



OPEN AGE

Members' Newsletter

New Horizons • Second Half Centre • The Avenues • and more

May 2022 • Issue No. 38

CATCH THE 70 JUBILEE FEVER!



Tickets are £5 and will only be booked on receipt of payment. So if you like fun, food and a whirl round the dance floor, don't miss out!

The second event is a free show being staged by the Rah Rah Theatre Company at all Open Age centres, with light refreshments. **The Jubilee Singers** show celebrates the Jubilee with feel-good sing-along songs, comedy and dance.

There are shows at all centres—four at The Avenues, three at New Horizons, two at Second Half Centre and one at St Margaret's (details below). But space is limited, so book as soon as you can. Tickets go on sale at the Second Half Centre on Tuesday 7 June.

Good news was in short supply early in 2022, what with 'Partygate', the variable weather, the cost of living, the ongoing COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

But one happy celebration to look forward to was the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and an unprecedented four-day holiday in June—with Open Age organising many of its own special activities continuing through the summer.

Most of them are listed on the Open Age website and also on posters and in the weekly email bulletin. Don't receive emails? Get in touch with mail@openage.org.uk so they can add you to the list!

All are exciting events—but two in particular stand out.

First to note and book for is the **Open Age Platinum Tea Dance** to be held at The Tabernacle in Powis Square, off Westbourne Park Road, Notting Hill, on Friday 15 July, with music from 1953 Coronation Year to the present day, along with good food and—of course—the best company in town!

Jubilee Singers Shows

Date	Times	Location	Contact number
10 June	11 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.	The Avenues	020 3713 8737
14 June	3:30 p.m.	St Margaret's	020 4516 9969
16 June	3:30 p.m.	Second Half Centre	020 4516 9971
20 June	3:30 p.m.	Second Half Centre	020 4516 9971
21 June	11 a.m, 1:30 & 3:30 p.m.	New Horizons	020 4516 9970
24 June	11 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.	The Avenues	020 3713 8737

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Sue's 'thank you' poem



Sue Kaidi has seen the best and the worst of life. Her battle against illness was described in the winter 2019-20 newsletter (MN35), but she has also spent holidays in some wonderful places—such as the Caribbean, India, Thailand, Morocco and the highlands of Scotland.

The part Open Age played in her life was the subject of a poem she wrote before Christmas 2021 (see right). Staff were so impressed that they asked her to film herself reciting it—and the video was played at the end of the charity's AGM in January.

Sue loves to attend the Play Reading class which was first offered at New Horizons and then moved to the Second Half Centre. She is also a keen member of the Creative Writing group at the Chelsea Theatre, World's End.

An Ode to Open Age

Open Age has been amazing,
The icing on the cake.
It's transformed my way of living
From asleep to now awake.
It's helped revive my senses,
Be it sight or smell or sound.
It has helped me stand up straight again
And put my feet back on the ground.

For darkness had once hijacked my life
And stolen all the fun.
Winter came and refused to leave
And took away the sun.

I battled on for many years
With gusto, strength and might.
A warrior raised of stoic blood,
I refused to cease the fight.

Then suddenly a helping hand
Offered groups that brought a smile,
And slowly darkness lost its grip
And the brightness stretched for miles.

For those that help to improve others' lives,
A thousand blessings from the start.
A million thanks and so much love
From the bottom of my heart.

Thank you, Open Age!

AGM brings good news

Open Age's second AGM on Zoom on Wednesday 19 January 2022 attracted twice as many members as last year, and those who tuned in heard good news about Open Age's finances, which did better than expected during COVID restrictions.

Although income and expenditure were both down between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, the charity's funding of over £1 million held up, and there was a surplus of over £95,000 to bolster its reserves, treasurer Stephen Souchon explained in presenting the annual report.

"Open Age has weathered what we hope is the worst of the storm. We are in a good place financially, but we can't be complacent," said chair Dean James, thanking staff for their excellent efforts.

