



July 2020

# SupportMatters

from Independent Age



## The enduring power of friendship

Adapting our services  
to a new reality



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# Welcome

*Thank you for being by our side at this challenging time. You've helped us connect isolated older people across the country, despite the restrictions of lockdown.*

These recent months have been like no other, with the coronavirus crisis forcing millions of older people to stay home. It's simply been the greatest test in our 157-year history.

The good news is that we've all risen to the challenge. Volunteers, staff and supporters have responded with incredible speed and passion: for example, calls to older people from our telephone volunteers have tripled since the end of March. I'm just so proud of our team, and so thankful to committed, caring people like you for making it all possible. It means we've been able to reach out in friendship to thousands of older people, making sure they have the support they need – people like June, whose inspiring story you can read on page 5.

At this difficult time, it's so important to stay in touch with friends and family. One way to do this is to take part in our new virtual fundraising quiz, *BrainTeasers*. Why not try a few of the puzzles on the inside back cover of the magazine? It's a great way to keep active and share precious time with friends.

Once again, thank you for helping at this critical time. I hope you feel proud of your support, enjoy reading the stories inside, and that you and yours stay safe and healthy in the months to come.

**Deborah Alsina MBE**  
Chief Executive

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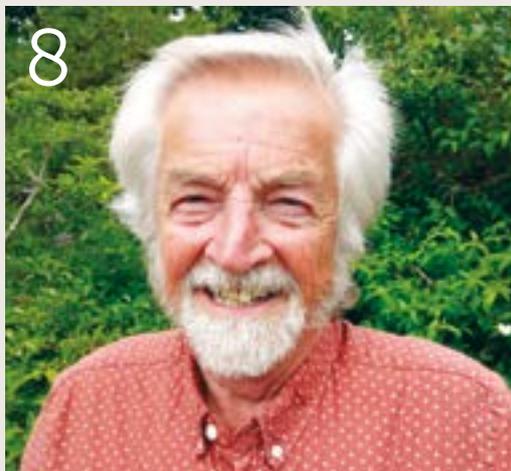
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# Looking out for friends

Campaigning to improve the lives of older people

*Morgan Vine, Head of Policy and Influencing, explains how we've been fighting for the rights of older people in this unprecedented crisis.*

What's the definition of a friend? To me, it's someone who has your back, and who looks out for you when times are tough.

This is the principle at the heart of our campaigning efforts, especially during the coronavirus crisis. We've been listening closely to what older people, our staff and volunteers on the ground have been saying – and several key themes have emerged that we're now discussing with the government, demanding action.

The first is the need for clear guidance. The government's original 'stay-at-home' message has been diluted, and many older people have told us they are unsure what the rules are. A second vital area is mental health, where we're calling for increased levels of mental health support and bereavement support to be provided to people in later life, both during the pandemic and beyond.

A third critical issue – and perhaps the most pressing – is food. More than half the older people we asked in a recent survey told us they couldn't

get the food they needed because of low stock levels or difficulty accessing delivery slots. We've heard from people across the country who either can't get to a supermarket, or who are scared of going in case they catch the virus.

Some people have talked about the difficulties of having to shop on their own, or ordering groceries over the phone. Others say that, because they've never been online, they're unable to shop from home and can't even register for an account. Together with other charities, we've brought these issues to the fore and are now pushing the government to take action. We've also met with major

supermarkets to convey the problems that people in later life are facing.

Thanks to these efforts, things are changing. We've secured more support for those unable to get food. More older people can now book priority supermarket slots. Plus, we've secured extra support for unpaid carers, so they can access food for those in their care. Of course, all of this is only possible thanks to the generosity and commitment of supporters like you, so thank you.

