

Dear Friends

This year is going to be better than 2020, but just not immediately...

Here we are in lockdown again, with transmission rates rising rapidly in London and South East especially. It is a worrying time, but we have been here before and the team at FiSH and our amazing volunteers are here to help you get through this difficult time.

The best way to stay safe is to STAY AT HOME to protect both yourself and the NHS. Our Helpline remains open from Monday to Friday. Here we can organise your shopping – whether it's a one-off requirement, occasional help or a regular weekly shop. We will arrange for a volunteer to contact you for your list and to let you know when they will deliver your shopping. We can also help with collecting prescriptions. Just call **020 8876 3414**.

Lockdowns are not easy for anyone and are particularly harsh if you are coping alone. Sometimes, it can be good to talk. We have friendly volunteers who would love to ring you for a chat. If you'd like to hear from someone on a regular basis, please call Liz on **020 8878 8100**.

Unlike previous lockdowns, what is different this time is that we now have vaccines available and as the vaccination programme gets underway, in the coming weeks and months, more and more of the most vulnerable people will be getting protected. This really gives us hope for a better tomorrow.

Vaccinations started last month at Essex House Surgery, the local hub for Barnes, Mortlake, East Sheen and Kew. Already over 2000 local people, including many FiSH members have received a first vaccination, and some have had their second one also. Among these George Perkin, aged 95, outside the surgery:



Wishing you all a happy vaccinated New Year!

ALCOVE VIDEO CAREPHONES

When you can't meet with the ones you love, wouldn't it be good to not only talk to them, but see them too? At the touch of a button? Surely, the next best thing and it's absolutely possible with a special, easy to use video phone!

Even if you've struggled with technology in the past, this simple device could have you sharing smiles with the people who matter to you. We are delighted to be working with the Digital Team at Richmond Council who are on a mission to make it easier for people to connect with loved ones. A limited number of free video phones are available.

The vaccination programme is vital in our battle against this coronavirus. We can't stress enough:

1. The coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine is safe and effective. It will give you the best protection against coronavirus.
2. The vaccine is one part of our defence – we still need to 'wash hands, cover face and make space'.
3. The NHS will let you know when it is your turn to have the vaccine. It is important not to contact the NHS for a vaccination before then.
4. After your vaccination you should still try to stay safe at home, but remember to wear a mask if you have to go out.

Further information is available from the local NHS about the Covid vaccine, including when you might be vaccinated. If you'd like more information please call **020 8876 3336**.

FiSH volunteer car drivers and the FiSH bus are able to provide transport for vaccinations.

Call the FiSH Helpline on **020 8876 3414**



FISH WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

Although many of our activities have had to pause because of lockdown, the following online FiSH sessions are available on Zoom.

Visit <https://zoom.us/> or open the Zoom App on your device and when prompted type in the Meeting ID and Passcode.

Wed 3pm - New Gentle Exercise Class
 £4 per session Meeting ID 917 705 3808

Thu 10:30am - Meet up Thursdays Coffee Morning Meeting ID 876 0957
 4576 Passcode 837451

Fri 10:30am - STARFiSH Dance Class
 £5 per session Meeting ID 846 9989 9990
 Passcode 949135

Where charges apply, please call **020 8876 3336** for details.

It's fine to join the class first to check it's right for you and then register.



These have built-in internet so you don't need wi-fi or a contract – and it's a completely free trial. To apply for a video phone, contact the Helpline on **020 8876 3414** to register your interest. One of our tech volunteers will get in touch to complete a referral form on your behalf. Once you receive the phone, they will help you to use it.



Talented actor and director, Barnes resident and FiSH member, **Alan Brown**, aged 93, is now registered blind but manages to live independently with the help of friends, family and FiSH. Alan tells Sally about his remarkable life and how he survived a very infectious and life-threatening disease:

Alan attended the Peter Simons College in Winchester where at the age of 15 he won a two-year scholarship to RADA. While at Rada, Alan was asked if he would like to delay his scholarship until after the war, but he decided it was safer to stay put! When he graduated in 1945, the war was over but he went straight into employment working for ENSA. Here he was sent on long tours of military hospitals with a small company entertaining the wounded, his first real experience of the war and one he found gruelling. However, although his career blossomed, and he subsequently played in four big West End productions, his profession was cut short when he discovered he had contracted tuberculosis and spent the following four years in hospital.

Having been a TB patient at West Middlesex Hospital for 9 months, and showing little sign of recovery, a good friend of his father, 'William Rawling' (a member of the family who invented the Rawl plug), contacted his Harley Street specialist who advised that Alan would never get well in this country. Instead he needed pure mountain air. Imagine Alan and his father's joy when William Rawling offered to pay for him to go to a TB Sanatorium in Davos, Switzerland, well away from smoggy 1950s London.