Offering heartfelt sympathies to anyone who had lost someone to COVID, Dean said the pandemic felt quite surreal at times, "like part of our lives have

been on pause", but all the efforts did underline the work that Open Age did.

Online classes were not to everyone's taste and some were not confident using Zoom. But of the 4,298 activities offered during the year, more than 1500 members took part in at least one session, and more than 40,000 individual attendances were recorded, reported CEO Iain Cassidy.

Head of member experience Jenny Marshall explained how numerous outreach activities had been organised, including a range of topics involving theatre, exhibitions, comedy, writing, art, architecture and singing. Christmas boxes were delivered to 40 needy members.

To read the full 72-page Annual Accounts & Trustees Report 2020-2021, see the Open Age website openage.org.uk and click on 'about-us' on the menu bar.

Chasing the blues away

Although it's the smallest of the main Open Age centres, with just one large room, plus kitchen, toilets and office—an upstairs room was no longer available after COVID—St Margaret's in Vauxhall Bridge Road near Pimlico tube station is a hive of activity.

Senior co-ordinator Hannah Munns has organised so many walks and outings for members, she's lost count. Destinations have included Tate Modern, the Science Museum, river boat trips to Greenwich and lots of visits to parks.

On 17 January, Hannah decided to cheer everyone up by arranging a cold but crisp walk round Battersea Park, where eight people enjoyed sunny blue skies, views of the Thames, lakes and gardens and some unusual rock

formations, followed by tea or coffee at the Pear Tree Café.

"They call this Blue Monday because that's when people tend to get depressed after Christmas and New Year are over and the weather is bad. I am very keen to support people's mental health," says Hannah, who in an earlier life was catering manager at the New Horizons café.

But why the third Monday and not the second or fourth? Open Age member Gill, a retired teacher, may have the answer. "It's partly about money. People get paid before Christmas and by the third week of January it's all gone and they haven't yet received their next pay cheque!"



Opening doors to science

Imperial College London is one of the city's foremost science learning and research centres. Its establishment in South Kensington was inspired by Prince Albert who had a vision for an area of culture including the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Natural History Museum, the Science Museum and the Royal Albert Hall.

But did you know that it also has an innovation campus in White City, a stone's throw from the Second Half Centre? And that Open Age and Imperial have been offering activities in partnership since 2019?

Our first major partnership took place when we successfully applied for a grant from Imperial's Science Seed fund and ran the five-week project called *Stand Up for the Over 50s*. The project was inspired by Open Age member Sandra Anlin, and consisted of a series of four comedy writing and performance sessions, culminating in a live performance.

Following this success, Vivienne Mitchell, Senior Coordinator for Hammersmith & Fulham, worked with Imperial to design a series of talks to showcase the amazing and innovative research undertaken there. The project was interrupted by COVID-19 but, nothing daunted, we began to offer online talks.

The first was—appropriately enough—on the subject of COVID-19 and delivered by Professor Helen Ward of the School of Public Health who spoke about antibody testing.

One participant aged 73 commented "It was wonderful to be able to listen and talk to a real scientist on COVID... instead of just receiving what is presented in the media." Another member said "I do hope it will be the first of many such lectures."

Open Age has since organised 'Open Science'; a series of monthly talks by Imperial's talented pool of researchers and lecturers on subjects including the latest in engineering and medical research and innovations in outer space travel and research.

Next two Zoom talks

How can singing and dance improve lung health?
Tuesday 14 June 11:00–12:30

From Core to Surface: Looking Beneath our Feet using Earthquakes: Tuesday 19 July 11:00–12:30

To book, see the Activity programme, or contact Vivienne on 07824 484984

Welcome to Men's Space!

If you've ever enrolled for a class with a largely female attendance, you might think Open Age is mainly for women—but our charity's programme tells a different story.

