

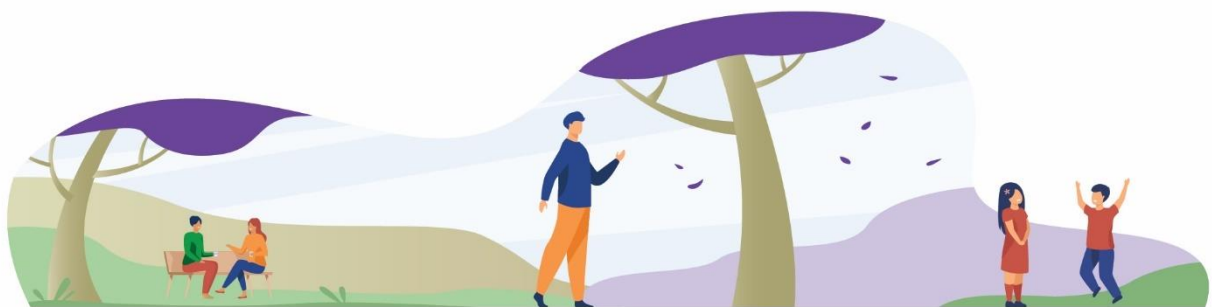


# Impact Report

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April 2022 to March 2023

28<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Trustees & Financial Statement  
for the Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023



emergence | inclusion | community | culture



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## Charity information

### Trustees

|                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Chairperson</b> | James Inglis    |
| <b>Treasurer</b>   | James Hirons    |
| <b>Vice Chair</b>  | Andy Cater      |
| <b>Vice Chair</b>  | Emma Sharp      |
|                    | Wendy Evans     |
|                    | Amiya Kagalwala |
|                    | Andrea McTeare  |
|                    | Tony McTeare    |

|                                |               |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Chief Executive Officer</b> | Mandy Neville |
|--------------------------------|---------------|

|                                    |         |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| <b>Charity Registration Number</b> | 1043601 |
|------------------------------------|---------|

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Charity Registration Number (Scotland)</b> | SC038068 |
|---|----------|

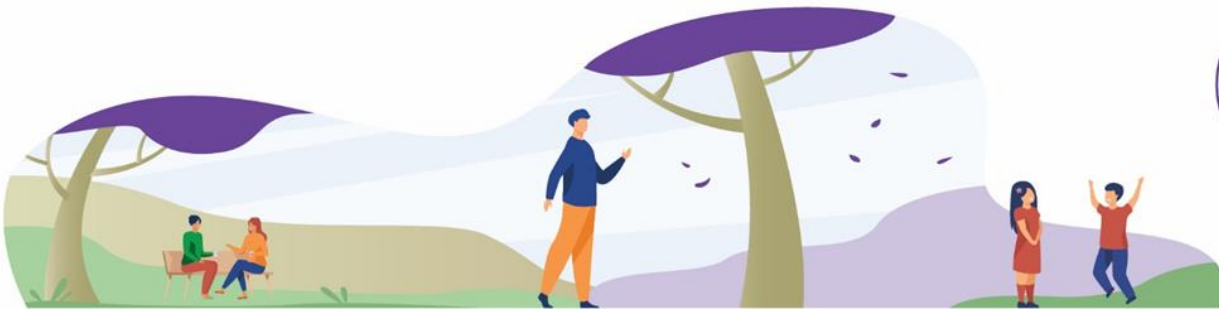
|                       |         |
|-----------------------|---------|
| <b>Company Number</b> | 2972700 |
|-----------------------|---------|

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Registered Office</b> | The Penthouse<br>Coventry Road,<br>Cawston,<br>Rugby,<br>Warwickshire,<br>CV23 9JP. |
|--------------------------|---|

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>Auditor</b> | Fruition Accountancy<br>29 Wood Street<br>Stratford upon Avon<br>Warwickshire<br>Cv37 6JG |
|----------------|---|

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| <b>Bank</b> | The Cooperative Bank<br>16 St Stephen's Street<br>Bristol<br>BS1 1JR |
|-------------|--|

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Solicitor</b> | Anthony Collins Solicitor LLP<br>134 Edmund Street<br>Birmingham B3 2ES |
|------------------|---|



## Report from the Chief Executive Officer

**I am delighted to present the impact report for this historic year. As the world came out of hibernation after three years of a pandemic that cruelly took and changed countless lives, we reflect on the trajectory for Circles Network and the people we exist to support.**

