our group."



Iean: We've all missed the tea parties so much.

66 When I first joined the tea party group, I didn't know what to expect. But they made me feel so welcome and my worries vanished in an instant.

"The volunteers take so much care of us. I get driven to and from the parties and there's always someone there to look out for us, whatever we need.

"Naomi's fortnightly cake deliveries during the pandemic really helped me. We have lovely chats and I've come to know her quite well; I see her as a friend. She makes such wonderful cakes: coffee and walnut, chocolate. lemon drizzle.

"I spoke to other tea party guests once a week during the pandemic and it made such a difference. We've all missed the tea parties so much."

Naomi: Seeing how alone some of our tea party guests felt put my own worries into perspective.

"I first became involved with Re-engage because I wanted to give something back. Our son is home-educated, and I knew that he would gain from the experience too. He helps me with baking and meets a generation who give him a different perspective.

"Jean is always so positive and bubbly. She keeps her mind active, reading or doing the crossword and she keeps up with everything that's going on. I can talk to her about anything.

"During the pandemic I made more than 120 cakes for our tea party guests. Baking for others has given me so much pleasure.

"Seeing how alone some of our tea party quests felt put my own worries into perspective. I realised what a difference a visit from a familiar face with a cake could make.



Thanks to funding from the Welsh government, August saw the start of our weekly face to face activity sessions in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Carmarthenshire.

Gavin, who runs our sessions, shares his top three seated exercises for the lower body that you can do at home. All you need is a stable chair and an arm's length of space.

Ankle stretches will help your flexibility and balance.

In a seated position with your back against the chair, lift one leg off the floor and lift your ankle towards and away from your body. Repeat 10–15 times then change legs.

Knee extensions will help strengthen your knees and build muscle in your legs.

In a seated position with your feet placed hip-width apart, extend the knee putting your leg out straight. Repeat in a controlled motion 10–15 times before changing to the other leg.

Hip marching will strengthen your hips and thighs and improve flexibility.

In a seated position with your back against the chair, begin marching on the spot, lifting and lowering one leg at a time. You can add to this by swinging your arms or increasing the pace. Do 5–10 repetitions on each leg.

Our weekly online activity groups have been running since the start of the pandemic. Held on Zoom, each 90-minute session includes around 45 minutes of gentle exercise followed by time to get to know one another afterwards.

If you live in Wales, are 75 or over, and would like to join our exercise groups, call us on 02922 801 802 or 02922 790 147.

Empowering older voices

In last September's edition of *Time Together* we invited you to get in touch if you were interested in joining our advisory group. Thank you to the hundreds of you who replied.

Our advisory group specifically seeks the views of over 75s. It is central to helping us refine our work and is made up of both tea party guests and those who take part in telephone befriending through call companions. Through regular contact with members of the group, we benefit from their valuable input into the development of future projects and their ideas about our existing work. We learn about how we can do better, and we plan for the future together, ensuring your voices are at the heart of everything we do.

In June we heard from the advisory group about the impact that our tea parties and call companions have had on their lives, and we were encouraged by the overwhelmingly positive experiences that they shared.

We also learnt of areas we can improve on and will be implementing those changes. We will be asking the group for their views again in September, so that we can monitor any changes, and will be asking specific questions about new programme opportunities. And don't forget, you can always tell us your views and thoughts using Meryl's Memo.

The words most frequently used by the Re-engage advisory group to describe the impact of our services:



You get a new lease of life, it's very worthwhile and stops you being inward-looking. It's nice to hear other points of view.

Tea party goer

It's stimulating for my mental health. It's nice to have someone to chat with in the afternoon.

Call companion

Bringing generations together **7**

The power of a chat

Sharon's mental and physical well-being suffered following a cardiac arrest. Feeling anxious, alone and afraid to leave the house, she got in touch with Re-engage. She was matched with Julia and they have been call companions since December.

Sharon says:

"Julia is always jolly and so happy to hear from me. She makes me feel as though our calls are as important to her as they are to me. Julia has become a true friend.

"Mostly, we just laugh and chat about the day-to-day things in life. She's always interested, but never intrusive.

"I know that I can talk to Julia about more personal things too. I trust her, and she makes me feel good about myself. Julia has helped to bring me back out of myself."

Julia says:

"Before I became a call companion, I was feeling very low, having been recently furloughed from work. Work is my life and I needed something new to focus on.

"Sharon and I always have a giggle. She never complains and she always finds something positive in everything that's thrown at her. "Being furloughed, and my chats with Sharon, have raised my awareness of loneliness and isolation. A 30-minute phone call once a week can really change someone's life.

"I've absolutely loved being both a call companion and a call companion coordinator. It gives me a sense of worth and a real purpose in life."

If you would like a call companion, please get in touch on 0800 716 543.

Re-engage

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