In the Second Half Centre, there are four groups Monday–Wednesday designed for men only, while on Thursday and Friday there are two opportunities associated with The Avenues centre for men only to meet.

All come under the heading of Men's Space—and surprisingly some of these gatherings have been running since 2014, when their co-ordinator Russell John joined the staff to set up a skeleton programme of activities.

He began with a social group and a monthly lunch at a local restaurant, with a remit to increase the level of participation throughout Open Age as a wider programme for men across the three boroughs was slowly established. This now includes a Zoom exercise class.

Activities are varied. There's a social meet-up for coffee, chat, reminisce and table games, a music group where those with guitars and other instruments can learn and practise playing popular tunes, a bi-weekly cookery event combined with eating lunch (always popular!) and a beginners'

IT class to introduce users to laptops, smart phones and tablets.

At The Avenues there's another bi-weekly social, while those keen on outdoor activity can take part in walking football once a week at the nearby Westminster Academy which has an all-weather outdoor

pitch. The team has become quite

proficient, taking part in tournaments and even scoring wins. "The age range is wide—we have people in their 50s, but some men in their 90s," says Russell. "Some men come along because of a health issue, a death or a change of circumstances. They may be referred by one of the services or word of mouth, but there are others who attend because they

like to be active. "My role is not to keep men separate, but to create an environment where they feel comfortable and confident enough to join in these and other mixed activities. "The programme has been a key factor in helping men connect with



Some of the Men's Space chefs

others and provide opportunities for them to experience new activities, make new friends and become less isolated."

A West Londoner, Russell was for 20 years a sports coach and football development officer for Kensington & Chelsea. He then moved on to Chelsea Football Club where he headed up their first men's health project and gained relevant qualifications. "I was used to working with people under the age of 50, but there's no real difference in the age groups. It's about how you yourself perceive people," he adds.

The Tuesday music group *The Magic of Music* is run by tutor Josh Millais—see page 7.

The lunch class is tutored by expert chef Manju Malhi—see page 9.



Russell (centre) joins a group playing dominoes

Unity Works in action

After an absence of nearly two years, the Orangery Café at New Horizons reopened at last in January 2022.



Danilo Salemahomed

Formerly called *The Camden Society*, the social enterprise that runs it provides training and employment to people with a learning disability. It changed its name to Unity Works before COVID arrived and remained hugely popular with members for lunches, snacks, or just a chat over a hot drink.



Matt, Jhelisa and Mithul

Unity Works cafes, all open to the public, can be found across London—including Kentish Town where the charity is based, plus Romford, Victoria and Bromley-by-Bow. It also operates at Mill Lane Garden Centre, West Hampstead.

When Open Age centres closed in March 2019, so did the café. But when centres reopened in September 2021, health concerns kept the charity away for a while.

Now the staff is gradually building up its offer of tasty meals, while providing NVQ training in food, hospitality and storage skills, plus training placements for those

not yet ready for a qualification or employment.

Father-of-three Danilo Salemahomed, who has been relief manager at New Horizons in the past, is the new manager. He is usually based at New Horizons from Monday to Wednesday and the Kentish Town café on Thursday and Friday.

He was unable to see relatives in his native Portugal last year after delaying his visit because of the imminent birth of his first grandchild. But finally he got there.

New café supervisor and chef Jhelisa Scott, who cooks the delicious meals at New Horizons—her specialities are lamb moussaka, lasagne, chicken curry and chicken pie—was a team worker then supervisor before the COVID lockdown.

In summer 2021 she restarted work at the Kentish Town centre and sometimes at the charity's Café Victoria in Westminster City Hall where Westminster Council is based.

Working with her is catering assistant Matthew Kong, who has been with the charity for many years and does some cooking and serving customers with food and hot drinks, plus apprentice Mithul Kerai, learning similar skills.

Here's Charlie's Bistro!