But the challenges of this pandemic are far from over – so our role as older people's friend and champion will continue in the months and years ahead. ■

*“ We've heard from people across the country who either can't get to a supermarket, or who are scared of going in case they catch the virus.*



## Join us!

Sign up to our campaigns e-newsletter and we'll keep you posted on what we're doing, and how you can get involved at [independentage.org/campaign-signup](https://independentage.org/campaign-signup)



# The enduring power of friendship

*Ashraf Choudhury tells you how the Wellbeing services have had to change because of the coronavirus pandemic.*

“

*Since lockdown began, our calls to vulnerable older people have risen by more than 300%.*

Ashraf is one of our National Wellbeing Managers, and runs our face-to-face friendship service across London and the south-east.

“Our job is to bring people together – it’s the main reason why many of our supporters give so generously. Clearly, that couldn’t happen in lockdown, so our volunteers immediately switched to calling older people in their local community. We made it a priority to ensure that every person had the support they needed. Our volunteer training went into overdrive, too, as the demand for our services increased dramatically.”

This intense level of support has continued throughout the crisis. Our teams have phoned more than 3,000 older people to check if they have access to food, care, support and medicines. *“Welfare checks have been vital in identifying the most vulnerable in our communities. It’s meant our volunteers have been able to deliver medicines and shopping to those most in need. And our new emergency fund has helped ensure that no older person goes without.”*

Many volunteers have gone to extraordinary lengths to make sure older people are supported in lockdown. For some, it’s meant

phoning pharmacies to make sure life-saving medical supplies are being delivered, and even calling petrol stations in rural areas to arrange food deliveries. *“The care and affection of our volunteers has really shone through. Corporate partners, old and new, have also stepped up to help. In fact, we’ve recently trained 40 volunteers from the business world, each one committing to making friendship calls over a minimum of 12 weeks.”*

Another innovation has been our virtual coffee mornings: friendly get-togethers over the phone. It started out as one or two book clubs, but has grown into 27 digital coffee mornings run by volunteers across the country, with more planned. These have brought laughter and companionship to more than 120 isolated older people.

The services that our wonderful supporters help to fund have played a pivotal role during the coronavirus crisis. Older people have told us that the kindness they’ve received has gone above and beyond what they expected. Friendship is so often taken for granted, but this challenging situation has actually brought people together, and created magical moments that will last a lifetime. ■

# I feel so lucky

How friendship has opened up June's life

*June found companionship on a shared phone line in lockdown, helping her come to terms with the death of her husband.*

After John died, I shut myself away. My world was completely bleak. In the end, the doctor said to me, "I'll give you some numbers. I want you to ring them." One of them was Independent Age and they were brilliant. They gave me a buddy, Charlotte, who started visiting me every week.

I wouldn't be where I am now without the support I have from Charlotte. She gives me confidence. She makes me laugh and if I'm down she gets me going. She gives up her time to help somebody and in my book that is quite something. Now that we're in lockdown, Charlotte phones me instead of coming to see me, but I still know she's there.

When the coronavirus first happened, I had a call from Independent Age to see how I was and if I needed any more help. Now they've done this wonderful thing for me. They've arranged for me and a group of my friends to connect with each other.

I first got to know the group when John was ill. It's where I learned to crochet and, as well as learning something new, I met lots of wonderful people. Every Thursday we met up and talked about different things. We had such a laugh. When John was alive it gave me some time for myself. Now he's gone, it's a wonderful source of friendship.

Given the coronavirus crisis, I was concerned about how we'd keep in touch but, thanks to Independent Age,

we're able to speak to each other on a shared phone line while we crochet. I wanted to keep the group together so that when this finishes we are not strangers. It really is great fun.

Now I have reached a place where I feel so lucky about how many people have helped me, the wonderful friends I have in my life and the support I've had from Independent Age. ■

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*The group is a wonderful source of friendship.*

Posed by a model



Posed by a model



Mary

“

*We love talking to each other. I feel so much happier after we've spoken.*

**Mary**



Ellie

# Friends across the ages

A truly special bond

*Mary and Ellie have become firm friends, all thanks to careful matching.*

A lot of thought goes into matching a lonely older person with a potential volunteer. Will their personalities complement each other? Do they have shared interests? Does the volunteer live within a reasonable travelling distance? It's only by asking these questions that we can create the perfect friendship – just like the one that Mary and Ellie enjoy today.

