

# Time Together

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# Welcome



**Welcome to our first edition of 2023.** You may remember that in May last year we got in touch with a survey asking you about your experience with Re-engage. We got lots of great responses and discovered that 87% of people have found that joining Re-engage groups or calls has given them something to look forward to, which is such an important thing as we get older. You can read the full results of the survey on page 10.

The formidable Gladys, who celebrated her 106th birthday on Christmas Day, describes the tea parties she attends as 'absolutely wonderful'. Known by her local group as 'The Queen of Borough Green', she occasionally serenades them with a few bars from her favourite ABBA song. Born during World War I, in this issue of Time Together she shares her childhood memories of how her family got by when food was scarce and of watching doodlebugs fly overhead during World War II.

Whilst Gladys gets immense joy from the tea parties she attends every month, we know that there are guests who are still desperately missing their regular Sunday afternoons of tea and friendship. I know that some guests don't yet feel ready to leave their homes or to meet in confined spaces. On pages 4-5 you can read more about how a small group in Glasgow have got around this by meeting in a spacious local garden centre, or cafe, for over a year.

Sadly, any one of us could become a victim of a scam or fraud and here at Re-engage we're determined to do all we can to help you combat this serious issue. It's important for every one of us to be aware of the signs that something is suspicious and the more we know, the safer we'll be. We've included some information with your magazine on how to protect yourself against common frauds and scams and I hope you'll find it useful.

And finally, thank you to readers who used the Autumn Meryl's Memo to tell us about your experiences with Re-engage. You told us that you would like to see your own recipes, poems and book reviews in Time Together and in this issue, we've included our first 'Poets' Corner'. Thank you to tea party guest Marianne, and Pauline, who receives regular calls from a volunteer call companion, who have both reviewed Ruth Jones' book 'Love Untold'. Please do take a moment to use the Meryl's Memo enclosed with your magazine to give us your thoughts on the issues currently facing the country and how much say you feel you have in political and local affairs.

**Thank you for being part of Re-engage. My very best wishes to you.**

**Meryl Davies**  
CEO, Re-engage

# Meet volunteer call companion, Tom



Tom

**My name is Tom and I have two full time permanent jobs. Being a father is one and the other is as a recruiter.**

I live in Northamptonshire with my wife and my two little girls, aged five and two. I am an avid football fan and regularly watch my team play at the 'Theatre of Dreams' in Manchester. From an early age, I've always enjoyed listening and speaking to new people. I'm a big family man and I love to give my girls new experiences whilst also reliving my own childhood.

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

We all have time to give, and it doesn't matter if it's 30 minutes or several hours every week. I really liked the idea of donating my time and my ears to somebody who may only get that one phone call every week.

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

As well as talking to people who are lonely, I learn new things and I hear some cracking stories.

## **What gets you out of bed every morning?**

Every single day is different for me. My main drive is my own family, but every day I also support people to make the right career moves.

I have great conversations. I also learn and share experiences and I get a real sense of achievement out of that.

## **What would you say to your younger self?**

I would tell my younger self to surround myself with the smartest ones in the room, to listen and keep listening. You don't know what you don't know.

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

'Live the life you love', which I have tattooed on my bicep.

## **What are you reading at the moment?**

A few months ago I finished reading 'Soldier Spy', by Tom Marcus, a true story of an MI5 officer risking his life to save the lives of other people. The book told stories of British counter terrorism operations and it was an amazing read which I highly recommend.

## **Has volunteering changed your outlook on life?**

It really has. I am proud of the volunteering work I do with Re-engage and I often tell other people about the charity to encourage them to get involved. Volunteering opens my eyes to the fact that everybody has their own struggles, their own needs and their own way of tackling each day.

# Meeting up after the long break

In December 2021, the Clydebank tea party group met up for the first time since the start of the pandemic, having not met in person for almost two years.

The group has not yet returned to tea parties as we typically know them, and throughout last year they chose to meet up at a local garden centre or café, rather than at a host's house. We caught up with group coordinator Alison, who first joined Re-engage as a tea party driver in 2012.

