



March 2021

# SupportMatters

from Independent Age



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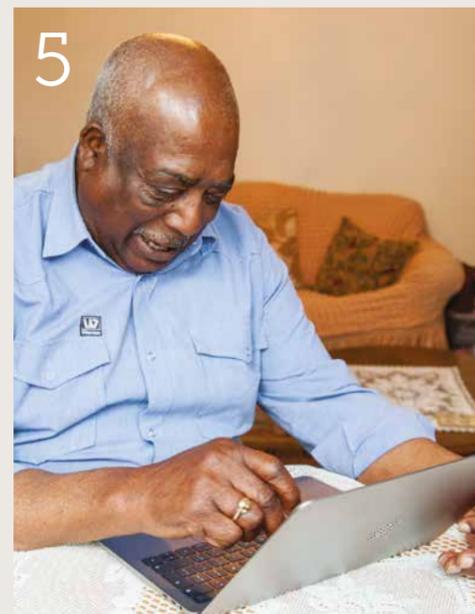
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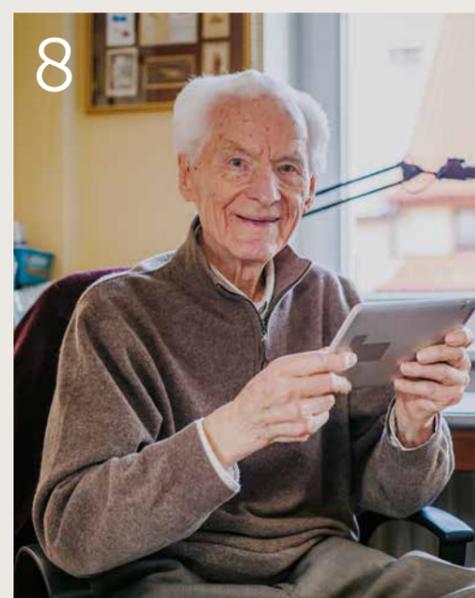
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**Support Matters survey results**

Thank you to everyone who completed our supporter survey in the July 2020 edition of *Support Matters*. We had an excellent response and will use our findings to shape the way we engage with all our supporters.

From the responses we received, 93% of you felt satisfied with the relationship you have with us at Independent Age. It's really good to hear this because it shows that, as a supporter, you feel that we value your support and that you hope to continue to support us in some way in the future.



# Welcome



*Challenging events, large and small, can have the unexpected upside of making us more inventive. You have proved this in the past year through your superb efforts to keep older people connected, safe and well.*

Thank you for 'doing your bit' during these testing times. Your support means we can continue to do our bit, especially for the isolated and the lonely.

We've seen this so wonderfully in the way our volunteer visitors have adapted to become volunteer phone callers and letter writers, maintaining their friendships and commitments regardless of restrictions. Fiona's connection with Peter on page 6 is a lovely reminder of the power of volunteering. People are often surprised by how much personal satisfaction, even a sense of accomplishment, they feel when they volunteer – the energy and enthusiasm are returned.

Your support carries this work, and more, forward. We've been able to set up new channels of information and connection for older people in the pandemic, particularly through our online coronavirus hub and the voices of our COVID-19 Correspondents – see page 2 for how they're being heard. We've even been able to offer technological help and resources to those who are digitally excluded, giving them more access to their families online.

I hope the stories here make you smile as you have made so many others smile through your positive efforts.

*Sally Sheehy*

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Head of Public Fundraising

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# Raising your voice

Our new COVID-19 Correspondents  
are being heard

*Campaigns Officer  
Oliver Steadman  
explains how our  
campaigners enable us  
to speak with one voice.*

**T**he voices and experiences of older people are always central to our campaigning at Independent Age. This has never been more important than during the coronavirus pandemic.

At key points during the pandemic, we've asked our campaigners which issues are affecting them most, and were thrilled that more than 5,000

people completed our most recent survey. The experiences you shared allowed us to focus our work where it was needed most, such as around bereavement and access to food. We shared your stories directly with MPs, parliamentary committees and government departments – but we wanted to do more.

In November 2020 we put out a call to our campaigners asking for people to join a new group of COVID-19 Correspondents. We weren't sure how many people would be keen on this, so were delighted when more than 300 campaigners signed up. Our correspondents have been answering weekly surveys on a range of topics related to the pandemic, such as receiving the vaccine, how lockdown is affecting their mental health or how they're accessing food. The insight they've given has been immensely valuable and has kept our work grounded in the experiences of older people.