There are many elements that affected the challenges and successes of the year. As with most organisations in our sector, we struggled with retaining team members and were affected by losing people through Brexit, through attractive salaries in other domains and through the aftermath of Covid 19, where working in proximity with people raised anxiety levels. Recruitment strategies needed a fresh approach, and we experimented by trial and error, monitoring those that worked best. Fortunately, we maintained all our projects and services throughout the year, even growing a few new endeavours. The Circles team strengthened, gaining courage and and fortitude, determined to remain resolute in our quest to dream, dare and act. Whist this year has seen a massive reduction in charities and not for profit groups, we are ever stronger in this, our 28<sup>th</sup> year.



### **Some of the highlights of the past twelve months included:**

- Several gatherings, celebrating the Queen's Jubilee and other significant events were held and it was great to enjoy the physical presence of real community connections. Our teams made the most of each opportunity.
- Recruitment success and staff growth within the Community team led to an increase of support offered to people in the Midlands.
- The creation and inception of a Keyworker Collaborative Hub as a place to work from in Peterborough.

- Partnership building with new schools in the West Midlands who wished to take up our programmes for their students.
- The strengthening of links across Scotland with different bodies including NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, The Mental Welfare Commission, Mental Health Tribunals Scotland, and Human Rights Consortium Scotland.
- The achievement of ongoing support to continue advocacy contracts across Scotland.
- The new funding for an advocacy project in Berkshire enabled a small project to start up in some high-profile advocacy work.
- An increase in 4D support in the Southeast, compared to the previous financial year.
- In Moray we experienced an increase of individuals supported by Circles Advocacy when going through the adult support and protection process.
- In Peterborough, the Small Group Holiday clubs have maintained consistent peer groups, resulting in the development of meaningful friendships and increased social interactions among the group members for disabled young people.
- We are delighted to have been approached by Priory Group to provide advocacy within their settings in South Ayrshire and will be starting this work in the new financial year.

#### **Key events included:**

- The organisation successfully ran Summer activities through the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme, supporting 25 children per day with various engaging activities and recruiting additional team members to offer individualised support.
- A Fundraising campaign was launched in the East of England to buy a respite cabin. Amongst the many events were a Santa Run, a Bollywood Jubilee evening, car washes and bake sales plus participation in the Great Eastern Run.
- Completion of a first podcast discussing the benefits of Power of Attorney was shared on radio and social media showcasing how the Carers Project, Fife can support unpaid carers through their personal process.
- Team members attended Proact-Scip training to address challenging behaviours among the youth group members.
- Recruitment of a new, quite brilliant, graphics and social media manager

#### **Amongst the many challenges were:**

- Struggles in lone working, post Covid, with the huge rise in mental health crises.
- The huge rise in food poverty amongst families known to us.
- All keyworkers noted managing high risk situations that tested resilience.
- Recruitment and staff retention was a significant challenge across the organisation. An action plan was developed to work on this.
- The communication with Crawley Football Stadium, following a change in management, has challenged the southeast team, who worked to accommodate everyone's needs in the area.
- Challenges around raising awareness of the Drug and Alcohol Recovery project with only one Recovery Advocate in post created certain angst, as the project gained momentum.



Despite best efforts, it took several months until we filled the second post

- Continuation of unrest across the world through the Russia/Ukraine war and the affect on people connected in different ways.
- Backlogs in statutory services, including NHS delays in processing complaints and information requests had advocates constantly requesting updates and escalating concerns for people we are supporting.
- A lack of new or additional funding to support huge requests for support limited us in our intentions. We had hoped to gain from public funding such as the captain Tom campaign, but this was not to be.

## **Where are we now?**

We are pleased to report steady growth and expanded projects in multiple regions. This sustained expansion acknowledges the community benefits and the continued commitment to our mission.

Like many organisations, we grapple with recruitment and staff retention hurdles. These challenges impact our operational systems and require a focused action plan to address. We look to add employee benefits that raise the bar in the coming years.

Our dedication to forging and strengthening partnerships remains strong. We have successfully created meaningful connections with various bodies, enhancing our network and outreach. Influence from the work of Jean Oelwang, Virgin Unite's CEO, who published an important book on Partnering, has encouraged some new direction that is working well. We remain determined to explore innovative solutions and improve processes that sustain our day-to-day operations and propel us forward as a free-thinking, person led organisation, unique and aspirational in our field.