“ I’ve been nervous about fully re-starting the group. I want the guests, volunteers and hosts to feel completely comfortable as we restart our monthly tea parties. ”

Alison

“We’re a small group at the moment, with just one driver and three guests. Betty has recently been crowned ‘Queen’ of the group after we all noticed her resemblance to Queen Elizabeth II when she wore a paper hat at our Christmas tea party. Isa also has a royal connection, as she once danced in the ballroom at Buckingham Palace on a very special occasion. Ellen keeps us all in touch with the latest technology. She has a more up to date mobile phone than any of us and tells us about what she has been watching on Netflix and where she recommends for a flat-white.”



“ Although we all love going to our host’s houses and catching up with what they’ve been up to, the most important thing is being with each other. ”

Alison



I think the secret to a successful tea party is the people, conversation and that everyone can join in. The cakes and tea are nice, but conversation and human connection are the most important things.”

Originally from Liverpool, Alison first came to Glasgow as a student and has lived in the city ever since.

“Two of my favourite things in life are older people and cake. When I heard about Re-engage it seemed the ideal charity for me to get involved with. I don’t really see myself as a volunteer as everyone in the group has become a good friend. When we get together, it’s just like meeting up with friends for a catch up. We just have delicious tea, coffee and cake too.

“Since the pandemic, meeting up has become even more important, and we’re keen to get back to tea parties with our lovely hosts this year.”

# What you've been reading

A big thank you to Pauline and Marianne, who sent us their reviews of *Love Untold* by Ruth Jones.

## Love Untold

**Love Untold** is a book with strong female characters about family ties and family secrets. The story moves along at a brisk pace. I was hooked from the intriguing first chapter, and I soon became immersed in the womens' stories; their relationships with each other, their personal struggles, successes, and regrets. There is humour throughout the book, as well as grit and determination. With all their imperfections, the four women seem totally believable, and I warmed to them all, willing them to make good life choices. Despite finding a couple of the storylines a little predictable, I was bowled over by the main protagonist, 89-year-old Grace, and the secrets she has kept over the years. This is a well thought out book, in which Ruth Jones has created memorable characters and injected them with her own brand of warmth and humour. Set in South Wales, with glimpses of small-town life, it will appeal to readers who enjoy an absorbing family drama with diverse storylines. – *Pauline, Southampton.*



**Love Untold** is set in Wales and focuses on family discord between four generations of Welsh women. The characters are brought to life and portrayed vividly. Some of the problems leading to estrangement and conflict include alcoholism, sexual orientation and misunderstandings. It is written with warmth, humour and a clear interpretation of how family conflicts can cause emotional distress. A 90-year-old grandmother has been estranged from her daughter for years and wants to find her to heal the family rifts. Can she accomplish this before her departure and make peace in the family? It is a complex situation as her granddaughter is less forgiving and upset about secrets and lies of the past. The book demonstrates that complex family situations can be resolved with patience, compassion and forgiveness. The author shows humour, warmth, insight and a clear recognition of family dysfunction and its effects whilst keeping the reader unaware of what will unfold next. – *Marianne, London.*

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

# Poets' Corner

Marjorie and Stella's poems capture the essence of tea parties and summer days, and we loved reading them.

## Fine Summer Days

*By Marjorie, Northwich*

Fun in the park on a summer's day,  
Is the thing to chase the blues away,  
No need to worry about a thing,  
Each one you meet is smiling.  
Sitting in the shade, you and me,  
Under the spreading chestnut tree,  
Music playing from the grandstand,  
Me and you all together, it's grand.  
Everyone's enjoying the summer sun,  
Relaxing and joining in all the fun.  
Doing the things they like to do,  
Along with family and friends too,  
Young children enjoying the sun,  
Summer days are meant for fun.



