

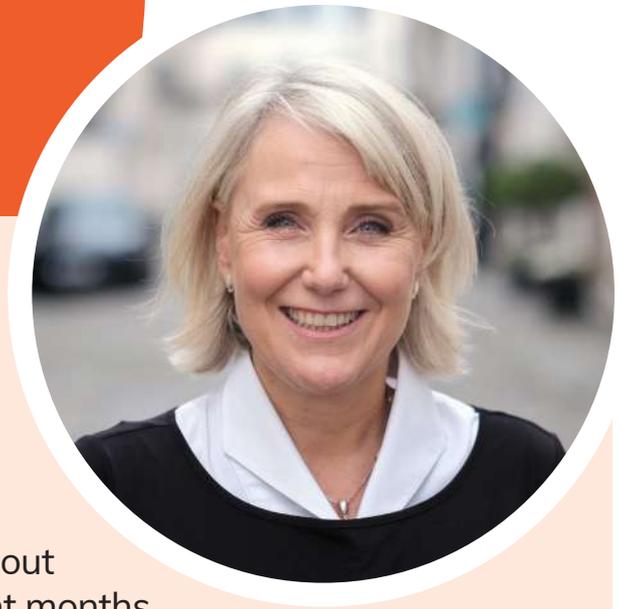
Time Together



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Welcome



As a charity that exists to bring people together, the past two years have had their fair share of challenges. But thanks to our dedicated volunteers, many of our tea party groups are now meeting again and more people are signing up to our call companions service. We've loved hearing about your experiences with Re-engage over recent months and we have much to look forward to together this year.

Between them, Maureen and Sylvia volunteered for Re-engage for a total of 100 years and were part of our volunteer team when the charity was founded in 1965. Last year, they retired as coordinators for their local tea party group in Oxford and they will be sorely missed. In this issue of Time Together you can read about their memories of Re-engage in the early days and why the tea parties were so important to them.

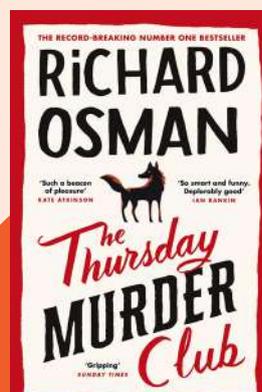
In the last issue of Time Together we told you about our new advisory group. It was set up so we could hear your views on how we're doing, how we can improve and what you'd like to see more of. You can read more about what the group has fed back to us over recent months on page 5.

We wanted to hear more about your experiences of being online and how you feel about an increasingly digitalised world. Not surprisingly, we found that some of you are regular internet users, whilst others prefer to pick up the phone, write a letter or read a book. Do you identify with any of the views in our article on internet use?

Finally, our book reviews on page 4 come from Re-engage volunteers and I hope you enjoy their recommendations. If you enjoy reading, we'd love to hear about what you've been reading too.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Time Together.

Meryl Davies
CEO, Re-engage



Meet Re-engage volunteer Helen



Helen

Helen set up and now organises two tea party groups in the Whitby area. She was born in Yorkshire, and returned five years ago, after almost 50 years away, and has now made Whitby her permanent home.

Living in both the UK and the United States, Helen spent over 40 years working for many charities, including the homeless charity Crisis. She was CEO for Open Age, a London based charity supporting older people to keep active and healthy.

Why did you decide to become a Re-engage volunteer?

I heard about Re-engage whilst I was working at Open Age and thought the concept of tea parties was such a simple and brilliant way of helping to prevent loneliness. I decided that it might be a nice idea, once I was retired, to look into volunteering myself.

What does your role involve?

I am an area organiser and tea party coordinator. As there were no groups in the Whitby area, I set up two new groups, and recruited volunteers and guests. As well as finding new volunteers and guests, I organise the tea party dates with volunteer hosts, arrange drivers and make sure our guests know all about the tea parties. My partner and I are also drivers.

How did your group stay in touch during the pandemic?

During 2020 I regularly called all the members of our group, not just to find out how they were coping, but also for a general chat. I actually came to know many of our guests better as a result. That year our group also delivered bouquets and cards to all our guests at Christmas. We made fewer calls last year, but we kept in touch, nevertheless, and in October we were finally able to re-start our tea parties.

What's the best thing about being a volunteer for Re-engage?

I love seeing the joy that the guests get from meeting with others and being spoiled for an afternoon. The average age of our guests in the Whitby groups is around 90 years and many lead quite a lonely life. I also enjoy building relationships with other volunteers.

What makes you get out of bed every morning?

It would have to be my family, friends and the countryside around my home – we're lucky enough to have both moors and coast on our doorstep. Having meaningful opportunities to keep me busy is also very important to me.

Do you have a favourite saying or quote that you live by?

"I can do anything through Him who gives me strength." - Philippians 4.13.

What have you been reading?

I We asked our volunteers to let us know what they've been reading recently, so we could share some of their recommendations.