The post-pandemic landscape has brought heightened awareness of escalating mental health needs across the UK. We are adapting to meet the additional, evolving demands and to providing crucial support.

The rise of remote work and online interactions has illuminated increased concerns regarding social isolation and loneliness, which we are actively addressing as required.

AI and automation continue to reshape our world, presenting both opportunities and challenges that we are monitoring and adapting to. Our intention in the coming year, is to ensure that all team members are trained in new approaches that safely utilise chat gpt effectively.

We acknowledge the impact of external factors, including political and economic crises, and although have little power in such events, are proactively strategising to mitigate their effects.

Circles Network remains committed to an inclusive approach, addressing mental and physical health concerns, embracing the richness of diversity, fostering social connections, and implementing equitable policies across the board.

Despite the challenges of the year that was, morale across the team remains high, with people feeling a distinct sense of achievement in remaining open and responsive throughout our services and supports. We are evermore grateful to a Board of Trustees who are fully supportive and intentional.

## **Gratitude**

I extend my personal gratitude and appreciation to each team member, to the fantastic volunteers, Trustees, funders, friends and supporters, who collectively make the Circles Network community such an extraordinarily powerful movement for positive transformation. This year has undoubtedly challenged us all beyond limitation, inspiring us to take forward ambitions with courage and desire to create a world of inclusivity beyond any perceived imagination.

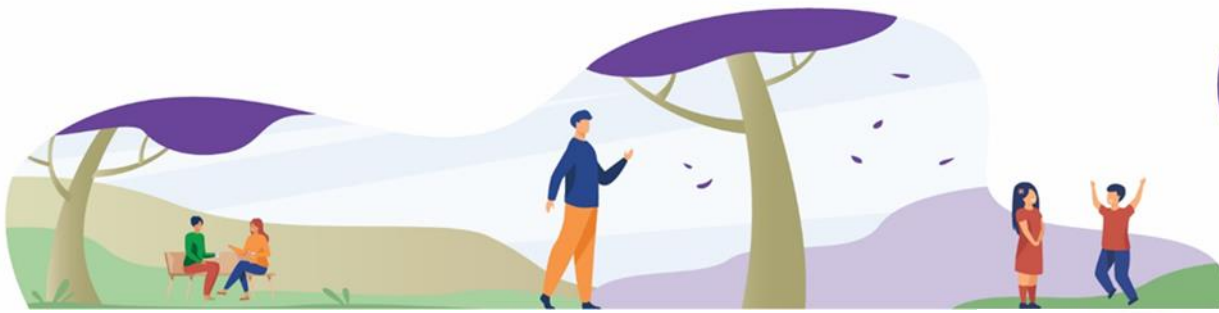
Thank you for your part in this shared progress, I hope that you gain valuable insight from the reports that follow.

With love, and immense gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mandy'.

Mandy Neville  
Chief Executive Officer





## Chairperson's Report

I must commend our team who have worked alongside people we support all through the pandemic, following restrictions and making full use of protective strategies. It has been a great relief during this year to look back and see how far we have come.



It feels as though a new spring has dawned and the positivity Circles Network is so well known for has fully emerged once more. Our face-to-face work, particularly throughout our advocacy provision is flourishing. We are delighted to inform readers of some new growth this year and that in our Southeast region we outgrew the office base that we liked so much and have had to move to much larger premises.

Our work with children is flourishing and this can be seen clearly in the array of projects in the East of England and in the West Midlands. We have a new keyworkers' scheme in full operation, some wonderful summer play schemes where children and young people have healthy food and snacks provided, where opportunities for friendship making abound and where the choice of activities are stimulating and exciting. We are about to launch a new vocational project for young people in the heart of Rugby in a stylish hair and beauty salon with a focus on inclusion.