After our first survey about receiving the vaccine, we were pleased that the majority of our COVID-19 Correspondents said they would accept the vaccine when offered it – but the survey also allowed us to hear from correspondents who had concerns. They wanted more information from the government about the vaccine and some were worried about travelling to get vaccinated. We shared these results directly

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*Independent Age has continued to call for older people to get the support they need during the pandemic – but we couldn't do this without your help.*

with the Department for Health and Social Care, including the vaccines minister, and with the NHS in England. Since then the NHS has reviewed and expanded their provision of information, including more details on what to expect at vaccination appointments.

Our COVID-19 Correspondents also told us that their food shop had become more expensive since the start of the pandemic, with 40% of respondents saying this was down to the cost of getting shopping, such as delivery costs or minimum spends. We agree that these costs can have a real impact on people's finances, so we've launched a campaign calling for the seven major supermarkets to offer free delivery to vulnerable people and reduce minimum spends. Independent Age has coordinated a joint letter signed by 24 other charities and has asked the public to add their names to the call. So far the letter has been supported by nearly 5,000 people.

The past year has been a really difficult time for everyone. Independent Age has continued to call for older people to get the support they need during the pandemic – but we couldn't do this without your help. Working alongside our campaigners, particularly our COVID-19 Correspondents, enables us to speak with one voice and raise the concerns of older people, their families and their communities. ■



## You've got mail

### Friendship can take many forms

*An enthusiastic band of letter writers, including volunteer James, is penning a new chapter of our friendship support service.*

Like so many services, our friendship support for older people has had to adjust during the pandemic. Face-to-face visits quickly switched to telephone calls, and now telephone calls are being complemented with letters.

An Independent Age volunteer from Lancashire came up with the idea of asking his colleagues to write letters to older people who were particularly lonely or who might benefit from receiving a letter in addition to their regular telephone call.

For those hard of hearing, for example, a weekly letter means they too feel included in our friendship services. We've also read out letters to a few older people who are visually impaired, so expanding the friendship service to them.

The letter-writing project began in earnest in May 2020, initially with 25 people receiving letters. The idea proved popular, and now up to 40 people are being sent letters every week.

And so, the project grows. After an email went out to volunteers in the North West asking for their help, we've also gained more volunteer letter writers – having started with eight, we now have 28!

The Independent Age inbox has been brimming with fabulous missives from volunteers, their friends, colleagues and family members. The letters are always cheery and thoughtful – and often amusing – and we have been moved at how willing people are to reach

out to virtual strangers to share stories of their lives, families, pets and experiences, both in words and with photographs.

We're now hoping to collaborate with a couple of primary schools in the North West, with some of their pupils writing letters or sending drawings to older people, so beginning an intergenerational friendship service.

Receiving a letter has been a perfect way to let people know they are being thought of during this very difficult time. ■

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*Receiving a letter has been a perfect way to let people know they are being thought of during this very difficult time.*

## Facts at your fingertips

Making simple, accurate coronavirus information easily accessible

*Dawn McCarthy, Information Development Manager, describes how our new coronavirus information hub is supporting people's wellbeing during the pandemic.*

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, we've been working hard to make sure older people can access simple, accurate information about the restrictions that affect them – and can get help when they need it.

With your support, we've been able to dedicate resources to building a coronavirus 'hub' on our website: [independentage.org/coronavirus](https://independentage.org/coronavirus)

The hub provides up-to-date information and advice for older people on a range of important issues, such as how to avoid coronavirus-related scams, how to manage

anxiety around the pandemic and how to cope with bereavement in these difficult circumstances.

It felt essential to us that older people should have information at their fingertips about how to access shopping and how to stay connected and well when they need to stay at home.

We've also developed a series of frequently asked questions (FAQs) based on what our advisers are hearing from the people who call our Helpline. These FAQs are regularly updated and now include answers to a range of questions about the coronavirus vaccine:

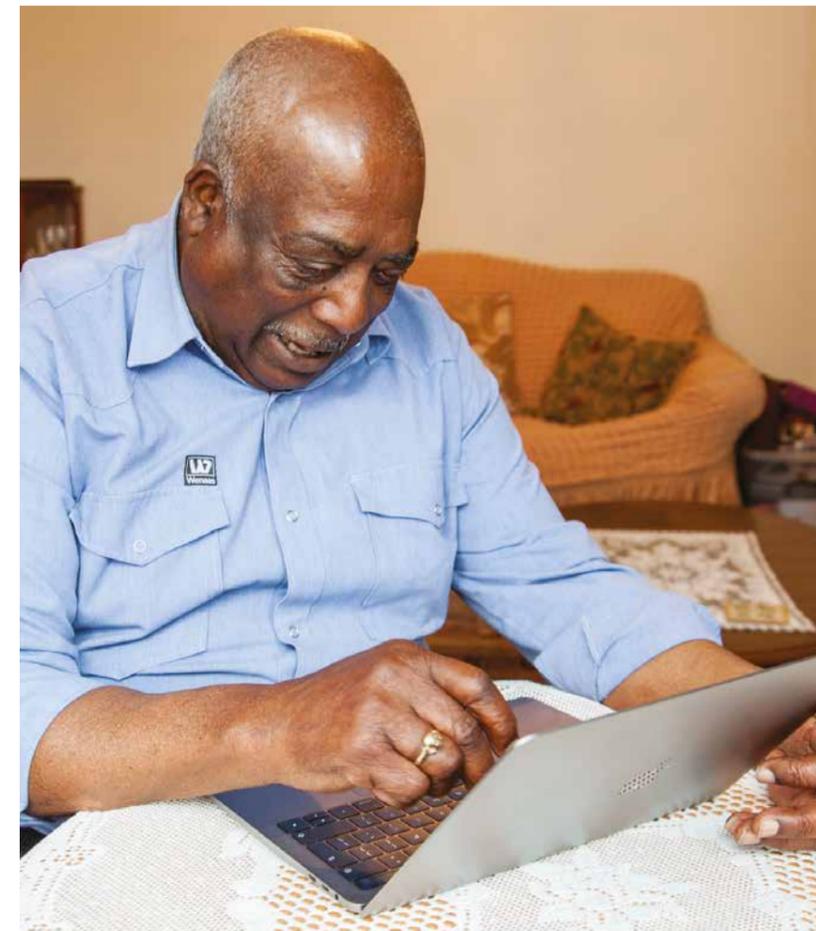
[independentage.org/coronavirus/FAQ](https://independentage.org/coronavirus/FAQ)

We know the changes to health and care services resulting from the pandemic have had a significant impact on older people. That's why the hub also has information explaining how some of these services, such as social care from the local council, may be affected.

Information resources like this – thanks to support like yours – are playing a key role in helping older people during the pandemic. ■

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# Helping each other

How volunteer visiting and calling lifts the spirits

*Eleanor Killner, a Volunteer Engagement Assistant at Independent Age, describes how our volunteer visitors are staying connected in strange times.*

Since we entered lockdown – almost a year ago now – we’ve seen our volunteer visitors adapt incredibly well to the difficult situation we’ve all found ourselves in. Their willingness to immediately switch to phoning those they’d normally visit in person has meant those precious connections are being maintained, ready for when they can meet once again.

One of my favourite connections is that of Fiona and Peter who, when the pandemic took over, began weekly telephone calls to each other to keep in touch.

**Fiona** “I was the youngest of six, and my mother was 44 when I was born. She was a nurse and my father a GP, so I grew up with a caring background. Because my parents were both incredibly busy with work, my siblings and I had two older ladies, among others, who helped bring us up. Now, I volunteer for Independent Age to honour their memory and say thank you for all the care they gave us.

“Sadly, there are a lot of older, lonely people, many of whom are neglected. I knew this growing up. Auntie Agnes, one of the ladies who looked after us and whom I visited until she died, had no other family and was always pleased to see me – as was Auntie Elsie, especially after her husband died. She used to come to our family home a couple of days a week

for company, and we six children were all devoted to her. One of my older sisters even used to take her from Preston, where we lived, to Newcastle to stay sometimes.

“My heart went out to Agnes and Elsie. Children are cute and often have older people such as parents and relatives who are keen to help them. Older people can be more daunting, say if they’re hard of hearing and won’t wear a hearing aid, or have different or strong views on things.

“I had always wanted to volunteer. At 59, I took redundancy from my job as a psychology teacher and personal tutor in a sixth form college. I started volunteering for Independent Age soon afterwards. I’m 65 now.

“Peter, whom I usually visit in person, is tremendous. He so looks forward to me going over and we often just laugh together for two hours. Even if I’m very tired and think I haven’t got the time or energy to visit, I make the effort for him and am always really pleased that I do. I wonder sometimes if we volunteers get more out of visiting than the people we visit do! The visits lift me.

