

Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum

Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus

Email: comms@sdsaf.org.uk

June 2023

Welcome from the Chair.

It is good to have the sunshine and warmer weather with us once again and for many it is a welcome relief to be able to turn the heating down or off and to try to reduce our energy costs throughout the summer.

Our Annual General Meeting will be held this year on the 7th July at Hollybush Indoor Bowls Centre, Hollybush Close, Sevenoaks, at 2.00pm. Kent Association for the Blind will be our speakers, they will be bringing their information bus to assist us all with understanding better eye health.

We would be pleased to see as many of you who can make it, as it is important to meet our members as often as we can, to ensure that our priorities are what you would like us to take forward and it is an opportunity for you to hear more about the work that we are doing.

The Committee has been working hard over the months, getting us back on track with our agenda. The Sub Committees have met and continued with their important work, meetings have been attended with various bodies such as Sevenoaks District Council, health and with the Police Liaison Panel. It was at the Sevenoaks District Council Making It Happen Awards that our dear late Margaret Parker received a posthumous award for her services to the Forum, for which we were delighted.

We approached one of our MP's Laura Trott in April for a meeting and received a response from her Agent Graham Clack, saying that she did not have any time available for us before the summer recess. As yet, no future date has been suggested. This is disappointing as we have many questions that we would like to raise with her on behalf of older people in Sevenoaks District. We will wait for a few weeks and will repeat our request.

72 organisations, including Age UK, Independent Age, Alzheimer's Society and many individuals are calling for a Commissioner for Older People to be appointed. The person/post would be an independent champion to ensure that older people are considered when debates and decisions are made in Government. We welcome this initiative.

I know that when you receive this newsletter, Volunteers week which was from the 1st-7th June will be over. The week is to celebrate the contribution that volunteers make to society, and I know that many of you volunteer for many organisations and charities across our district. Seniors make up a huge army of volunteers and without this assistance many organisations would have great difficulty. However, although the date has passed, it is not too late to volunteer, **we need your help!** We need people to join our subgroups, Committee and to take on some roles such as secretary, publicity and much more. If you feel you can help, however much time you can spare, please get in touch.

I cannot believe that I have now been on the Committee for a year, how time passes, but I am so pleased to be assisting and to be part of a magnificent group of people who really do work hard for the Forum, I am looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the AGM.

Gill

Grow a healthy Swanley

Our thanks to Jackie Griffiths for telling us about an exciting new project in Swanley. Maybe other parts of our district will emulate this very empowering initiative. For further information contact Jackie on davidgriffiths701@hotmail.com or Mobile 07720327779 "Grow a Healthy Swanley" is a community initiative to produce cheap, fresh food for local people and to foster a real sense of community to include many who are socially isolated. Swanley has many dysfunctional areas of poverty and illiteracy. Some residents are actually destitute. Mental health issues are high.

We have a community group with constitution, terms of reference and a bank account. We now have community funding. We have 3 allotments in Crockenhill, a rural area near Swanley. We have also acquired some land in Swanley itself. A local scout troop is interested in affiliating with us as they have some land at the rear of their hut. We have a growing number of volunteers and supporters, which includes people with gardening expertise.

The idea is for the project to be organic so that its growth can be flexible. In the future we are hoping to encourage people to join together to cook and eat a healthy meal together. Also, eventually we wish to pull local restaurants and cafes into the scheme with a "Grow a Healthy Swanley" Menu. The project is attracting a lot of interest and has the potential to develop into a sustainable scheme for the benefit of the residents of Swanley"

Inter-generational Fun

Some of our Seniors were invited to Sevenoaks Primary School at the end of May to take part in their annual Big Book Day. The focus this year was on Age and the aim was to develop the children's understanding and appreciation of the older generations.

Seniors were invited into the classrooms to share their wisdom and experience with the pupils. Each child in the classroom had prepared a question and we shared our memories of life before mobile phones and the internet, when we used to play out in the street and make our own fun in our local communities

We took in old photos, moth eaten teddy bears and examples of toys we played with. And how wonderful it was to go outdoors with the pupils to skip, play hopscotch, bounce balls against the wall and hunch over a game of jacks in the playground, whilst in the classroom there was great excitement over board games, boxes of cards for playing snap and creative theatre using hand knitted finger puppets.

It is of course wonderful to benefit from technological advances - we love our cars, household appliances and smart phones - but it was a true joy to experience the excitement of the children when they were having some good old-fashioned fun. And we all appreciated this valuable opportunity for different generations to interact together and to enjoy and respect each other's company.