Our new work and further plans are in direct response to a growing and desperate need in local communities. With schools reporting higher numbers of absences,

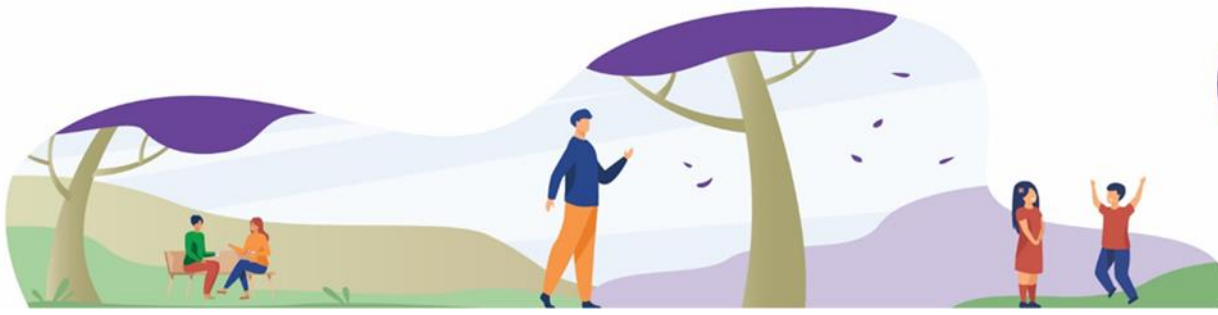
congregations dramatically lowered, and loneliness reported in huge figures with people isolated, working at home and having little opportunity to build relationships with colleagues, being noted as just some of the reasons. The whole social structure has weakened the fabric of society and the gaps this brings will doubtless fall to the underfunded voluntary sector to fill. We are already working on some future proofing planning to ensure we are up for the job!

On a personal note, I would like to thank all our team members for their individual contributions and their dedication and outstanding work. The difference we make is tangible.

I thank too, fellow Trustees, friends and supporters whose time and guidance play such a big part in the success of Circles Network.

Thank you,

Jim Inglis  
Chair of Trustee Board



## Report of the Trustees

This annual report highlights Circles Network's key services, events, operations, challenges and successes. It reviews the significant activities undertaken by the charity to further our purposes for, and with due regard to, the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit.

### Our Organisation

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Circles Network is a UK-wide organisation, registered as a charity and a company limited by guarantee, governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association. Established with an educational objective to build inclusive communities, Circles Network supports thousands of people to be included in community life. The individuals we support are experiencing social exclusion or are at risk of being isolated through disability, long term illness or other disadvantage. For us, 'disabled people' are individuals, old and young, living with physical and/or sensory impairments, learning difficulties, autism, severe anxiety or enduring mental health differences and/or chronic long-term illness.

Circles Network is a leader in the development of Circles of Support and person-centred approaches. We continue promoting the tools and processes that underpin person-centred approaches to empower people we support and advocate with people who are feeling vulnerable and marginalised. In 1994, founder and Chief Executive Mandy Neville, supported by a loyal group of friends, formed the first Circles of Support in the UK. This organisation was formed; founded on the values of justice, advocacy, empowerment, and relationships.

We are guided by the philosophy of social inclusion and believe information, knowledge sharing, and good practice leads to improved and self-determined lives. We have built and



sustained several unique and exciting specialisms in distinct geographic areas.

Our ambition is to expand the reach of our services and increase the impact of our proven approaches in more communities across the UK.

Our success relies on a dedicated team of staff, volunteers and many partnerships with individuals, communities, local authorities, and other relevant organisations.

## **Our impact**

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Our daily interaction within the lives of thousands of individuals means we know we have a real and long-lasting impact. To make evident the change we create and nurture, requires robust monitoring and evaluation of our social impact. This annual impact report demonstrates the social return on investment and our strategic achievements across our diverse programmes.

Our investment in service provision, and continuous learning, informed by disabled and disadvantaged people and their families, nourishes our dissemination efforts. Our collaborative ways of working with families, friends, community-based organisations, local authorities, NHS and social care partnerships and national networks, influences service provision and policies. We are expanding understanding, expectations and horizons and contributing to the public good. Our Academy conferences and workshops increase our capacity to promote good practice and public benefit.

Critical to our success is the art of listening and valuing the lived experience of disability, disadvantage, and discrimination. The individuals, families, and professionals we have worked with for over 28 years, have enabled us to develop considerable expertise and establish our reputation in the health and social care sector. The person-centred nature of our work means our projects and services are extremely innovative and diverse. This report presents an overview of our work during this financial year across the many projects, individuals and services that form our charity.

## **Our Strategic Achievements**

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At Circles Network we believe everyone deserves the opportunity to thrive and live their best lives. **Our vision** is to create inclusive communities where all lives are valued. We build inclusive communities on the foundations of justice, advocacy, empowerment, and relationships. **Our mission** is to support disabled and disadvantaged people of all ages in transformational and empowering ways to live fulfilling and inclusive lives.