Bigger than the New Horizons café is the basement café at St Charles Centre for Health and Wellbeing, formerly St Charles' Hospital. Its patrons include patients and visitors, as well as staff and members of Open Age's Second Half Centre housed in the same building.

Even during lockdown it was never fully closed and maintained a skeleton service. Now it is run by the NHS and has a trendy new name—Charlie's Bistro.

The café is open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. and welcomes the general public as well as those using the centre. It even has two television screens in the larger seating area, so you can watch the news, sport or maybe even *Dickinson's Real Deal* while you are eating your lunch or having a coffee break.

It's a spacious spot to meet friends or classmates, even if you're only passing by. What could be nicer? But don't get carried away and miss your class!

Meet the new Senior Centre Coordinator

A surprising number of people associated with Open Age have an artistic background—not only members, but also staff.

One of them is Andrea Carrington, who since December 2021 has been the Senior Centre Co-ordinator at the Second Half Centre, North Kensington, after three and a half years at The Avenues Centre in North Westminster.

Hackney-born Andrea went to Central St Martin's School of Art and Design and did a four-year sandwich degree in Fashion Design, specialising in printed clothing.

She was offered a design job in Italy, but a sudden bereavement led her to turn it down. She began creating accessories like printed scarves, felted scarves, and jewellery, selling through trade shows and markets.

Hoping to teach arts, she decided to volunteer first to gain experience. She became a creative

arts tutor with older adults, which led her towards the elderly and social care.

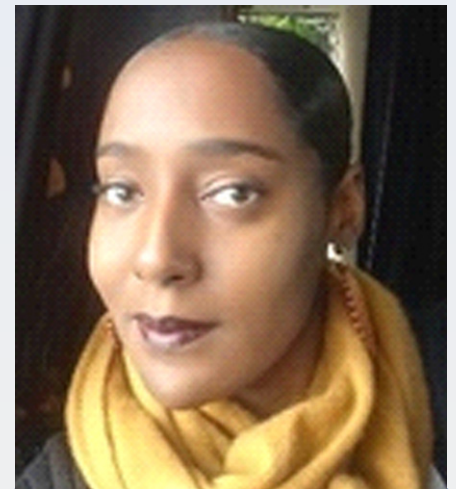
"In 2018, I was made redundant from my job with the Alzheimer's Society, where I worked as a Dementia Café Co-ordinator. I saw the Centre Co-ordinator role at The Avenues and thought it looked really interesting. And it meant I could still work with older people," says Andrea.

"I worked alongside the Senior Co-ordinator, Geoff Brown, and learnt a great deal from him and the Westminster hub members. I really enjoyed my time there and we had a lot of fun.

"I had become acquainted with the Second Half Centre when I started covering there from September 2021, when we came back from lockdown. So when the senior job there became vacant, I thought it was time to challenge myself.

"It's very similar to my previous role but carries a lot more

responsibility. I am really enjoying the new position and getting to know the members there."



Andrea Carrington

If she has any free time, Andrea hopes to continue designing jewellery to sell on her website. But for now, she is busy organising several Open Age events, including a napkin decoupage art workshop, a Jubilee sing-along and a flower painting workshop to mark the Queen's Jubilee.

Who is Caiti?

Open Age has several behind-the-scenes staff whom you may not meet unless you happen to pop into their workplace.

So we'd like to introduce Caiti Campbell, Open Age's Office Manager, whose job includes managing and updating the charity's website in conjunction with the Member Experience Team of co-ordinators and associated staff.

From her shared office at the Second Half Centre in North Kensington, she also deals with emails sent in by members, updates staff policies where required, manages office equipment and organises inductions for new staff.

Raised in Stoke Newington, Caiti started work immediately after



Caiti Campbell

GCSEs as an office junior, moving on to retail and customer service jobs and managing an office in a nursery, where she developed her

experience of websites.

She was appointed as Open Age's full-time office manager three years ago, and since COVID arrived she has worked at home in Tottenham two days a week.