Well done Sevenoaks Primary School for this initiative. If you would like to take part in similar events around the district, do let us know

Eileen

Fuel prices

The current cost of living crisis affects us all and it's important to do everything we can to to make ends meet. Fuel prices in our district can vary considerably so it's worth shopping around. Go Compare have developed an interactive fuel prices tool to help drivers find some of the cheapest places to fill up nearby. We have added this to the useful links on our website.

<https://www.gocompare.com/motoring/guides/petrol-prices/>

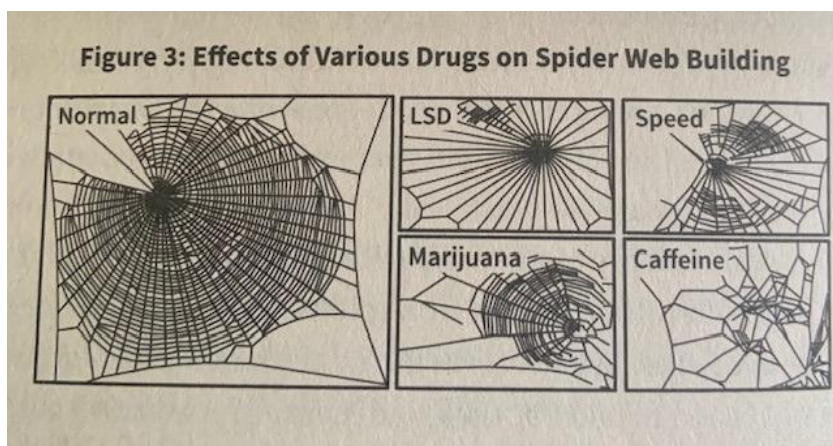
Support for Cardiomyopathy



It's a sad fact of life that more and more people are being affected by myocarditis, cardiomyopathy and other serious heart conditions. The Heart Muscle Charity, Cardiomyopathy UK has recently set up a support group in Kent which offers online meetings. You can also speak with a nurse 0800 018 1024

Addicted to caffeine?

Taking care of our brains....



Our thanks to Lynne Payette who sent us this picture from Matthew Walker's book 'How we Sleep'. It shows the results of research by NASA in the 1980s. The scientists exposed spiders to different drugs and then observed the webs that they constructed. The drugs included LSD, Speed, Amphetamine Marijuana and caffeine

The researchers noted how strikingly the performance of the spiders was affected when being given caffeine, even compared to the other drugs. So when you reach for that extra cup of caffeine loaded coffee or tea, let's learn from the spiders and remember that caffeine is a stimulant drug, and for all of its feel good factors, it can interfere with the quality of our sleep and take a toll on our bodies.

Discounted broadband packages

For any of our members who are in receipt of benefits, there are special discounted home broadband packages available.

These packages, known as Social Tariffs, are offered by broadband providers and can be vital for those struggling with bills, keeping families connected even in tough times. Subject to eligibility, customers on social tariffs could in some cases save over a hundred pounds a year. For further details visit <https://www.digitalkent.uk/information/projects/scp/socialtariffs> or call [03000 410 950](tel:03000410950).

Brain healthy summer salad

Here's a brain-healthy recipe for a refreshing summer salad (kindly composed by our robot)



Ingredients:

- 2 cups mixed salad greens (spinach, kale, arugula, or your preferred greens)
- 1 cup mixed berries (maybe locally grown blueberries, strawberries, raspberries)
- 1/2 cup walnuts, chopped
- 1/4 cup crumbled feta cheese (optional)
- 1 small avocado, diced
- 1 tablespoon flaxseeds or pumpkin seeds
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. In a large salad bowl, combine the mixed salad greens, blueberries, raspberries, sliced strawberries, diced avocado, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, and crumbled feta cheese (if using).
2. In a small bowl, whisk together the extra-virgin olive oil, balsamic vinegar, salt, and pepper to make the dressing
3. Drizzle the dressing over the salad and gently toss to coat all the ingredients evenly.
4. Serve immediately and enjoy your brain-healthy summer salad!

This salad contains several brain-healthy ingredients. We all know that greens are good for us and spinach in particular is rich in antioxidants and vitamins, including vitamin K, which has been linked to improved cognitive function. Berries are packed with antioxidants and flavonoids that can help protect the brain from oxidative stress. Walnuts are a great source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential for brain health. Flaxseeds are also high in omega-3s and provide fiber and lignans, which have been associated with brain health. Avocado contains healthy fats that support brain function, and olive oil is another source of healthy fats and antioxidants. Finally, the balsamic vinegar adds flavour while providing some additional antioxidants.

Enjoy your brain-healthy summer salad!

Social Isolation

Jackie Griffiths has written the following article to raise our awareness of the potential dangers of social isolation.

