

EDITION 34: WINTER 2019 - Simple, up-to-date, important news for Octavia residents

UPDATE NEWSLETTER

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING WHY NOT BECOME A BEFRIENDER?



Many people volunteer their time with us every year to be a befriender to an older or isolated adult living in the communities where we work in central and west London.

We really appreciate their contribution. Without them we would not be able to offer companionship and support to the many people who benefit from this service provided by the Octavia Foundation.

We currently have a waiting list of around 100 people who would like the company of a befriender. These are people who for various reasons live very isolated lives, often without the support of friends and family living nearby.

We are seeking more befrienders to meet this demand. The role is a commitment of just one hour a week, spent visiting an older person in their home. It's a small time commitment that can make the world of difference to the people we support.

Our volunteer befrienders come from all walks of life, including professionals who work full-time, students and retired people. So if you are thinking of volunteering, and you have an hour a week to spare to visit an older person, please consider contacting us to find out more about being an Octavia befriender.

All of our volunteers are carefully 'matched' with a befriender with whom they share mutual interests and they receive full training and support from Octavia staff to help them with the role.

Continued over...

What do you think of this newsletter?

Let us know at: E_update@octavia.org.uk

Contact us

Repairs: T 0800 479 0011 (freephone)
Contact centre: T 020 8354 5500 E info@octavia.org.uk
W www.octaviahousing.org.uk



Julia became an Octavia befriender several years ago when she reached a crossroads in her life and was looking for a new direction.

"I was approaching my retirement and I was looking for something that I could start doing while I was working that would create the potential of being a stepping stone to new projects, once retired," she said.

"I was never going to be the sort of person that retires and shrinks away from living and learning. I wanted to use my life experiences to support others.

"I contacted Octavia and was very impressed with their approach to volunteering. I built up a good rapport with them straight away. They were so encouraging and supportive and took care to find a befriender that I would get on very well with."

Since becoming an Octavia befriender, Julia has become a great advocate for volunteering and has taken on a number of different voluntary roles within her community.

"I think it is very important that we consider other people in life and experience meeting people in different life situations from our own, outside our immediate circle," she said.

"It is important not to become complacent in life, for your own personal wellbeing as much as for the benefit of others. I really like volunteering. I get fantastic training and I am getting more and more experience. It's all very fulfilling."

To find out more about befriending and other volunteering roles with the Octavia Foundation go to:

www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/volunteer/

Are you struggling to pay your heating bills?

Green Doctors are here to help

Octavia is teaming up with local authorities and an environmental charity to provide free help for residents who may be finding it hard to meet the cost of heating their home.

If you feel you would like your home to be warmer, but are worried about the cost of turning the heating up, the Homes4Health initiative may be able to help. You can get a free home visit from a 'Green Doctor' (energy efficiency expert), who can help you with things like:

- ▶ Explaining how to make your home energy efficient.
- ▶ Installing energy saving devices for no charge.
- ▶ Providing independent advice on switching your energy supplier to save money.



The programme is aimed at households with residents who are over 65, on a low income, or where someone living in the home has a long term health condition or disability.

To request a Green Doctor visit, or for more information on how they can help you keep your home warmer, call **0300 365 5003** or email GreenDoctorsLdn@groundwork.org.uk.

You can also request appointments online at: www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/london/pages/homes4health



More digital media opportunities for young people



Our digital media programme for young people, Base@theReed, is increasing to four nights a week from the beginning of February. The club that meets at 5pm at The Reed in North Kensington will be adding Wednesday evening sessions to the current Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 5 February. The Wednesday session is especially for young people who want to work towards a bronze and silver Arts Award.

If fashion design is your thing, you will be interested to know that there is an opportunity to get involved with a new digital project at Base from March. Called 'The Birth Of Cool', this exciting filmmaking project will focus on the history of fashion in west London – from its inception on the King's Road in the 60s, all the way through to the present day. It's a fantastic opportunity for any young person aged 13+, who is interested in filmmaking, fashion design, local heritage, or audio and music production, to get involved with an ambitious project to add to their portfolio and celebrate the history of their community.

And as half-term is nearly upon us, Base@TheReed has put together a packed schedule of daytime digital media workshops between 18-22 February.

To find out more about Base@TheReed activities, go to: www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/our_work/young_people_children

We are getting better at helping the environment



Octavia has achieved a 'Gold' accreditation in our recent SHIFT assessment, a sustainability standard specifically for the housing sector.

This recognises the way we are working to improve energy efficiency in our homes, the way we build new homes, and the more general ways that we work as an organisation. It puts us in the top 6 out of 40 UK housing providers to be assessed and it means we are very keen to reach a target to bring all of our homes up to a good energy efficiency standard by 2023.