**Mary:** "I used to feel so lonely I'd sit at home and cry. I rang charities to see if I could have a visitor, and only Independent Age rang me back. They sent me Ellie and, as soon as I saw her, we clicked. She just made me feel at ease. Sometimes I see younger people and don't know what to say to them. I thought this would happen with Ellie but she was lovely straight away.

"Even when the weather was terrible, I'd see her on my doorstep

once a week. I'd say to her, 'You shouldn't come in this weather,' and she'd say, 'I like talking to you.' She loves asking me questions. We love talking to each other. We have a wonderful bond. I feel so much happier after we've spoken.

"Now, because of the coronavirus, she isn't allowed to come round, so she's careful to ring every week and we speak for an hour. I do miss her but I also love the phone calls. We said when this is over we'll see each other again."

**Ellie:** "I don't have grandparents, so I decided that the time I would have spent visiting a grandparent every week, I would spend with an older person who needed a friend.

"After I did the training with Independent Age, I was matched with Mary. The team took great care to make sure our personalities and interests would work together. Even so, I remember my first visit was a bit like a blind date. I walked up to her front door thinking, 'Is she going to like me?' But as soon as I saw her it was lovely. We were great together.

"She's taught me so much. She told me what it was like coming over here from West Africa in the 1960s and the tough times she went through. She's also told me what it was like being a nurse for all those years.

"Mary isn't able to leave the house much and I know how happy she is to have the companionship when I go round. I feel good when I'm with her and that feeling stays with me when I leave. Volunteering is such a rewarding experience." ■

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*She's taught me so much.*

**Ellie**



# Laughter changes everything

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The power of friendship  
down the phone line

*Telephone volunteer  
Katie reflects on how  
her training helped  
Derrick move beyond  
grief to a place to hope.*

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I've been talking to Derrick for about two years. I started after my gran died. We always had a weekly phone call and she loved them. So I wanted to help other older people who didn't have anyone to talk to.

I trained with Independent Age and I was asked to be Derrick's telephone volunteer. When I first called him, I was a bit nervous. He was a total stranger, and I was worried about how the conversation would go. I remember calling him with a list of topics to discuss and I didn't know if he'd be ready to talk to me.

But it went really well. He's so easy to talk to. I knew Derrick had found life terribly difficult after his wife died, and many of our early phone calls were traumatic. Thankfully, I'd had lots of training from Independent

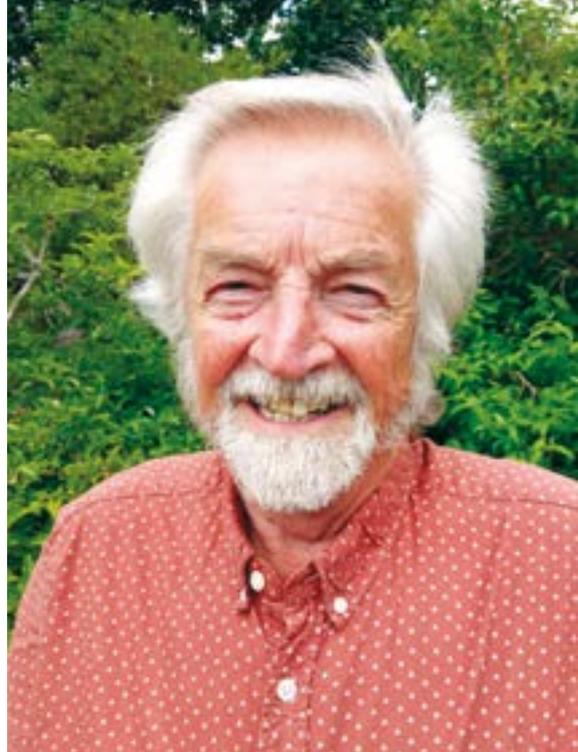
Age on how to approach really tough situations, like bereavement. I think Derrick was able to take comfort from what I said.