Research suggests that there is a clear link between social isolation, loneliness and a negative impact on health outcomes and thus can put a strain on already overworked health services.

Holt-Lunstad (2010) states that 'weak social connections carry a health risk that is more harmful than not exercising, twice as harmful as obesity, and is comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day or being an alcoholic.'

Loneliness is associated with an increase in mortality. Socially isolated people are more likely to use the services of a GP and A/E. They are more likely to suffer from physical and mental ill health. Lack of a social network can impede recovery from illness and accidents. Isolation and loneliness can be the catalyst for mental health issues including self-harm, suicide and substance abuse.

Social isolation and loneliness can affect all members of society and patterns are not evenly distributed across the population. However, based on available data, those children and adults who are socio-economically disadvantaged, those living alone, the widowed and separated, those with poor physical and mental health are the most at risk.

We already live in a time of increased social isolation, The pandemic has exacerbated this along with the cost of living crisis and the cuts in public services. Older people and those living in rural areas have been disproportionately affected. Increased use of technology often excludes these very people.

Mitigation is urgent although medium and long term solutions are difficult to implement in the current climate. However, it is imperative to raise awareness of this issue.

Some members may be aware of our previous work in this area and of our response to KCC's investigation. (See link on website) we would welcome your thoughts on any initiatives we could take to reduce social isolation. Meanwhile, let us all remember that there may be people we could reach out to in our immediate neighbourhood with random acts of kindness. A smile and a good deed a day can go a long way.

Some Ideas for meeting new people

If you have got into the habit of being alone and want to break out of your comfort zone, you could try

Networks clubs and events

Join an exercise class

Join a walking group like Every Step Counts

Walk your dog (or someone else's dog)

Volunteering

Fellowship groups at your local church

Support groups

Forget me not cafes

Go out for a coffee to a local cafe

Attend local coffee mornings and lunch groups

To make contacts online

"Next door" to connect with your neighbours

Facebook groups

Friendship and dating apps

Helpful links to help cut the cost of living

- Affinity Water's [application page](#) and phone number to discuss their Low Income Fixed Tariff (LIFT) for a cap on your freshwater bills at £107.20 per year -**0345 357 2402** This is suitable if your income is below £16,480 or you're on means-tested benefits
- Southern Water's [website](#), [application form](#) and the number for their Affordability Team to discuss their Essentials tariff where you can get at least 20% discounted from your water bills – **0800 027 0363** This is suitable if your household income is below £21,000, excluding disability benefits. South East Water's [website](#) and phone number to discuss their Social Tariff to cap your freshwater bill and receive a 25% discount on your wastewater with Southern Water - **0800 952 400**
- [Thames Water:- WaterHelp and WaterSure](#) for a discount or cap on water bills – **0800 009 3652**
- Citizens Advice's Help to Claim line to discuss your benefits situation – **0800 1448 444**
- [Turn2Us charity](#), for grants and bursaries.
- [Money saving expert benefits calculator](#)

MONTHLY FORGET-ME-NOT CAFES

For those of us who are recognising issues with our memory or cognition and for their carers, family and friends. There will be support, companionship, entertainment and lots of tea and cake. These cafes take place across the Sevenoaks District and are free to attend

Forget
-me-
not
Cafés



Companionship over a cuppa

SEVENOAKS AT KNOLE

When: 1st Friday of the month
Time: 10.30am-12.00pm
Where: The Hayloft, National Trust Knole, Sevenoaks, TN13 1HU

HILDENBOROUGH

In Collaboration with St John's Church
When: 2nd Wednesday of the month
Time: 11am-12.30pm
Where: St John's Church Centre, Foxbush, Hildenborough, TN11 9HT

BAT & BALL STATION

In Collaboration - Presented by Sevenoaks Town Council
When: 2nd Wednesday of the month
Time: 10.30am - 12pm
Where: Bat & Ball Train Station, Bat & Ball Road, Sevenoaks, TN14 5AP

WESTERHAM

In Collaboration with Westerham Parish Council
When: 3rd Friday of the month
Time: 11am-12.30pm
Where: The Congregational Church, Fullers Hill, Westerham, TN16 1AB

EDENBRIDGE

When: Last Friday of the month
Time: 10.30am-12.00pm
Where: The Eden Centre, Four Elms Road, Edenbridge, TN8 6BY

OTFORD

In Collaboration with Otford Parish Council
When: Last Thursday of the month
Time: 11am-12.30pm
Where: Otford Village Memorial Hall, 28A High St, Otford, Sevenoaks TN14 5PQ