"Before lockdown, we had a lot of main office volunteers who managed the mailout system, printing and posting, but eventually we became digital, so that manual work was not needed. Now the volunteers tend to be based on reception, rather than with me," says Caiti.

In her free time, she enjoys going to the theatre to see musicals like *Grease* and *Moulin Rouge*, and looking after her cat Marley—named after the singer Bob, of course!

Music magic with Josh

Before Joshua Millais decided on a music career, he was a qualified chef working in restaurants—not surprisingly, because it runs in the family, along with singing, songwriting, photography and art.

His French mother was a professional cook, his Michelin-starred grandfather was head chef of the Carlton Hotel in London. But a meeting with an old school friend in 2008 caused him to change direction.

She had started a company called *The Courage To Sing* which encouraged adults who had been put off singing as children to use their voices, and he learnt to teach her method both for enjoyment and for its health benefits.

He was intrigued because his father was an excellent guitarist and singer who had taught him guitar from the age of nine and had spent some years in the Caribbean singing with famous Calypsonians.

“The Mighty Sparrow named my father Lord Bamboo because he was 6 foot 6 inches tall and the only white calypso singer!” says Josh, who is himself 6 foot 7 inches.

“He taught me many songs which I still love today. Singing is good for you physically and mentally. It’s good for the soul and the spirit, like meditation, but is very important for the breath—most people’s breathing is too shallow.”

Josh started his own franchise, Rock Choir Limited, and taught complete beginners and intermediates. But then a much cheaper rock choir put him out of business.



Josh (centre back) with his singers

Undaunted, Josh found he was eligible for Open Age and joined a singing class at the Second Half Centre. Soon he was invited to tutor a class in his own karaoke style—using You Tube music, singing and playing guitar and inviting members to join in.

“Many people are often reluctant to sing solo because they lacked the confidence, but once they develop some courage and realise they can actually sing, it can be very emotional for them. I’ve seen people just burst into tears.”

Later Josh moved to Open Age’s Westminster centre, St Stephen’s and St John’s, but now he runs the *Singing* class at New Horizons, once known as the Chelsea Belles, on Wednesday afternoons.

He also teaches music performance, mainly with guitars, at the Second Half Centre on Tuesdays and at The Avenues on Thursdays.



Men’s Space guitarists

The 90-minute Tuesday class, *The Magic of Music*, is a jam session for men only, being part of the Men’s Space programme (page 4). With chord sheets provided, eight to ten musicians—some ex-professionals, some beginners—play songs in various genres, including jazz, country, folk, pop and rock.

The repertoire ranges from Patsy Cline to John Denver, from *Autumn Leaves* to *Dirty Old Town* and from blues numbers to the *Love Actually* film theme.

The Thursday intermediate class, called *Guitar For All*, is a one-hour lunchtime session at The Avenues. It attracts around ten people per session and is aimed at both men and women.

Beyond Open Age, Josh runs singing and reminiscing classes for the Elgin Resource Centre—part of the Notting Hill/Genesis Housing Project. During the COVID lockdown, he was transported around to clients’ doorsteps to sing three songs with them and raise their morale.

“Open Age members are lovely people, but I believe everyone is special. Although I get paid, I hope I am giving something back by helping people enjoy themselves and uplift their spirits.”

Arts and food



Like many members of Open Age, Pearl Duarte is a woman of many talents. Born in Colombia, she studied architecture and fine arts and worked in her country's health ministry, where her professional career was developed mainly in building hospitals.

In 1998 she came to England and took a master's degree in interior design at Westminster University because as she says

"I like to pay attention to the fine details. It is very important that the interior is full of harmony and colour."

Pearl worked for more than 15 years at a college in West London, teaching website design and other computing courses. At home, she has a studio where she makes handbags for sale and dolls for charity, using recycled materials. She recently donated some of her paintings to a charity auction.