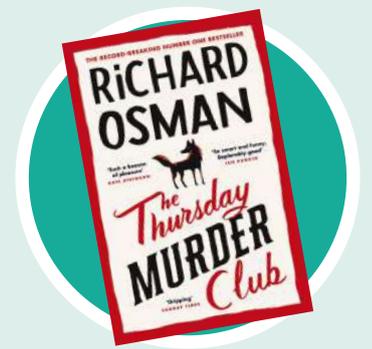
If you'd like to write a short book review yourself (200 words or less), please email us at comms@reengage.org.uk or write to us at Time Together, Re-engage, 7 Bell Yard, London WC2A 2JR.

The Thursday Murder Club by Richard Osman

In a peaceful retirement village, four unlikely friends meet up once a week to investigate unsolved murders. When a murder takes place on their very own doorstep, the Thursday Murder Club find themselves in the middle of their first live case.

Elizabeth, Joyce, Ron and Ibrahim make this book what it is – their characters are so well thought out, and with some of the chapters being written as Joyce's diary entries, you get a true insight into their thoughts. This is a great murder mystery which will keep you guessing right until the very end. So much more than your usual whodunnit, it's a heartwarming, witty and clever read and a perfect book to cozy up with on a cold winter's night. Crime and comedy are clearly a winning formula.

If you enjoy *The Thursday Murder Club* you can be reunited with the characters in the next book. *The Thursday Murder Club* has been so popular that Osman has already written the sequel in his series '**The Man Who Died Twice**' and is currently writing the third instalment. Happy reading! – *Zoe Hill, volunteer tea party host and call companion.*



The Ladies Midnight Swimming Club by Faith Hogan

When Elizabeth's husband dies, leaving her with crippling debt, she turns to her friend Jo for help. As life slowly begins to resemble something normal, Jo's world is turned upside down when she receives some shocking news. In search of solace, Jo and Elizabeth find themselves enjoying midnight dips in the freezing Irish sea. Here they can laugh, cry and wash away all their fears.

This is a really good read. It's one of my favourites from last year and I highly recommend it. – *Susan Williams, volunteer call companion.*



The Re-engage advisory group



In the last edition of Time Together, we shared with you some of the initial feedback we've had from our online advisory group, who represent those of you who attend our tea parties or have a call companion.

We created the group to listen to your views and ideas and place these at the heart of everything we do. The advisory group's input helps us review and make plans. For instance, the group's experiences of joining call companions helped us to speed up how we match people with volunteers, reducing waiting times for telephone befriending.

As many of you do, our advisory group has told us how wonderful our volunteers are and we have passed that on to volunteers, along with encouragement from group members to join in with tea party conversations and make themselves part of the party as much as possible.

Thanks to the group's feedback, we are also reviewing our communications with you – including taking on board ideas for future editions of Time Together.

In terms of bigger changes, the group has suggested that Re-engage could help people to get online. We know that in the UK, around half of over-75s do not use the internet. For some people, this is a choice, but for those who would like to get online, the challenges can be very difficult to overcome and can include cost, equipment, health or accessing support.

We have conducted a large piece of research to find out more about people's technology needs and there is a piece in this edition of Time Together highlighting the online experiences of different people.

We are grateful to the advisory group for their input and always value hearing their views.

We are looking for new members to join our advisory group from March 2022. We are keen to hear from anyone who attends or uses one of our services, but to ensure the group is representative, we are particularly keen to hear from you, if:

- you attend one of our activity groups in Wales
- you are from a BAME background
- you identify as LGBT+
- you are male
- you have a disability

If you would like to join the advisory group, please get in contact with us by calling Georgina on **020 8017 8238.**

“ Help with IT skills would be very valuable going into the future. ”

Advisory group member

The digital divide – what do you think about the internet?

The onset of Covid-19 restrictions led to more of us relying on the online world. We wanted to get a better understanding of what people aged 75 and over think about the internet.

It can be easy to make assumptions, but what better way to find out more than by asking you directly.

And here is what some of you told us*:

“I’m on my iPad every day. If I sit down and I’m bored, I get it out. My sister, she rings me from 9 – 10am, and 4 – 5pm. She’s on her own as well, so she’s glad of the company... Christmas day, she was on her own, I was on my own, so we cooked our dinners so that they synchronized, and we had the iPad on, and ate our dinners together... These little things are a godsend. Of course, you’ve got to have the internet. It’s no good without the internet.”

“Since I bought my tablet a few years ago it has been a source of pleasure and knowledge. I wouldn’t be without it, even at 90 years of age. You are never too old to learn.”

“We learnt that many over 75s have a healthy approach to using the internet and are savvy about its benefits, but also wary of its risks. But we also found that many of you are not online, sometimes through choice, because you view the internet as entirely irrelevant.

Re-engage is committed to supporting choice, providing support and investigating the massive issue of scams and fraud. As we can see, the internet has brought a lot of joy to some of you and for others it is something you are happy to be without. We will continue to offer services right across the board to ensure we are able to reach all those who need us.”