Our work takes us into every dimension of life. Childhood and parenting, disability and transition, criminality and employment, family dynamics and diversity, learning support, mental health, loss and addiction, unpaid caring are just some of the diverse and complex aspects of human experience in which we are involved. We work to build sustainable, inclusive communities where everyone belongs. Circles Network provides information, training and development opportunities to raise awareness and increase understanding the concept of inclusion. Across the UK our work includes:

- Individualised support for disabled and disadvantaged young people, adults and children living in their own homes and communities. We facilitate person-centred planning that strengthens social capital by developing friendships (bonding) and building networks (bridging). We support people in planning and managing life's significant transitions – child to adulthood, relationships and parenting, marriage and bereavement, moving to independent living or into employment. We offer individuals with high level support needs and complex impairments the specific and in-depth support necessary for real inclusion.
- Advocacy with people living in a wide range of situations including secure units, prisons, community and hospitals. Unique coaching and advocacy for disabled children, adults and young people experiencing early childhood trauma, long term illness, addiction, age or caring responsibilities.
- Development and delivery of alternative education provision for children and young people for whom mainstream education has not been a good fit. Innovative approaches and extra-curricular activities supporting the inclusion of disabled and disadvantaged children and young people, including Equine Facilitated Learning, and outdoor learning that nurture diverse 'peer groups' to experience inclusion and feel valued.
- Training, mentorship and support to professionals and others wishing to work in a person-centred way. Consultancy and training for statutory, voluntary and independent sector services and for parents, individuals and carers. A wide-ranging programme of courses, conferences, workshops and events, open to anyone.



Our work is uniquely tailored to individuals' needs and preferences, institutional settings and social contexts, as well as our funders' aims and contractual requirements. We structure our work across local teams, programmes and projects that are delivering on our five strategic aims.

### **Strategic Aim 1: Circles Equine –**

We deliver the equine programme portfolio in Warwickshire, open to people from around the UK. Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL) provides therapeutic opportunities for people of all ages, working alongside horses and ponies, to develop, make positive changes and grow. Participants are supported to learn through natural horsemanship skills, trauma informed practice, neuro-linguistic programming, pony centred life coaching, mindfulness, and emotional resilience techniques.

### **Strategic Aim 2: Circles Advocacy –**

We provide professional, independent person-centred advocacy for young people and adults across the UK. Our approach enables the person (or their chosen advocate) to express their views and choices on a wide range of issues. We ensure that their voices are heard by the people they need and want to relate to.

### **Strategic Aim 3: Circles Community –**

We deliver community-based support services that assist people in the community to live rich and fulfilling lives. Our facilitators work individually with people of all ages to understand what they want in their lives, strive towards their goals and coach to overcome barriers and achieve great outcomes. We have developed approaches with children, young people and adults with high level support needs and complex impairments which offer the specific and in-depth support necessary for real inclusion. Young people leaving care are one group of people we work with to develop structures which promote and encourage full inclusion and citizenship in communities. We support parents and carers of disabled children and adults and fostering and adoptive parents looking after children who have experienced trauma and disadvantage.

### **Strategic Aim 4: Circles Academy**

Serves to disseminate learning on inclusion, diversity, and transformational experiences. Through the Academy we also offer alternative education provision to children and young people who learn more readily outside of a mainstream system or who need therapeutic provision to overcome barriers to learning.

### **Strategic Aim 5: Organisational excellence and resilience –**

Our success relies on a dedicated team of staff, volunteers and many partnerships with individuals, communities, local authorities, and financial supporters. Together we strive for change alongside disabled and disadvantaged children, young people and adults, their carers and families, and the wider communities to build inclusive lives.

## Key Attributes

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We are continuously searching out people who are the hardest to reach, and potentially highly vulnerable. Key to our success in having a positive impact on people's lives include our:

independent status,  
specialist knowledge of disability and human rights,  
un-shifting value base of inclusion and equality,  
ability to draw alongside and engage with people at all levels,  
effective acclaimed methods of delivery,  
reputation for providing innovative services and support,  
timely response to offer solutions in a range of complex situations,  
person-centred approaches, and wide-ranging public benefit.