Says Pearl: "I love working with communities. At this moment I am working on planning and organizing creativity workshops for children and adults.

"Art is something that has always been an important part of my life and I wanted to go deeper by dedicating more time to it." She plans to study for a doctorate in fine arts at the University of East London.

Meanwhile she is a keen student of various Open Age courses—Manju Malhi's *International Cooking course* at the Second Half Centre on Mondays (see next page) and a monthly course called *Food for Thought with Manju* at the Queen Mother Sports Centre, Pimlico, on Thursdays, plus a *Memoir Writing Class* on Zoom on Tuesdays.



Pearl Duarte's handiwork includes handbags, recycled bags and dolls —a selection is shown here



Our neighbour Beatrix

Peter Rabbit toys as well as chocolate eggs were all the rage at Easter, and his creator has a special link with Kensington—she was born here, and educated by governesses before attending South Kensington art school.

Beatrix Potter was raised in Bolton Gardens and only started visiting the Lake District as a teenager. She did not move there till she was 47. Apparently, she knew Millais, the pre-Raphaelite who lived in Cromwell Gardens.

So it's fitting that the V&A Museum should devote a long-running exhibition to the animal-loving writer and artist's life and work—it started in February 2022 and continues until January 2023.

Yonita Macgregor is hoping to visit and discover how Peter has evolved into the current age.

She has fond memories of the stories from her childhood. "I read about Mr Macgregor and Peter Rabbit at the dentist when I was a child. I loved his waiting room table, as it also had all the Rupert Bear books.

"Little did I think that I would marry a Mr Macgregor and that he would also be a farmer! Now I have lost my teeth and time has moved on, but Peter Rabbit has kept all his and has not changed."

Prepare and eat with Manju

British-born chef and food writer Manju Malhi, a respected media name but also one of Open Age's tutors, has been awarded a British Empire Medal in a special Queen's honours list in recognition of her work during the pandemic.



Manju Malhi

Manju, who is equally at home with British comfort food as with traditional Indian dishes, taught healthy cookery using store cupboard ingredients to help the elderly and isolated—mainly Open Age members—during the COVID lockdown and beyond.

She received her medal at Westminster Abbey from the Lord Lieutenant of Greater London, Ken Olisa, and was congratulated by Boris Johnson.

She credits Open Age with enabling her to teach classes on Zoom, adding: "The medal was a pleasant surprise but I do this for love, not awards."

Early in the pandemic, Manju was interviewed about women and food for an Instagram video seen by thousands. The journalist was so impressed with the Zoom classes that she nominated her for the BEM award.

Manju has now released a cookbook *The Seasoned Foodie*

(available on Amazon), based on the recipes she demonstrated to the vulnerable, including Indian, Chinese, Mexican, Lebanese, Tunisian, Syrian, European and British dishes.

But few members who met her on Zoom were aware of their tutor's celebrity status. She has written six books and is a TV consultant chef for Anglo-Indian cuisine, exchanging ideas with the likes of Gino d'Acampo, Paul Hollywood and Gordon Ramsay. This year Manju teaches three popular classes at Open Age, all requiring advance booking. Two are at the Second Half Centre: *International Cooking* is a 90-minute class on alternate Mondays for both sexes, and *Lunch and Cookery* is taught on alternate Wednesdays to the Men's Space group.



International Cooking

Then there's a monthly *Food for Thought* class in Pimlico run from the St Margaret's Centre (South Westminster) on Thursdays. But she also has teaching commitments elsewhere—at a school and a health and wellbeing project in Hounslow, and at outdoor cooking demos in the grounds of Chiswick House.

Manju learned her craft from watching her mother cook—but she started her career originally as a broadcaster and interviewer. She was a DJ for BBC Leeds for two years, then a continuity announcer for BBC TV (which meant she was heard but never seen).