To begin with, I hoped that I would help him a bit, just by listening. Now, looking back, it's amazing to think what he was like and how much he's changed.

In two years, the transformation in Derrick has been amazing. He still has the occasional wobble or bad week, especially at the anniversary of his wife passing away, but nothing like he did in those early days. He's so much more upbeat now. Our conversations are totally different. When we started, I would never have believed we'd be having the conversations we're having now.

Ever since we started talking, I've encouraged Derrick to go out. I try to find out what interests him and we talk about those things more.

Now we have a good laugh. I have a naughty six-month-old puppy, so I tell Derrick the antics the puppy gets up to. We know each other so well – one conversation often starts where the last one left off. I think I look forward to our chats as much he does. ■



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*We know  
each other  
so well – one  
conversation  
often starts  
where the last  
one left off.*



# Let's get quizzical!

Keeping minds active  
and friendships strong

*BrainTeasers is a great way to get together online, while raising money for older people in need.*

One thing has united Britain during the coronavirus crisis: an obsession with quizzes. Across the country, hundreds of thousands of people have spent their lockdown days in an online battle of wits with friends, family or colleagues.

The appeal is obvious. It's a chance to connect with friends when we can't see them in person. It's also a way to keep our brains active at a time when so much of life is on pause. And with more and more charities getting involved, many see it as the perfect way to do some good while stuck in isolation.

That's why Independent Age has recently launched *BrainTeasers*, a fun, online event where people can get together for puzzles and a cuppa – while raising vital funds for our services. A host signs up online, then invites friends, family or colleagues to join in. Each player gives a donation to take part, and the fun begins.

It's a quiz with a difference: an hour or so of head-scratching puzzles and riddles rather than the usual general knowledge questions. Why not try the brain-teasers to the right? If you're stumped for the answers, you'll find them at the bottom of the page. ■

**i** Fancy having a go with friends or family? To sign up for *BrainTeasers*, simply go to [independentage.org/brainteasers](https://independentage.org/brainteasers) and we'll send you everything you need.



## Can you solve these BrainTeasers?

1. If you have me, you want to share me. If you share me, you haven't got me. What am I?
2. Work out this anagram of a famous British sitcom: DRAINED LINES
3. Find the phrase hidden in this word puzzle: VA DERS



**Independent  
Age**



Send a gift that  
makes a real  
difference to  
people in  
later life.

# Gifts of Independence

## Virtual gifts that change older people's lives

**Half a million older people go at least five or six days a week without speaking to, or seeing, anyone else.**

Buy a Gift of Independence for a loved one or a friend, and you could help provide vital advice and companionship to older people living in isolation.

It's ideal for a birthday treat or a Christmas gift. Or what about marking International Friendship Day on 30 July with a gift for someone you're missing?

Buying a Gift of Independence is easy. All you have to do is pick the gift you'd like to send, and tell us who it's for. Once you've gone through the online checkout, you can send a certificate to your friend or loved one, telling them how they're helping to transform older people's lives.

**Here are just some of the Gifts of Independence on offer:**

**Send wise words**

£5 could buy vital guides and leaflets that advise older people on money, health, care support and more.

**Buy a smile**

£20 could pay for a friendship visit that brings laughter and companionship into a lonely older person's life.

**Shine a light**

£40 could provide life-changing advice for older people from trained experts in social care, finance and more.

**Buy a year of cheer**

£120 could go towards friendship visits that bring joy and companionship to lonely older people all year round.

**If you'd like to send a Gift of Independence, simply visit [giftsofindependence.independentage.org](https://giftsofindependence.independentage.org)**