mha
Live later life well

Make it matter



Join our Advent of Kindness • Give the gift of wellbeing with Joysome • Volunteer stories that inspire

Why kindness is good for your health • Supporting families living with dementia

Winter 2026

The greatest gift we can give

There's something different about winter.

As the days grow shorter and the evenings draw in, many of us find ourselves slowing down. We spend more time with family and friends. We reflect on the year that's passed. We look ahead to the one still to come.

It's also the season when the smallest acts of kindness can mean the most.

At MHA, we see those moments every day. A volunteer giving up an hour to visit someone who feels lonely. A colleague going the extra mile to brighten a resident's day. A supporter helping fund services that bring comfort, connection and hope.

Each one leaves something behind: a friendship, a smile, a sense of belonging or the reassurance that someone cares.

In this edition of Make it Matter, you'll discover stories that celebrate the power of **kindness**. You'll meet remarkable people, explore why kindness is good for us all, find inspiration for looking after your own wellbeing, and discover simple ways to make a difference this winter and beyond.

None of this would be possible without you.

Whether you've donated, volunteered, fundraised, remembered MHA in your Will or simply championed our work, thank you. Your generosity helps older people across England and Wales feel connected, valued and supported to live later life well.

I hope these stories leave you feeling inspired. Inspired by the kindness you've already shown. And inspired by the difference even the smallest act can make.

Thank you, as always, for your support.



Sam Monaghan
Chief Executive, MHA

Kindness adds up

Because of you, thousands of older people experienced greater connection, companionship and support over the last year.

- **17,401** older people supported across MHA
- **9,000+** befriending calls made by volunteers
- **67,000+** hours of pastoral and spiritual care provided by our chaplains
- **2,190** volunteers gave their time to support older people.

Every number represents a person. Every act of support helps make later life better.





The Ripple effect

Kindness has a habit of travelling.

Someone gives their time to sit and talk. That conversation helps another person feel less alone. A friendship grows, and perhaps, somewhere along the way, that kindness inspires someone else to do something too.

But the ripple effect of kindness is more than a nice idea. Research suggests that doing something kind for another person can benefit our own wellbeing too.

> A review of 27 studies involving more than 4,000 people found that performing acts of kindness had a positive effect on the wellbeing of the person doing them. Other research has found links between giving to others and increased happiness.

Part of the reason may lie in connection. Kindness brings us into contact with other people and helps strengthen the relationships and communities around us. For someone experiencing loneliness or isolation, a seemingly small moment of connection can take on much greater significance.

We see that ripple effect across MHA. A volunteer gives a few hours and becomes the familiar face someone looks forward to seeing. A donation brings people together, where new friendships can begin. One person's determination inspires others to get involved, helping even more older people benefit.

The act itself might be small. Its effect doesn't have to be. That's the ripple effect at the heart of MHA's work: people doing something for one another and, together, helping older people to live later life well.

This winter, we hope you'll create a few ripples of your own.

You never know just how far they'll travel.

Pass it on

Kindness can start with sharing something useful. Our Later Life Hub is full of trusted advice and practical guidance to help you, or someone you care about, live later life well.

Visit the Later Life Hub – and if you find something helpful, why not share it with someone else?

mha.org.uk/hub

or scan the QR code

Advent of Kindness

Small acts of kindness.
Lasting impact.

Let's make kindness the story of this Christmas

Imagine if, this Advent, thousands of people across England and Wales each chose to do one simple act of kindness every week.

A phone call to someone who lives alone.

A handwritten Christmas card.

A cup of tea with an older neighbour.

A gift for someone who wasn't expecting one.

A few minutes spent listening.

On their own, they're small gestures.

Together, they become something extraordinary.

That's the idea behind Advent of Kindness – MHA's brand-new Christmas campaign inviting people of all ages to **spread hope, peace, joy and love through simple acts of kindness** while helping older people live later life well.

Christmas can be one of the loneliest times of the year for many older people. But kindness has a remarkable way of changing that. A simple conversation can become a friendship. A thoughtful gesture can remind someone they're valued. One act of kindness can inspire another.