As the millennium dawned, she spotted a competition run by the BBC's Food and Drink programme inviting amateur cooks to submit a video of themselves. She filmed herself in the garden making chutney—at the time she had no kitchen—and not only did she win, but she found an agent to publish her first cookery book.



Lunch and Cookery

"My agent said the BBC were looking for a female chef for Saturday Kitchen, and that's how I started appearing on TV," recalls Manju, who also works as a consultant to food companies in the UK and Europe.

"But people in India heard about me too. I was once a personal chef to a Bollywood star for a few days while they were doing a location shoot on the Isle of Wight. Another time an Indian TV company wanted to do a British food series in 40 episodes, adapted for Indian viewers. We filmed in Delhi in the space of two months—in 38 degree heat!"

Phew!

Help us recruit more members!

How did being a member of Open Age help you during the pandemic? If you were helped, would you like to introduce our wonderful club to others?

Being a member of this charity during COVID made such a difference to my life. I was able to learn new skills, meet new people and feel part of a Zoom or phone community, despite being locked down at home for months.

There were hundreds of people who did not have the advantage of the communications network that Open Age set up during COVID, and many suffered serious mental distress.



Sheila with Open Age leaflets

I discovered that one way of introducing Open Age was through my doctor's surgery. Doctors struggled during the lockdown to treat their patients who were suffering from depression and loneliness.

This has had a knock-on effect because, since restrictions were lifted, many doctors are still struggling to treat them due to the numbers involved.

First I reached out to the patients at The Good Practice, King's Road, Chelsea. The GPs there were very inspirational and had been holding regular 'Zoom-led' coffee mornings with patients.

This doctors' practice, as do many others, has a Patients Participation Group (PPG). This makes it easy for the practice patients to be contacted and attend either Zoom or face-to-face social meetings.

The group invites guest speakers from many clubs and charities, including Age UK and University of the Third Age.

When I asked if I could introduce Open Age through one of these sessions, they invited an Open Age manager to give a presentation. I then lobbied the patients with notices in the practice waiting room, and local residents through the local shops, and we had a good attendance, with 24 people joining in. I have since learned that at least two patients have joined Open Age.

With this in mind, perhaps you would like to contact your GP surgery and ask if they have a PPG and ask to be introduced to the person who manages that group? If you could then ask them to promote Open Age to their over-50s patients, many people will have a 'life jacket' to put on, in the

awful event of a similar pandemic or lockdown.

There must be at least 50 surgeries around London where current Open Age members are patients. If we could get new members from this exercise or from people telling their friends, it would strengthen our charity.

Another way to help is to take some of the Open Age promotional leaflets, and put them in your doctor's surgery. If you are a member of another club, organisation or society, why not take some leaflets with you to their next meeting?

I did this at a meeting of the **Friends of Chelsea Physic Garden** (founded as a herb garden with medicinal plants), who hold a monthly coffee morning for members, and was very surprised at the interest engendered.

If you would like more information or assistance with promoting Open Age, please contact me on my mobile—07973 861646—or email me at events@hunterassociates.com

Sheila Newsum



"The Friends are a really nice crowd of people who do free tours around the garden in summer," says Sheila.

Chelsea Physic Garden

Beware the scammers

Data breaches and internet scams are an ongoing worry for the elderly who use computers and smart phones, but now it's even worse.

Since the COVID lockdown, even landline phone users have been pestered, and the number of fake messages and frauds has reached epidemic proportions.

One Open Age member targeted by scammers in the past is Rita, who lives in North Kensington near The Avenues. She received an email purporting to be from a friend on holiday in Cyprus, who urgently need 200 Euros because her bag had been stolen.

Fortunately Rita had the sense to phone her friend's landline in Ireland and found she was not on holiday abroad, had not had anything stolen and did not need money sent. Rita's suspicions were raised because the email addressed her as Margaret, but nobody uses her full name.

Another time someone tried to use her bank card number in Ireland to order flowers, but did not have the 4-digit code, so the florist alerted the police and the bank notified Rita and her husband.