## Tea Party

*By Stella, Saffron Walden*

The tables set for special tea  
And guests will soon arrive,  
All meeting up with lots of chat  
The room soon comes alive,  
When talk of some adventures past  
Goes down the memory lane,  
And pleasure felt with joining up  
All pleased to meet again,  
The vintage cups of bygone days  
Set out with usual style,  
There's sandwiches and savouries  
To please us all the while,  
And popular as ever,  
The cake of pure delight,  
Victoria sponge with strawberry cream  
It makes a tempting sight,  
The afternoon will flow with ease  
With endless cups of tea,  
And work that goes behind the scenes  
Seems not for us to see,  
Such welcome comes from all our hosts  
All such a joy to know,  
May Re-engage continue on  
With friendships made to grow.

If you'd like to write a poem about any subject for Time Together or Re-engage social media pages, please email us at [comms@reengage.org.uk](mailto:comms@reengage.org.uk) or write to us at Time Together, Re-engage, 7 Bell Yard, London WC2A 2JR.

# Lives lived

Gladys celebrated her 106th birthday on Christmas Day and marked the occasion with a little burst of ABBA.

Gladys is a regular at the monthly gatherings of her local tea party group in Kent. She loves the Swedish group ABBA and will occasionally serenade her fellow guests with a few bars of their hit song, 'Thank you for the music.'



"I love ABBA and I love being with people. It makes me come alive, and the tea parties are the perfect place to enjoy both. I go for the company. The food is always good but it's being with other people and having a chat that really matters."

Great grandmother Gladys was born in Islington, north London, during World War I. She was the eldest of eleven children. She and her youngest sister, Christine, are the only survivors.

“ We had a hard life, but we were always happy. ”

Gladys

"I left school at 13 and worked in a shop before going into service. I did chores like cooking, washing, ironing and scrubbing stone steps at 6am for wealthy London families. Later I became a lab assistant for the pharmaceutical company, Burroughs Wellcome, which I really enjoyed.

"During World War II we moved to south London, and we would watch the German doodlebugs go across the sky with a huge stream of flame pouring from behind. When that light went out, we knew we had to run for the bomb shelter because it was going to come down and explode."

Gladys's family eventually moved to Kent, where she married and had two sons; Michael, now 80, and Christopher, 74. Later she wed a Petty Officer in the Navy and they were married for 40 years.







*Gladys with a telegram from King Charles on her 106th birthday.*

“ I have no idea how I’ve managed to live so long. I just wake up every day and say to myself, ‘I’m still here’ then I get on with things. ”

Gladys

“I shower, have breakfast, make my bed, do some washing and then maybe, if I’m not going out, I watch TV. I don’t have any carers because I can look after myself and still get out and about.

“I go to a lunch club twice a week and to the Re-engage tea parties, which are absolutely wonderful. Every month I have an all over massage, which helps keep me supple and I get my nails painted a different colour. At the moment they’re red.

“Times have changed dramatically but I still enjoy the company of others. I’m a very sociable person.”

If you would like to join a tea party group in your area, please call us on **0800 716 543**, email us on **info@reengage.org.uk** or visit **www.reengage.org.uk**

# Your experiences with Re-engage

Between 2021 and 2022 over 8,300 people took part in our services, supported by almost 11,000 volunteers.

**“I would not have coped very well without the Re-engage contacts in my life. They have become close friends and have helped me in every way possible. Mentally, and through their companionships in person or a phone call away. I’m so happy to be part of a wonderful organisation. Thank you Re-engage, from the bottom of my heart.”** Older person who has a call companion and belongs to a tea party group.

Every charity wants to be sure that it’s making a difference. That’s why we carry out surveys, interviews and research projects every year. We want to hear directly from you, rather than make assumptions. In 2021-2022 we received **5,311 survey responses** and arranged **over 90** in-depth interviews. You may remember that back in May 2022 we carried out our large annual survey. We received **1,581 responses** from this survey alone and today we’re delighted to share the results with you.