And that's how change begins.

Join the movement

We'd love you to be part of it.

Simply visit **mha.org.uk/advent** and sign up for Advent of Kindness.

Each week throughout Advent, we'll send you a short email inspired by one of the four traditional Advent themes – **Hope, Peace, Joy and Love**. Inside you'll find simple ideas





29 November to 24 December 2026

make it matter

to help you spread kindness, uplifting stories from across MHA and inspiration from others taking part. Follow our suggestions or create your own – every act of kindness counts.

Some people will simply choose to complete the acts of kindness.

Others may decide to make a donation or create a fundraising page, inviting friends and family to sponsor their Advent of Kindness. Every pound raised will help MHA bring companionship, care and connection to more older people this Christmas.

However you choose to take part, you'll be helping to create a kinder Christmas for older people across England and Wales.

The beginning of something bigger

The word **Advent** means coming or arrival. It's traditionally a season of preparing for something important.

We hope Advent of Kindness becomes the beginning of something too.

Not simply four weeks of thoughtful acts, but the start of looking out for one another a little more often. The beginning of new friendships. New conversations. New volunteers. New supporters. New ways of helping older people live later life well.

Because perhaps the greatest gift we can give this Christmas isn't something we wrap.

It's kindness.

Join Advent of Kindness today at mha.org.uk/advent and let's make kindness the story of this Christmas.

or **scan the QR code**



Introducing Joysome

What if every day brought the opportunity to discover something new?

A hobby you've never tried. A recipe to share with friends. A favourite song that sparks happy memories. A gentle exercise class that leaves you feeling energised. Or simply five minutes to do something that makes you smile.

That's the idea behind Joysome – MHA's brand-new digital wellbeing platform, designed to help you enjoy later life to the full.

Created with older people, Joysome brings together thousands of carefully curated classes, quizzes, videos and articles that inspire movement, creativity, learning and connection. Whether you have five minutes or an afternoon to spare, there's always something new to explore.



An exclusive offer for Make it Matter readers

To celebrate the upcoming launch of Joysome, we're giving Make it Matter readers three months of the full Joysome experience, completely free.
Joysome is free to join, with a paid subscription unlocking even more classes, activities and content to enjoy.

Visit **joysomeapp.com**, create your account and use the code below.

or scan the QR code

Promo code: MAKEITMATTER26

Full subscription £5.99 a month or £59.99 a year. Terms & conditions apply.
mha.org.uk/terms-conditions/promotions





Enjoy on-demand content whenever it suits you. Challenge your mind with a quiz, discover a new hobby, keep active with gentle movement or simply spend time doing more of the things you love.

Because later life should never stop being full of possibilities.



Love it? Share the joy
Why not gift a Joysome subscription to someone special? For £5.99 a month or £59.99 a year, they can enjoy the full Joysome experience, with even more content to help them discover new interests, revisit old favourites and enjoy more moments of joy.

Because every day deserves to feel

Joysome



Because of you...

...Mondays mean more



Living alone, with family some distance away and few neighbours nearby, 92-year-old June Simmons can easily find herself isolated.

That began to change two years ago when she discovered Love 2 Move, run by MHA Communities South Staffordshire.

> *"This is my favourite day of the week. I can't wait for Mondays to come to my class."*

The weekly exercise helps June stay active, but the friendships she's made mean even more. She arrives early to help, keeps in touch with friends outside the sessions and regularly checks in with other members.

That support has become even more important since June was diagnosed with cancer. She continues attending each week, finding companionship and reassurance from friends, volunteers and MHA colleagues.

When June celebrated her 90th birthday, her family and the group organised a surprise party.

Because of your support, groups like Love 2 Move create more than opportunities to stay active. They create somewhere to belong.

> *"The group is like a lifeline to me."*

...One step inspires another



> *"I felt immensely proud and wanted to contribute,* says Bobby.

One person's determination. Another person's kindness. And a difference that will be shared by many.

At 104, Daphne knows the difference getting outdoors can make. A resident at MHA Ryelands care home in Wallington, she loves spending time in the home's grounds.