"You don't have to lose your card to be scammed. Apparently there are organisations sitting at phones making up numbers, and if they are successful at finding a genuine card number, they then start ordering more expensive items.

"It's scary. My grandchildren thought the Cyprus scam was hilarious because they know I don't part with money that easily! I have been lucky, but you read about lots of people who have been conned. People come to the door offering to do work, then they say more work is needed and before long it's costing a fortune."

In April, a so-called delivery company left a note saying they had failed to deliver a parcel, but if Rita paid a certain sum they would redeliver. Rita did not comply as she was not expecting a parcel.

"But a small sum might sound reasonable to some householders. If you live on your own, it's easy to be taken in. Then you don't tell people you've been scammed because you fear appearing a bit silly. Pride comes into it."

Rita decided to share her responses with fellow members through this newsletter to raise awareness and help them avoid mistakes.

Rita's Tips

- Be vigilant
- Check everything
- Never accept anything at face-value
- Never pay upfront

Van Gogh—first selfie?

The Van Gogh Immersive Experience—a touring virtual reality show of the artist's best known works—has been extended into May 2022 in London and could even be extended again.

But if two immersive exhibitions of Van Gogh's work in London in 2021 and 2022 has proved too much, too confusing or too expensive, another more conventional exhibition which focussed on around half of his self-portraits was available at the Courtauld Gallery (February to May).

In March Yonita Macgregor went to check it out and asked: "Did Van Gogh create the first selfie, before Andy Warhol made them look like a page of postage stamps? His eyes follow you and are the telling point amid the many different



colours on his face.

If Andy Warhol became the most prized artist of the twentieth century for his portraits, then maybe Van Gogh filled that role for the nineteenth century, with around thirty self-portraits.

He felt that portraiture was the highest ambition for a painter, not just "a testing ground for raw emotion". His features are immediately recognizable, with his piercing green eyes, red beard and ginger hair, but his work is very diverse.

The most famous picture is of the bandaged ear, but he represents himself in various guises, from elegant gentleman to working painter."

Yonita Macgregor

Bon voyage, Herve!

Sometimes the best opportunities are those that fall into a person's lap when they are not even looking.

This is what happened to Herve Bessieres, who left Open Age on 31 January to become the new health manager at West Ham United Foundation—a charity run by West Ham Football Club in East London.



Herve Bessieres

After two and a half years as the popular Locality Manager South (Chelsea, South Kensington and South Westminster), Herve was not planning any moves, but a surprise offer of working in the community to promote health and well-being, with emphasis on children, older people and cardiovascular disease, seemed too good to miss.

One aspect is walking sports, including football, aimed at people with reduced mobility.

"What attracted me was that I used to run a cardio-vascular disease prevention service for Westminster before I came to Open Age, and I really enjoyed that," says Herve, who is also a trustee for the charity Munro Health, because his background is complementary health and nutrition.

"Every football club in the Premier League has a charitable branch providing health and well-being opportunities for the community—very like what we do in Open Age, but with a different group target.

"I am sad to leave Open Age,

which provides a truly essential service, but I am very happy at all that we have been able to achieve since the COVID pandemic began. It's been a very challenging two years, but also very successful."

Despite the lockdowns, Herve has managed to squeeze in a few trips abroad. After trying and failing four times to visit his relatives in France, he finally flew there last August for a three-day visit, and in October spent a week in Malta.

For his birthday in early January 2022, he went to Iceland for five days to see the Northern Lights, and in July he hopes to attend a yoga teacher training course in Bali.

Meanwhile he plans to continue his hobby of running or cycling to work on certain days, because his office in Beckton is not too far from his home.

His final message to Open Age? "A massive thank you to all the staff, all the volunteers and all the members who have made this a very special place since I arrived in 2019." Our reply? Thanks, Herve—it won't be the same without you.

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