## You told us:

**“I am so happy to have had the opportunity to join Re-engage as it has made a big difference to my life. It’s given me more social confidence and something to look forward to each month.”** Tea party guest

**87% of people told us joining Re-engage has given them something to look forward to.**

**76% of people have made friends with Re-engage volunteers.**

**70% of people told us they feel less lonely as a result of Re-engage.**

## Our volunteers told us:

**“Making a difference makes every second of my volunteering worthwhile.”**

**94% of volunteers feel like they are making a difference to somebody.**

**90% of volunteers feel like they are giving back.**

**76% of volunteers told us their understanding of loneliness and social isolation has increased and they have become more aware of the challenges faced by older people.**

We would like to thank everyone who has taken part in our surveys and interviews. All your feedback gives us a fantastic understanding of the impact of our work and the ways in which people benefit from being a part of Re-engage.

You can find out more about our impact and the results of the 2021-22 annual survey on our website at [www.reengage.org.uk/about-us/our-impact](http://www.reengage.org.uk/about-us/our-impact)

# Meryl's Memo - what you told us

In our last issue, we asked for your suggestions for activities you'd like to see in your area and for what you'd like to read in Time Together.

Thank you for your responses. We've had messages from all over the country about what you enjoy with Re-engage, as well as a host of ideas.

Some of you would like to see singing, music, quizzes and games at tea parties, while others would like additional groups that meet regularly to play cards or other games.

Several people mentioned day trips to local attractions, as well as sometimes heading further afield.

“It would be lovely if trips out to the seaside or interesting places could happen.”

A regular outing can make a big difference and we heard how difficult it can be without reliable transport, or when you need more help to get out of the house.

Some of you said you would welcome support with using new technologies, especially if it offers new ways to connect with people.

We heard that the advice and information in Time Together is useful and could also include readers sharing problems and advice, as well as more general 'top tips'.

“I would like to hear more about people's lives and experiences.”

Some of you want to see recipes, more book reviews, quizzes, crosswords, and stories. You'll notice some changes already in this issue.

We can't take on everyone's suggestions, but your ideas do help us to think about what Re-engage could do in the future. Your feedback also helps us to review what we already do.

You told us about wonderful volunteers who lay on fantastic spreads each month, run uplifting exercise classes or have become a friend through regular phone calls. They give you something to look forward to.

“I am 94 and live alone, so I really cherish our meetings.”

Your feedback was overwhelmingly positive, but we know that for some of you, tea parties haven't yet restarted, or volunteers have lost touch.

**We know how much those of you in this position miss the support and companionship that your groups provided and helping them recover is one of our top priorities.**

We know that these are challenging times, particularly with the cost of living crisis, which is causing very real concern and having a growing impact this winter.

Here are official sources of information which you may find helpful.



## Get help with the cost of living

**Call Citizens Advice.** Their advice line is usually open between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

**Advice line (England):**

**0800 144 8848**

**Advice line (Wales):**

**0800 702 2020**

**Advice line (Scotland):**

**0800 028 1456**

Find your local Citizens Advice bureau by visiting their website:

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

## Get advice on how to save energy at home

You can ring the government helpline for advice on **0800 444 202**.

Or visit the household energy pages of the government website:

[www.gov.uk/improve-energy-efficiency](http://www.gov.uk/improve-energy-efficiency)

## Re-engage

7 Bell Yard | London | WC2A 2JR  
0207 240 0630 | [www.reengage.org.uk](http://www.reengage.org.uk)  
Registered charity in England and Wales (1146149) and in Scotland (SC039377)

## The Priority Services Register

If you join the Priority Services Register you will get priority support in the event of an energy emergency, and advance warning of scheduled power cuts.

You can join the Priority Services Register by contacting your energy supplier.

## Get advice on your mental health

Our mental health is as important as our physical health. Worries about our finances can sometimes affect our mental health. If you're finding things difficult, talk to your GP.

The charity Mind has a help line which provides an information and signposting service. The line is open 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday.

**Mind help line: 0300 123 3393**

Or visit the information and support pages of the Mind website:

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