So, when Daphne challenged herself to walk 3,000 to 4,000 steps every day to raise money for outdoor activities, she inspired MHA area manager and keen runner Bobby Brooks to join her.

He pledged to run one mile for every 1,000 steps Daphne completed. Friends, family and supporters got behind them, helping raise more than **£1,100**.

Daphne kept walking, while Bobby clocked up more than 100 miles, even through some of July's hottest days.

Because people chose to support them, more Ryelands residents can enjoy the fresh air, activity and companionship that mean so much to Daphne.



Looking after yourself this winter

Winter asks a lot of us. We spend time caring for others, preparing for Christmas, keeping in touch with family and supporting the people around us.

Sometimes we forget one important person. Ourselves.

Looking after your own wellbeing isn't selfish. It's one of the kindest things you can do, helping you stay healthy, connected and ready to enjoy the moments that matter most.

Move a little
You don't have to run a marathon to feel the benefits of movement. A gentle walk, a few stretches or five minutes of chair-based exercise can lift your mood and help keep your body moving through the colder months.

Call someone
A cup of tea shared with a friend. A quick phone call. A conversation with a neighbour. These little moments of connection often mean more than we realise.

Take a quiet moment
Winter can be the perfect excuse to slow down. Read a book. Listen to music. Sit in the garden if the sun appears.

Sometimes the smallest pauses help us feel our best.

Eat well
Comfort food is one of winter's pleasures, but nourishing meals, plenty of water and eating with others can all help you stay healthy and connected.

Remember, it's okay to ask for help
Everyone needs support sometimes.

Whether you're caring for someone else or finding winter a little difficult yourself, talking to someone you trust can make all the difference.



Continue your wellbeing journey

Our Later Life Hub is full of trusted information and practical tips to help you live later life well.

Whether you're looking after yourself or supporting someone you love, you'll find guidance every step of the way.

mha.org.uk/hub
or
scan the QR code

Giving back the gift of reassurance

Lee's mum lived with Alzheimer's and attended a day centre three times a week while living alone 70 miles away.

"She enjoyed the company and activities, and it gave me peace of mind for those three days," Lee remembers.

After retiring and recovering from surgery, Lee wanted to use her time to do something meaningful. In 2023, she joined MHA Communities East Surrey.

Today, she volunteers at the twice-monthly Horley dementia café, which provides companionship, activities and support for people living with dementia, alongside their carers, family and friends.

> *"Volunteering for MHA is a joy. The group is like a little family where everyone cares for one another. There's such a happy atmosphere and lots of laughter."*

Lee is part of a small team of volunteers supporting Julia, who runs the group. Together, they welcome members, chat with people living with dementia, support carers and help with everything from homemade cakes and refreshments to planning activities.

"We're a well-organised team supporting Julia. By taking care of things like refreshments, she can focus on running the group without other distractions."

For an upcoming Route 66-themed session, Lee has been helping plan everything from pizza and apple pie to the perfect playlist.

Lee gets plenty back too. She's made good friends, some of whom she meets outside the group, and says the planning helps keep her brain active.

But knowing what the group means to families matters most.

"Knowing how much we benefited makes me want to give my time so that other families can experience that same peace of mind."

Nikolia, whose mum Maria attends, sees that impact first-hand.

> *"The dementia club, and the wonderful volunteers and MHA team, bring joy to my mother's life. It really is very good for her wellbeing, both mentally and physically, and also for the wellbeing of our family."*

For Lee, volunteering has come full circle: the reassurance her own family once received is something she can now help give to others.

Volunteering makes a difference both ways

- **98%** of MHA volunteers felt they had made a difference
- **97%** felt a sense of personal achievement
- **79%** learned new skills and gained new experiences.

Could you make a difference too?

Scan the QR code to discover volunteering opportunities with MHA.

mha.org.uk/volunteer



3 minutes with *Admiral Nurses*

We sat down with MHA's Admiral Nurses, Judy Mattison and Lyndsey Dixon, to talk dementia, kindness and the small things that can make a big difference.