Meryl Davies
CEO, Re-engage



51%

of you told us you don't use the internet

69%

of those already online have begun using the internet more frequently since the pandemic started

80%

of you use the internet to communicate with friends and family

56%

of you use the internet to do day to day tasks such as shopping or paying the bills

"I can't go to the bridge club, but I can play online. You could be playing with anyone, all over the world, which I have done... You are not tied to any time, you can play in the middle of the night if you want to, because the time zones are different wherever you are."

"There are many people who do not have access to the internet. We are dismissed, ignored, excluded. Since the pandemic, the situation has become worse. Announcements on TV constantly repeat 'go to our website for information' or 'send any queries by email'. Anything received through the post repeats these phrases. Phone calls are appalling, I am put on hold and bombarded by recordings telling me to 'go online'. I am 84 years old and live alone."

"I have no interest in getting online. I cannot think of any reason that I would want to. People that are online all the time probably think we're mad, because we say no. I suppose it's because it's something that I've never done, and I've never really been interested in."

"I lost my husband 3 and a half years ago. Just after he passed away, I was badly scammed. So I had the computer closed down."

We would love to hear what you think. You can email us at comms@reengage.org.uk or write to us at Time Together, Re-engage, 7 Bell Yard, London WC2A 2JR

*All responses have been anonymised

100 years of volunteering

Before finally retiring last year, together Maureen and Sheila volunteered for Re-engage for a total of 100 years. They coordinated a tea party group in Oxford and have many happy memories of tea parties dating back to the early eighties.

We caught up with them about their experiences of volunteering and what support they would like to see for older people in the future.

*Maureen
& Sheila*

What first drew you to volunteering for Re-engage?

Maureen: “The tea parties are such a simple idea and there’s so much kindness involved. I started out as a driver, and it felt such an easy way to help others. It had the added benefit of getting me out of the house occasionally.”

Sheila: “I was first introduced to Re-engage when I became a tea party host in London. I’ve always been interested in older people and hearing their life stories.”





You shared responsibility for coordinating your local group. How did that work?

Maureen: “Sheila and I have known each other for many years. We’re on the same wavelength and we get on very well. We’re both extremely organised so nothing ever got overlooked. In the old days, Sheila would hand out her ‘yellow slips’, or fixtures lists, so that everyone knew the dates of forthcoming tea parties. Sheila and I knew we could rely on each other to come up with the goods.”

Sheila: “Between us, we always made sure that our guests received birthday and Christmas cards and that the tea party hosts knew when there was a birthday coming up.”



Why were the tea parties important to you?

Maureen: “Tea parties were always special occasions. Our guests would get dressed up and have their hair done – someone was coming to take them out to tea and they felt valued and cared for.”

Sheila “The hosts would pull out all the stops. They would bring out the best china and put on a real spread. The tea parties were such fun and I know our volunteers enjoyed them as much as the guests.”

One of the hosts would make a present for all our guests at Christmas every year; a lavender bag or a coat hanger. We were all part of the group because we wanted to be – there was never any sense of duty.”

Maureen: “Being in Oxford, we sometimes went to quite large houses where we could easily fit a dozen people around one table. But I equally have many fantastic memories of the tea parties when we all squeezed into a tiny room.”

Do you have any special memories?

Sheila: “I remember Minerva and her 100th birthday celebration. She was always such a joy to be with and she had a very sharp mind too. You could ask her any question about Shakespeare and she would always know the answer.”

Maureen: “My granddaughters once stood in to host a tea party at the last minute and enjoyed making the cakes and sandwiches and serving the guests. There were so many characters in our group and I remember every one of them.”

Did you learn anything from volunteering for Re-engage?

Maureen: “My husband died in 2020 and I quickly realised what living alone is like. I am lucky and can still go out independently and ride my bike. Many of our guests could not go out alone, which is why the monthly teas were so important and a real treat.”

Sheila: “Our guests had all lived through two world wars and we had so much to learn from them. I remember a guest telling me all about the ration book that she took to the Co-op during the war. It’s a job to imagine life as it was. I also had my eyes opened to what loneliness was.”

What sort of support would you like to see for older people who are alone in the future?

Maureen: “I’d like to see even more opportunities for social connection. And I’d like to see more men involved in the tea parties. Sometimes it was difficult to get men to join our tea party group, but they got so much out of it when they did.”

Sheila: “Most of the volunteers in our group were women, but I think men would enjoy volunteering too.”





“ The tea parties are such a simple idea and there’s so much kindness involved. ”

If you would like to join a tea party group, ring us on **0800 716543** to sign up or visit www.reengage.org.uk



“ I don't have to watch what I say, I can just be myself. My call companion has become a valued friend and I look forward to my time with her every week. ”

Call companions is available to anyone aged 75 and over who would benefit from a regular chat over the phone with a friendly volunteer.

If you would like your own call companion, please call us on **0800 716543**, email us on info@reengage.org.uk or visit www.reengage.org.uk

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