

Salisbury Are Board 10th March 2022

Irene Kohler – Salisbury Older People’s Champion and Chair of the Silver Salisbury Group

The underlying aim to the work of Silver Salisbury Group is to alleviate loneliness and isolation amongst the older population. It does this by promoting opportunities for older people to meet old friends and make new ones through trying out activities as part of the Silver Salisbury programme held in the two to three weeks around 1st October which is International Older People’s Day. The Silver Salisbury programme grew out of my role as Salisbury Older People’s Champion: the Silver Salisbury Group developed as a small constituted voluntary organisation which has now applied to the Charity Commission to register as a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation) which is a charity and also a limited company. After the success of the first programmes in 2018 and 2019, Amesbury requested to be part of this initiative: to include Wilton was practical because of its proximity to Salisbury. Silver Salisbury has now been requested to also include Downton.

As Champion, my primary focus is Salisbury and I have received funding each year from Salisbury Area Board. Silver Salisbury also receives funding from Stonehenge, Southern and South West Wiltshire Area Boards. We also have grants from Community Fund, Awards for All programme and Wiltshire Community Foundation to include the whole area of benefit plus from Southern Area Board to develop in Downton.

The programme in 2021 included about 100 entries of events and ongoing groups offering taster sessions. The programme can be downloaded on www.silversalisbury.co.uk. The events were well attended and a number of groups reported that they had visitors to their group and/or an increase in membership.

As well as leisure and physical activities, the programme also included Techy Tea Parties, Pride Through the Generations, conservation work at Hazel Hill Woods, a talk for Grandparents estranged from their grandchildren through family conflict, Parkinson’s Monologues, financial abuse and feedback from the local history talks was very positive especially from people new to Salisbury. Most events include refreshments to encourage social engagement over a cuppa. We are very appreciative of the volunteers who provide home baked cakes for these occasions which often evoke memories and initiate conversation.

Working in partnership is incredibly important: too many to name all but including the Libraries, Wiltshire Creative, Salisbury City Community Team, my colleague Helen Dowes, Salisbury Carer’s Champion, SaSS members, Salisbury Soroptimist members, the team at the Guildhall and Information Centre to name but a few. Silver Salisbury only organises a very few events directly; we co-ordinate the programme and promote the brochure.

Following Silver Salisbury successful tea deliveries during lockdowns, we made a delivery to people who are housebound as part of the programme: as they weren’t able to join us at events for tea, we took it to their homes. “What a lovely surprise”; “very much appreciated”; “made me feel that I wasn’t alone”; “I had a very excited phone call from my mother (98). She had just received a lovely tea delivery from you and was ringing the whole family to tell them.”; “It was good to know I wasn’t forgotten”. I also had a couple of notes saying how lovely the tea was and that it was enough for two days which gives me some concern that some older people may be finding it difficult to afford enough food and the cost of living is escalating: there are very few older people using food banks and following on that they may not have enough to eat, is the concern that pride may be preventing them from asking for help.

We are very aware that the programme was successful due to the people who were ready to get out and about and who welcomed the Silver Salisbury programme when it came out, took advantage of it and enjoyed the programme. At a number of events, we overheard and noticed arrangements being made to meet and contact details being exchanged.

Having the programme in print is very important because of the number of older people who do not access the internet or social media which for Silver Salisbury is a back up. Distribution was quite difficult due to GP surgeries being closed as were a number of our usual outlets. The majority of participants were ready to

get out and about again. We are concerned that there are many isolated or lonely people we are not reaching and aim to further develop our outreach work.

The development of the programme and its range of activities has been influenced by a variety of sources including

- My developing knowledge of what is available in Salisbury and surrounds and its various groups
- Word of mouth and people contacting me with details of new possibilities
- Feedback from older people who have participated in various events
- Results of our consultation with older people during 2021.

Silver Salisbury Older People's consultation

In early 2021 Silver Salisbury was awarded a Community Fund grant from the Awards for All programme and we were able to engage Moira Packer to undertake our outreach and consultation with older people. 600 hard copies of the questionnaire were shared through older people's sheltered housing and retirement complexes, support, activity and volunteer groups, newsletters, faith groups, libraries, coffee mornings, etc and personal contacts. 16% of questionnaires were completed on line. In total we had 243 responses.

Key points from the consultation were

1. that 13% of respondents said that they experienced anxiety, one in seven of our older people said they often or always felt lonely. The question about activities indicated that a number of people decided to step down from their volunteering role or paid work following lockdown and there is an increase in people wanting to learn new skills and a reading or poetry group.
2. The inhibitors preventing people leading the life they would like to lead included
 - Government Covid restrictions (20%)
 - Mobility issues (19%)
 - Confidence using computers and smartphones (17%) Get Connected project and the library are now increasing their Techy Tea Parties: being IT illiterate increases isolation)
 - Physical health (17%)
3. Facilitating increased participation of older people
 - Local activities (54%) including activities in their sheltered schemes or retirement complex
 - More information on activities available (45%)
 - Knowing older people are welcome (37%)
 - Low cost or free sessions (37%)

They also fed back that one programme a year in the autumn was not enough A full report on our consultation is on our website, www.silversalisbury.co.uk.

Reviewing the Silver Salisbury Offer: The Silver Salisbury Group including trustees, beneficiaries, contributors to the programme and funders of the programme met in early December for a review meeting. The conclusion they reached on the way forward for 2022 included

- A late spring/early summer Silver Salisbury mini-programme (offers of events welcomed)
- To consolidate our links in Wilton and Amesbury
- Extend our outreach work
- Consult with Downton seniors and groups and offer a spring taster session

We would really welcome your help

We are aware that the majority of people enjoying our programme are ready to engage. There are many people who are finding it difficult to get motivated and as a result are in danger of becoming more isolated. We would welcome help with our outreach and promotional work. If you are interested, please contact via our website www.silversalisbury.co.uk or to silver.salisbury@outlook.co.uk