Judy Mattison



Lyndsey Dixon

Q. What does an Admiral Nurse do?
We're specialist dementia nurses. Admiral Nursing was created by Dementia UK to support people living with dementia, their families and professionals. At MHA, we support colleagues through expert advice, education and coaching, helping them develop the skills and confidence to provide high-quality, person-led dementia care.

Q. What's one thing you wish more people understood about dementia?
There is always a person at the centre of the diagnosis. Dementia affects not only the person living with it, but their relatives, friends and carers too. A big part of our role is helping people better understand that experience and how best to support the person at the centre.

Q. What's the kindest thing someone can do for a person living with dementia?
Give them your time. Get to know the person, understand them and connect with them. If someone is distressed, trying to correct them can cause more distress. Sometimes it's better to meet them in their reality.

Q. What reminds you why your work matters?
Judy: *"Watching teams learn and trial new ways of providing care is so rewarding. When you see those little moments work, those 'golden nuggets' as I call them, it makes me realise that our work matters."*

Lyndsey: "*When I was only 18 months into my career, my nan was diagnosed with mixed dementia and I became her carer."*

Q. What's one small thing we can all do to better support someone living with dementia?
Judy: *"Avoid making assumptions about people, which is good advice for life! If you're unsure in the moment, stop and take a moment."*

Lyndsey: *"Getting to know the person and building a personal connection can help reduce anxiety and validate their emotional reality. Don't be afraid to seek support, both for them and yourself."*

Because of your support...

families affected by dementia can access specialist knowledge and reassurance when they need it, while MHA colleagues are better equipped to provide care that sees the person, not just the diagnosis. Our Admiral Nurses help make that possible.

Moments that Matter

Behind every moment is a difference made. Here are just a few examples of generosity, community and care bringing joy, connection and new experiences to older people across MHA.



A surprise delivery brings smiles

Residents and colleagues at MHA Kenbrook care home in Wembley received an unexpected surprise when more than 50 roses were donated by singer-songwriter Harry Styles following his Wembley performances.

His gesture was a thank you to the local community for its support during the tour and brought plenty of smiles to the home.

Sometimes an unexpected act of generosity is all it takes to brighten someone's day.



Recognition for two people who make a difference

Two familiar faces from MHA Stratton House care home in Bath enjoyed a memorable day at Buckingham Palace when colleague Julie and volunteer Jan were invited to a Royal Garden Party.

Both had previously been recognised at MHA's OSCARs, with Jan named Volunteer of the Year and Julie receiving the Walter Hall Special Recognition Award.

Their invitation celebrated two people whose time and commitment help make a difference at Stratton House.

Alpacas bring a community together

Patches and Bramble proved quite the attraction when MHA Rushden Park care home in Northamptonshire welcomed its local community for a special alpaca picnic.

The event brought people together for an afternoon of fun, raising £480 for the home's amenities fund in the process.

The money raised will support the home, while the day itself delivered something just as valuable: smiles, shared experiences and a chance for residents and their community to spend time together.





Going the extra mile

Six colleagues from MHA Stratton House took on Tough Mudder for the fourth year running, tackling mud, freezing water and obstacles during one of the hottest weeks of the year.

Their efforts raised £1,692.50 for the home's amenities fund, helping provide entertainment, activities and trips that residents can enjoy together.

A tough challenge for the team, with rewards that will be enjoyed long after the mud has washed off.



Bringing people together through music

MHA Communities South Somerset piloted community Music Therapy sessions to help older people come together, enjoy music and build new connections.

The sessions have proved hugely popular. One attracted 43 people, with around 30 now taking part each week. Familiar songs have lit up faces, encouraged people to join in and even got people up to dance.

The sessions are creating opportunities for older people to connect with others, enjoy a shared experience and feel part of their community.

Everybody needs to feel like they belong

Feeling that you belong starts with knowing you can be yourself.

For LGBTQ+ people, that hasn't always been something they could take for granted. Many older people today grew up at a time when homosexuality was criminalised and discrimination was commonplace. Some spent years hiding an important part of who they were, while others faced prejudice simply for being themselves.