“When I first saw Peter, his wife was very ill. She had gone blind, had dementia and was in hospital. Then she was moved into a home and died there. He was very sad. It was a very low time for him.

“He is so much happier now. He was initially wary of socialising, even though he attends church regularly. I have encouraged him to go to his local day centre. He had been worried that the people there would be snobbish but, in fact, it’s been a highlight of his week. He contributes when he’s there, offering suggestions for activities. I saw it as part of my role to persuade him to broaden his interests, so I’m delighted for him.

“All the volunteers are looking to the future when things can be back to normal and visiting can restart.” ■



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*I wonder sometimes if we volunteers get more out of visiting than the people we visit do!*

# Channelling your support

*Your support on social media is focusing our campaigns and messaging on the issues that really matter to you now, says Digital Content Officer **Kristy Collingbourne**.*



*Your generosity has helped create new and lasting friendships.*

**W**hen the coronavirus pandemic hit and we went into lockdown, our first question was: what happens now? How can we, as an organisation, get important information out to older people so they know who's there for them, how they can get extra support and, even, who they can trust during this uncertain time?

Ultimately, we had to ask ourselves: how can we possibly change our lives overnight yet continue to offer support?

Our answer was social media – quite simply, to make it the source of information, resources and, most importantly, support for older people during the crisis.

Social media's not without its flaws, and we recognise the many who are digitally excluded, whether by choice or because they don't have the resources. Your support and donations have enabled us to offer support to those who are digitally excluded. We've been able to give (virtual) technological support – and even offer devices – to older people, giving them more access to their families online.

And, we've been able to communicate key messages

and information about crucial topics quickly, efficiently and effectively to those older people who are online – as well as to their families, friends, carers, neighbours and, importantly, those who support us.

Hearing more of your voices and stories through our channels – from volunteers sharing news on the older people they've become friends with, to campaigners helping call on issues we're trying to tackle – means we've also been able to create more information and advice resources tailored to your needs.

With your continued support, we have gathered more volunteers to Independent Age, which means we can reach and support more people who have expressed their feelings of loneliness to us. Your generosity has helped create new and lasting friendships.

We can't change the pandemic but, with your help raising concerns and issues, we have a renewed sense of focus on who our audiences are, what concerns are relevant to them and the key everyday battles that older people are now facing. It's all part of helping people to live a happy, connected and purposeful later life. ■

## Growing old should be wonderful

Get a **FREE** Will Guide to see how you can help end loneliness and poverty in later life.

Our later years should be full of life and companionship. But for too many older people life has become unbearable, especially since the pandemic hit.

Almost 2 million older people live without the food, warmth and financial security they need. Nearly 4 million say the TV is their only friend. We believe this is wrong.

Our mission is to help more older people live well with dignity, choice and purpose. You can help by leaving a gift in your Will to Independent Age. With your support in the years ahead, we can reach out with vital advice, guidance and Connection Services.

*I was lonely before Holly started visiting. You do need someone to talk with. It keeps you going, and you feel grateful.*  
**Ivy, 91**

To find out more about the impact a gift in your Will could make on older people like Ivy, please get in touch.

Our Legacy Giving Manager, Sophie, can also explain how to make or update your Will for free with a participating local solicitor, through the National Free Wills Network. With a new year ahead of us, there's no better time to get your affairs in order. So please get in touch today.

In 50 years, there will be an additional 8.6 million of us over 65. That's why we're counting on the support of gifts in Wills.

**Please request a free Will Guide today to see how you can leave a legacy to end loneliness and poverty in later life.**



**Independent Age**

Call: 0207 605 4223

Email: [legacy@independentage.org](mailto:legacy@independentage.org)

Visit: [independentage.org/legacy](https://independentage.org/legacy)



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FROM JUST  
**£1**  
A WEEK

2

# £1 could turn into £20,000 every Friday!

Having a little flutter in the **Friday Flutter Independent Age Lottery** can be incredibly rewarding.

Not only could you win up to **£20,000** every Friday, you'll also be helping to transform the lives of older people across the UK.

**It's definitely worth a flutter!**

**1st Prize:**  
**£20,000**  
if you match 6 numbers

**2nd Prize:**  
**£1,000**  
if you match 5 numbers

**10** guaranteed prizes of a  
**£25**  
M&S voucher

**Play now at**  
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or call our Lottery Helpline on **0330 002 0057**

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