FORGET-ME-NOT'ES - SINGING GROUP

In collaboration with Rockdale Senior Living
When: Third Thursday of the month
Time: 2.30 - 4 pm
Where: Beatrice Wilson Common Room, Rockdale, Rockdale Road, Sevenoaks, TN13 1JT

Life on the Buses

An update from David Brazier (*County Councillor for Sevenoaks Rural North and Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport at KCC*)

We are at an interesting stage at the moment with the BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan Oct 2021) allocation. KCC's bid to the Department for Transport was in excess of £220 million; we were allocated £35 million and of which we have received £19 million for 2023/25. The figures are £6.53 million revenue and £12.45 million capital. The capital is destined for physical schemes around the county to create priority for buses, a plan to create an integrated travel scheme known as MaaS (Mobility as a Service) which would take an entire article to start to explain but which will join together bus, train, taxi and cycling to enable you to plan and pay for a journey from beginning to end with one ticket.

Revenue spending will be concentrated on fare initiatives and promotions (the £2 cap of recent weeks would be typical and has now been extended from Oct to £2.50), QR QuickResponse codes at bus stops to obtain information. Also new and enhanced services. We are discussing with ourselves what these might be.

We are reasonably confident that the remaining £16 million from our allocation will be received in due course. The present government is keen for the bus industry to recover from Covid and is maintaining its support for operators. There have been concessions to us that we did not expect and we shall now be able to keep the cost of the Kent Travel Saver for selectively educated schoolchildren down to £450 for a year with the use of BSIP money. It remains the case, however, that we cannot revive withdrawn services; that would not accord with the government's view of the future as they see it as throwing good money after bad. New services, yes, so this might help those who no longer have, or have never had, a bus service.

At the present time we have been able to fund buses to get children to their selective schools when Go Coach were withdrawing services. Pre-bookable DRT (Direct Response Transport) remains the modus in Sevenoaks and there is nothing we can do about that. As I repeatedly say, we don't run the buses in Kent, the operators do and if they choose to create services.

Apparently, David will have much more to tell us in a few months' time.

Praise

The Gathering Community
Dunton Green Pavilion which meets on Tuesdays 9-11 in term time
And other local churches that provide similar outreach services

Angela Painter who was given the British Empire award in the Kings new year's honours list for her decades of dedication to the community

Oncology Department at Maidstone Hospital for caring and sensitive service even when under pressure

Lynne Payette, one of our readers who lives in California, for furnishing us with helpful information on falls prevention and brain health

Health and Social Care

Many thanks to Ken Cardinal and the team of members in our newly updated Health and Social Care Action Group - the new name reflects the movement towards integrating health and social care within the NHS. The main function of the Group is to keep our senior citizens informed of changes that will impact them.

A recent survey amongst a section of patients in Sevenoaks District showed the major plus being the clinical expertise, kindness and care of medical staff, weakened by 1) the difficulty of getting an appointment within a reasonable time and speaking to a GP/nurse of choice 2) the shortage of face to face appointments and the drawbacks of some telephone appointments 3) wrestling with IT systems and 4) not enough staff, particularly doctors. The NHS is very much aware of these problems and is trying to find solutions.

Change is happening very fast and new methods will change how we interact with the NHS. A new 5-10 year strategy will aim to give patients more options, better support and properly joined up care. Over the next five years, every patient will have the right to online digital GP consultations. These will save some trips to surgeries and to hospitals and will reduce NHS expenditure, releasing funds for extending local services and creating integrated teams of GPs, community health and social care staff. Many people will benefit from social prescribing and from partnerships with patient groups and the voluntary sector. However, the move towards digital consultations will create problems for seniors who have difficulty accessing digital technology and we fear that some of our older people will feel more and more marginalised.

In April 2023. the Hewitt Report was published which heralds "integrated care systems" which will aim to treat patients in a holistic way. At present, what this will mean in practice remains vague - our Action Group will aim to remain abreast of the changes and keep you posted.

Are you a Seenager?



I am a Seenager (Senior Teenager).
I have everything that I wanted as a teenager -
- only 60 years later.
I don't have to go to school or work
I don't have a curfew
I have a drivers license and my own car
I have ID that gets me into pubs and lets me
buy booze from a store
The people I hang around with are not scared
of getting pregnant
And I don't have acne

Life is great, I have more friends that I should
send this to, but right now the only problem is -
I can't remember their names!

FORUM CONTACT DETAILS

To contact the Forum Committee:- email Eileen Murray-Giles at :
chair@sdsaf.org.uk, or write to
"Sevenoaks District Seniors Action Forum" C/O 22 Lambarde Road, TN13 3HT
or ring 07784 677626
SDSAF Website: www.sdsaf.org.uk
Please let us know if you would like to receive the Newsletter in large print