We are working to achieve this through our rolling programme of cyclical maintenance and repairs. We hope to improve on this in future and we have an ambition to reach the highest SHIFT 'Platinum' standard for sustainability.

New mobile app for rents and repairs to launch in the Spring

We are launching a new mobile app later this year which will make it quicker and easier for you to view rent statements, pay your rent and report and track repairs via a smartphone.

The app is designed to give you access to your information and our services at a time that suits you.

The new app is being designed with help from residents. Thank you to all those involved in the design and the testing.

When it is ready, the app will enable you to:



- ▶ Report a repair with a photo – your request will automatically appear in your account so you can track progress and know when it has been completed.
- ▶ Access your rent account information 24/7, including current balance and rent statements – with a link to where you can pay rent online.
- ▶ Make changes to your personal details, as well as those of next of kin and household members.
- ▶ Make a general enquiry.

How to get the app when it goes live

We are planning to launch the app in the Spring. We want to notify you by email when it is live, so now is a good time to make sure that the contact details on your account are up to date.

To ensure your details are correct and so that you don't miss out on the new app, we are asking all of our tenants to provide their current contact details online at: www.octavia.org.uk/residentdetails

We will check this information and carry out any necessary updates to your account in time for the launch.

You can also provide the information using the form included in this mailing and send it to us using the envelope provided.

As an added incentive, if you submit your details by 31 March, we will enter your name into a free draw to win a £100 prize.

Universal Credit update

Universal Credit Full Service has now rolled out across all areas in the UK. This is a single benefit replacing six existing legacy means-tested benefits - Income Support, Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income-related Employment Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Housing Benefit.

If you are already receiving one of these benefits and your circumstances change, a new claim for benefits may automatically move you onto Universal Credit. Once you make a claim for Universal Credit you can't go back to the old benefits. We advise that you check with a benefits adviser first before making a new claim to ensure you don't lose out. In some situations you may be better off staying on the old style benefits.

If the Christmas period has left you feeling the strain and you are struggling to pay your rent and essential bills, don't struggle alone, support is available through:

- ▶ Citizens Advice, an independent and free benefit and debt advice service (you can book an appointment at Emily House).
- ▶ National Debtline, [0800 808 4000](tel:08008084000), www.nationaldebtline.org
- ▶ StepChange, [0800 138 1111](tel:08001381111), www.stepchange.org

Helpful information is also available on our website, www.octaviahousing.org.uk/welfare-reform/universal-credit, or contact us on [020 8354 5500](tel:02083545500) for further advice.



60 secondsWith Octavia Foundation employment and training adviser Kyrsha

The Octavia Foundation's employment and training team offers a free service to Octavia tenants and other local residents seeking employment. We asked employment and training adviser Kyrsha to tell us about the service and how it helps people get into work or find a better job.



What is the employment and training service and who is it for?

The Octavia Foundation employment and training service helps people who are looking for work or want to move on from their current role to develop their career. We reach out to our residents and others living in the community to invite them to come to us to talk about how they would like to improve their employment prospects and how we can help them. We are not a recruitment agency, but we provide advice and help with confidence building in applying for work, interview technique, and how to sell yourself when communicating with recruiters. Getting started in the world of work can be very daunting, especially for someone who has been out of work for a while.

How important is this service for people?

There are lots of people who are looking for work and don't know where to start because they haven't been to an interview for a long time and don't really know where to go for assistance. We can provide all kinds of training, advice and practical support. We try to work with people's aspirations and ambitions to help them find a job that will really suit them and be something they will enjoy. And it's not just unemployed people we help – we also support people in low paid work through getting them access to training so they can move to more skilled roles.

How does this service differ from other job seeker support?

We try to provide support in a more personalised way. Our service is completely by choice and tenants appreciate our welcoming, respectful and realistic approach to helping them. We can also provide expert services that come from working within a housing organisation and these can aid someone's journey into employment. These include volunteering opportunities and training workshops provided by partner agencies and local employers. And, if needed, we can plug people into help and advice services to support them with financial issues, or make a referral to our local food bank.

What do you like most about your own job?

The best bit about my job that there is no daily routine. All the people I work with are different and that makes every day different. I enjoy meeting our residents and trying to always find a solution for their individual needs. No matter how many times someone may approach us seeking help with job seeking or writing a c.v., when I talk to them I find there is always something different about them and that gives me a fresh perspective on how I can help. People lead complex lives. This gives me a great sense of responsibility to do the best I can to help those coming to us for assistance.

To find out more about Octavia's employment and training service go to:

www.octaviahousing.org.uk/for-tenants/employment

Keep safe from fire this winter



The winter months can be a time of increased risk of fires in the home. Things like overloaded electrical sockets, using poorly maintained electrical heaters and lit candles in the home are all serious risks.