It was there that Alan met his future wife Kyra, (she was a patient there for six years). Kyra had fled from Estonia to Germany to escape the Russians, and Alan describes her as quite remarkable in many ways. A brilliant linguist and seamstress, she offered German classes and designed tapestries for her fellow patients to sew. Knowing that by learning to sew he would get to see more of her, Alan eagerly took up this activity and Kyra designed a special frame that fitted around Alan's hospital bed so he could be wheeled onto the balcony looking over the beautiful mountains with his tapestry securely mounted in front of him.



Alan in the Swiss TB hospital with his special tapestry frame

The tapestries were all designed by Kyra and were for sale so that the patients could earn some money. Eventually a wonder drug was invented for TB and Alan, along with millions of others, recovered quickly.



Alan, Kyra and family in the 1960s

Alan returned to England while Kyra convalesced with friends in Germany, but six months later she came to England where they married and had two children. Alan's career resumed and after working with the Northampton Repertory Company he was offered a post at the University of Vanderbilt, Tennessee directing students in their main productions. So all the family embarked for the USA where he went on to direct 15 productions. A few years later the Browns came back to England so the children could have an English education - and their son first attended Westfields Primary School and was head chorister at St Michael & All Angels in Barnes.

Alan continued to go to America regularly, and Kyra continued to design tapestries in England - and together they spent many years translating the scripts of plays using her flair for languages and his production skills. Kyra sadly died in 2008.

Alan tells the incredible story of how, through FiSH, he met up with a friend from the past and fellow actor. He had requested a lift to BGC for a Podiatry appointment, and was advised by our helpline that volunteer, Sarah Whaley, would collect him. He knew the name rang a bell, and when she came to his door, he asked if she could possibly be the same Sarah Whaley who had played Jane Eyre to his eminent Mr Rochester 65 years ago. Sarah was thrilled to confirm that she was

the same Miss Whaley! How ironic it is that in later life Sarah is now reunited with Alan, but that, just like Mr Rochester and Jane, Alan is now blind and cannot see Sarah's face! Since then they have stayed good friends and have enjoyed sharing each other's stories of the acting world.

We asked **Sarah Whaley** to add to Alan's story and she was very happy to tell us the following: *"I met Alan Brown when I joined Northampton Repertory Company in 1957. I was just 19. He was tall and incredibly handsome, the perfect leading male actor. We were in many plays together, but I especially remember his performance as Mr Rochester to my Jane Eyre. He was superb in the part but I was particularly impressed with the livid stage make-up scar (caused by the fire) he painted on the side of his face in the final scene! I also remember the stage manager coming on stage during a curtain call to announce that Alan and his wife had just had their second child, to much applause from both audience and cast. He was very popular in Northampton and after I left he went on to both direct & act in plays.*

We had lost touch until I moved to Barnes, started volunteering with FiSH, and, a few years ago, was asked to collect Alan and drive him to the Barnes Green Centre for a chiropody appointment! What a joy to meet him again. Needless to say, we have done a lot of reminiscing since..."

WHAT'S ON

Are you missing out on our Lunchtime Concerts or other local music events? Now you can listen to a wonderful array of professional musicians in concert every week from the comfort of your own sitting room at <https://www.artistsandresidents.org/>



My Life Films has launched the first Video on Demand streaming service for people living with dementia. Called 'My Life TV', programmes have been adapted for their cognitive needs and is the perfect way to help those with dementia stay stimulated and connected. Your first 3-month subscription is free - then it costs £4 a month (it can be cancelled at any time) <https://mylifefilms.org/my-life-tv/>



BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND: CREAM TEAS IN A BAG

We've finished our Christmas cakes and the reduced price mince pies have sold out... so we've been asked, ever so politely, if the 'Cream Teas in a Bag' might still be happening! The good news is they're returning very soon and we'll be delivering them to different areas of Barnes, Mortlake and East Sheen on Tuesdays.

The Great British Bake Off final was at the end of November, but FiSH have their very own baking stars making incredible cakes. They all deserve a 'FiSH handshake'!

There's a separate socially-distanced team of amazing volunteers packing the bags, and the delivery team on the FiSH bus, in cars or on foot have really missed waving to you from the front gate!



Home-baked chocolate cakes!

For your cream tea please contact Liz on 020 8878 8100 or 07565 304726 or email liz@fishhelp.org.uk

Please remember that if you need help with shopping or transport for a Covid vaccination or hospital appointment, FiSH is here to help!

Call the FiSH Helpline on 020 8876 3414

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