

Time

Together



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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 guests 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.

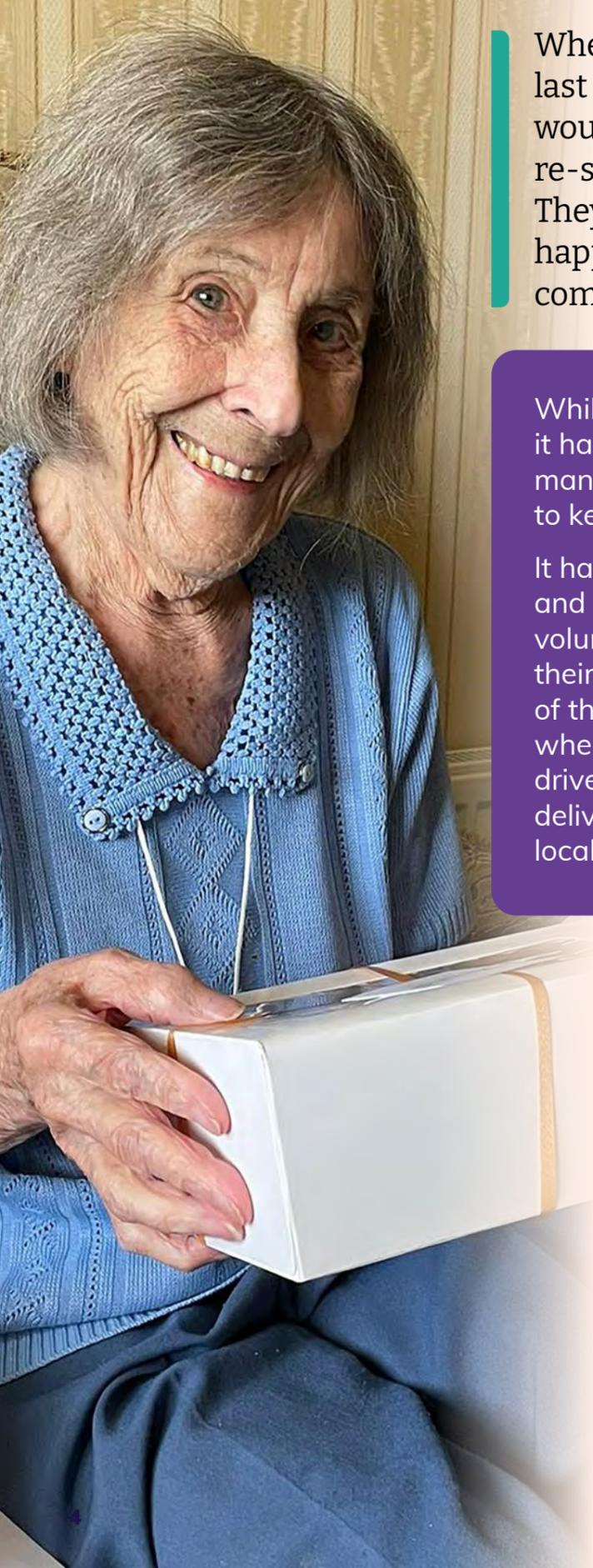
"Kathleen feels like part of my family. She's sociable and exceptionally considerate of others. I've watched her chatting to the other guests, they really enjoy her company. I love spending time with Kathleen and our time together is precious. Kathleen is always impeccably presented; she takes such pride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

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

“ 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!



When we had to suspend our tea parties last year, we had no idea how long it would be before we could make plans to re-start these much-loved gatherings. They have been sorely missed and are happily slowly re-starting over the coming months.

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 guests and volunteers to stay in contact, but some volunteers made regular phone calls, letting their guests 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 anyone 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."

A familiar face



Jean (top) and Naomi (right)

Jean has been a member of her tea party group in Bristol for several years. Housebound throughout the pandemic, she struck up a special friendship with Naomi, a volunteer driver.

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

“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 guests felt put my own worries into perspective. I realised what a difference a visit from a familiar face with a cake could make.

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."



Julia

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

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