Those experiences don't disappear as someone grows older. Feeling welcomed, understood and accepted can make a real difference at every stage of life.

It's something the Pride in MHA Network is helping to nurture across MHA.

The Network brings LGBTQ+ colleagues and allies together to share experiences, support one another and help make MHA a place where people feel comfortable being themselves.

> "I truly feel we have the opportunity to be ourselves, which goes a long way."
>
> Pride Network member

That sense of belonging matters in its own right. But its impact can reach further. By giving colleagues opportunities to listen to different experiences, learn from one another and have conversations they might not otherwise have, the Network helps build greater understanding of what it can mean to be LGBTQ+. And that understanding can make a profound difference to the experience of an older LGBTQ+ person receiving care and support.

Good person-centred care starts with seeing the whole person: their history, relationships, identity and the things that matter most to them. For an LGBTQ+ older person, feeling able to talk openly about a partner, share memories or simply be themselves can all contribute to feeling at home and knowing they belong.

Sometimes kindness is as simple as making space for someone else to be who they are. It can be listening without judgement, taking an interest in someone's life or making sure they feel included rather than overlooked.

These may seem like small things, but together they help create communities where people feel recognised, respected and valued.

That's why inclusion matters at every age. Everyone deserves to enter later life knowing there is a place for them, exactly as they are.



Pride in mha
Live later life well



Baked with love

A recipe worth sharing

Credit to Jess Hodgkinson, aged 8, and supported by her mother Jacqui Hodgkinson

This recipe quickly and easily makes about a dozen little cupcakes. Why not bake a batch and take a couple round to share with a friend or neighbour as part of the Advent of Kindness?

Ingredients:

For the cakes:
100g butter or margarine (softened)
100g caster sugar
100g self-raising flour
2 medium eggs
½ tsp vanilla essence
1-2 tbsp milk

For the icing:
140g butter (softened)
280g icing sugar
1-2 tbsp milk
A few drops of food colouring (optional)

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 190°C/170°C fan/ gas mark 5.
2. Line a 12-hole muffin tin with paper cases.
3. In a large mixing bowl, cream together the butter and sugar until fluffy. If you have an electric whisk this will make the process quicker, otherwise use a wooden spoon.
4. Slowly beat in the two eggs, then add the vanilla essence.
5. Fold in the flour using a metal spoon. Gradually add as much of the milk as needed until the mixture drops off the spoon slightly.
6. Spoon the mixture into the cake cases until they are half full, and then bake for approximately 15 mins until a skewer comes out clean.
7. Cool on a wire rack.
8. To make the icing, beat the butter in a bowl until soft, then gradually add the icing sugar and mix until smooth. Add the milk gradually until you have a smooth, creamy icing. Add in the food colouring (if using) and mix until combined.
9. Using a piping bag, pipe spirals of the icing on the cupcakes.

Why not share a cupcake with someone who could do with a friendly visit?

Turn coffee and cake into something even bigger

Host a *Communi-tea Party*

scan the QR code for resources mha.org.uk/teaparty

Keep making it matter

Thank you for making a difference

As another year draws to a close, we'd simply like to say thank you.

Every donation. Every hour volunteered. Every event attended. Every story shared. Every conversation about MHA. It all matters.

Together, you've helped older people across England and Wales experience companionship, comfort, dignity and hope.

But kindness doesn't end with Christmas.

As we look ahead to a new year, we'd love you to continue making a difference in whatever way feels right for you.





Become a regular giver

A monthly gift helps us plan ahead and support more older people throughout the year.

Volunteer your time

Share your skills, experience or simply a listening ear.

Take on a fundraising challenge

From fun runs to marathons, there's an event for everyone.

Host a fundraising event

Bring your community together over coffee, cake or your own fundraising idea.

Leave a lasting legacy

A gift in your Will is a powerful way to ensure your values live on, helping future generations of older people live later life well.

Thank you for making this year matter. We hope you'll continue this journey with us. Because kindness doesn't stop when this magazine closes.

It begins with whatever you choose to do next.

Scan the QR code to discover more ways to support MHA or visit **mha.org.uk/support-us**

make it matter

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