In England:

- ▶ Two fires a day are started by candles.
- ▶ About two fires a day are started by heaters.
- ▶ Faulty electrics (appliances, wiring and overloaded sockets) cause around 6,000 fires in the home every year.
- ▶ Every six days someone dies from a fire caused by a cigarette.

Around half of all home fires are caused by cooking accidents and people are four times more likely to be killed by a fire in the home if there is no smoke alarm.

A lot of people are unaware of the risks. The London Fire Brigade provides lots of advice about how to minimise the risk of fire in your home. Here is some advice from the London Fire Brigade on keeping your home safe this winter.

If you use candles or tea-lights, these simple precautions will help keep your family safe:

- ▶ Make sure candles are secured in a proper holder and away from materials that may catch fire – like curtains.
- ▶ Keep pets away from lit candles.
- ▶ Put candles out when you leave the room, and make sure they're put out completely at night.
- ▶ Never leave children alone with lit candles.

If you are using electric heating to keep your home warm, be sure that:

- ▶ The heater is well maintained and in good working order.
- ▶ You don't take risks with old heaters – if it's electrical and getting older, get it tested by a qualified electrician or buy a new one.
- ▶ You keep heaters well away from clothes, curtains and furniture and never use them for drying clothes.
- ▶ You always sit at least one metre away from a heater.

Never install, repair or service a heating appliance yourself.

For further advice on keeping your home safe from fire, go to www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/the-home/

For further advice on how to make your home warmer, including help with cutting the cost of energy bills, call us on **020 8354 5500**.

The end of an era – Grahame Hindes announces his retirement



Many residents may have met or personally know our Chief Executive Grahame Hindes. Grahame recently announced that after 18 years at Octavia, he will be saying a fond farewell to us this summer as he has decided it is time to retire. We are sad to see him go. Our Board is already working on finding a successor and we will keep you updated when we have further news. In the meantime, if you would like to send a personal farewell message to Grahame, you can email it to update@octavia.org.uk

Meeting up with residents



If you live in Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea or Brent you may have met Octavia staff during our Walkabout Wednesday on 24 October. We visited 18 schemes and spoke to 93 residents during the afternoon. Thank you to everyone who gave their time to talk to us and tell us what they think about our soon-to-launch new mobile app. The feedback we received was extremely positive, with 88% of residents saying they are looking forward to using it.

During the next few weeks we will be informally meeting residents at:

- ▶ Gloucester Terrace (Westminster) - February
- ▶ Wilsham Street (Kensington and Chelsea) – 18 February
- ▶ Bentley House (Brent) - March
- ▶ Miles Buildings (Westminster) – March

These are all opportunities for you to meet us. So if you live at any of these schemes, please come along to your event to talk to us and give us your feedback. For more information call **020 8354 5500** or email be.involved@octavia.org.uk

Has Octavia helped you further your career?

Share your story on social media and you could win £500 to fund further training.



Do you have an inspiring story to tell about how support from Octavia has helped you into work or move to a dream job? As part of the wider Communities that Work campaign, Give us a Chance is launching a nationwide competition looking for stories of how social landlords have helped their tenants into work, or in developing their career.

Tenants can enter the competition by submitting a short video or case study on Twitter (with hashtag #CommunitiesthatWork and tagging @GUACjobs). The winning story will be selected by a panel of judges and the winner will receive up to £500 towards further investment in skills and development.

The competition is open until 1 May and the winner will be announced during Communities that Work week in May.

Find out more about the competition at the Give Us a Chance website: www.giveusachance.co.uk/communitiesthatwork

Our performance

We check on our performance in all areas of our work in order to improve. A summary of how we are doing in key areas is below.

We are doing well in a number of areas and exceeding our targets in many areas - including completing emergency repairs on time and responding to reported anti-social behaviour quickly. Responding to complaints on time and satisfaction with our overall service are below target. We will monitor these areas closely to make sure we improve and meet the targets set.

Performance indicator	Nov 2018	Target	Rating
Rent arrears as % rent due (general needs)	4.3%	4.5%	😊
Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs)	100.8%	100.5%	😊
Average re-let time in days (year to date)	22	22	😊
% of emergency repairs completed within target time	100%	99%	😊
% of urgent repairs completed within target time	99%	99%	😊
% of routine repairs completed within target time	100%	98%	😊
% responses to anti-social behaviour reports within target time	100%	95%	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (Switchboard)	16	20	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs line)	7	20	😊
% responses to complaints within target time	90%	99%	😐
Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service	91%	95%	😐

Don't miss out on our annual £1,000 prize draw

Octavia holds a £1,000 prize draw for tenants who have a clear rent account at the end of the financial year. To be entered, you need to have a clear rent account on Friday 29 March 2019.

If you pay your rent monthly at the start of the month, please make your April payment one week early to ensure entry.

Please contact us if you need any part of this information in Braille, on audio tape or explained in a different language.

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