## Volunteers

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People volunteer with us in many ways. We rely on this significant contribution of skills, experience and time. We receive voluntary inputs, contributions in kind, from hundreds of people including those who act as trustees, ensuring good governance; in operational delivery and service provision as facilitators, advocates and staff assistants; as specialists bringing lived experience by contributing to training and events; as administrators and event organisers; in communities as our Circle of Support members and community builders; and a myriad of individuals contribute in their own ways from to fundraising and estate management.

## Our Environmental Impact

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Environmental impact is intrinsic to our mission, and we strive to reduce waste, re-use resources where possible, recycle, minimise transport and carbon emissions, and save energy.

**Reduce and recycle** – The move to digitised communications and information management systems continues to reduce the volume of paper daily and maximises storage efficiency. We recycle waste materials at all our offices including paper, cardboard, glass and plastic. At our head office we compost food waste and manage our significant horse manure production to the benefit of local allotment owners.



**Carbon emissions** – Our projects are based in local communities and seek to employ local people. We encourage the use of public transport where possible. We purchased our small pool of cars driven by fuel efficiency.

During the pandemic we became increasingly agile in working across digital platforms which has greatly reduced the need for frequent travel.

**Energy savings** – All of our work hubs adhere to energy saving practices, involving lighting, heating, water and electricity usage.

### **Risk Review**

The Trustees continue to review and mitigate the major risks the company is exposed to. Our policies and procedures have been regularly updated and our risk register is reviewed quarterly.

Financial security, especially with the impending recession presents a challenge. Our fund-raising strategy links to our business plan, and our senior leadership team strive to secure the organisation's financial future. We continue to seek financial support from a variety of sources including trusts, foundations, and national charitable donors. We tender for and provide commissioned services for local authorities and offer fee paying service to individuals. We aim to achieve full cost recovery for all work undertaken.

Recruitment and retention of key personnel post COVID and Brexit has become critical. The variability of demand and income leads us to work with a significant portion of workers on zero hours contracts. We continuously review and take action to ensure the well-being of both staff and volunteers. We provide development opportunities and promote from within where possible. This year we restructured the management team in line with our growing needs. Our HR team are supported by external consultants, Peninsula, and work constructively to maintain governance and compliance.

For the second year running, whilst living through the pandemic we have continued to provide services, delivering on target and managing additional operational costs. We have remained operational for the entirety of the year with local closures being managed to minimize any occurrences of the virus among team members and individuals we support. We have successfully introduced new systems and changed





behaviours to support uptake of government recommended practices.

## **The Board of Trustees**

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Members of the Board of Trustees (also the Directors for the purposes of Company Law) who served during the year and up to the date of this report are listed on page one. The Board of Trustees meet on a quarterly basis to review the work of the organisation and plan strategically. The Trustees consist of nine individuals who collectively provide a wealth of expertise in the many domains required. Regular audits ensure this group have the appropriate skills and are provided with training and development such that the Board is fit for purpose. There have been no new Trustee appointments during this financial year. The Trustees of the charitable company guarantee to contribute an amount not exceeding £1 to the assets of the company in the event of it winding up. The total number of such guarantees as of 31st March 2023 was eight. Trustees are indemnified with third party indemnity insurance.

## **Trustees Responsibilities**

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Charity regulations and company law require the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the affairs of the company. In preparing these financial statements, the Trustees are required to

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- prepare financial statements on an ongoing basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will keep operating.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the company and enable them to ensure that the accounts comply with the Companies Act 2006 and with the 'Statement of Recommended Practice for Charities'. The Trustees are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

## **Policy on Reserves**

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The Trustees intend to build unrestricted general funds of at least six months' running costs for the central work of the organisation. A bridging fund for externally funded projects is essential to manage the risk of a reduction or sudden end to funding. This remains a challenge in times of austerity. We have a buildings fund to provide for the purchase of an accessible central hub in the future. In addition, we allocate a reserve fund for capital equipment and technology and a fund for the development of publications for dissemination of our work.

## **Policy on Investments**

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The income of the company comes principally from tenders, which are sometimes received in advance of the expenditure being incurred. It is the company's policy to invest the unspent grant income in suitable investments whilst maintaining a prudent balance between security, profitability and liquidity.

## **Statements as to disclosure of information to the auditor**

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In accordance with company law, as the charity's Trustees, we certify that:

- as far as we are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the charity's auditor is unaware; and
- we have taken all the steps that we ought to have taken in order to make ourselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's Auditor is aware of that information.

## **Partnerships and Networks**

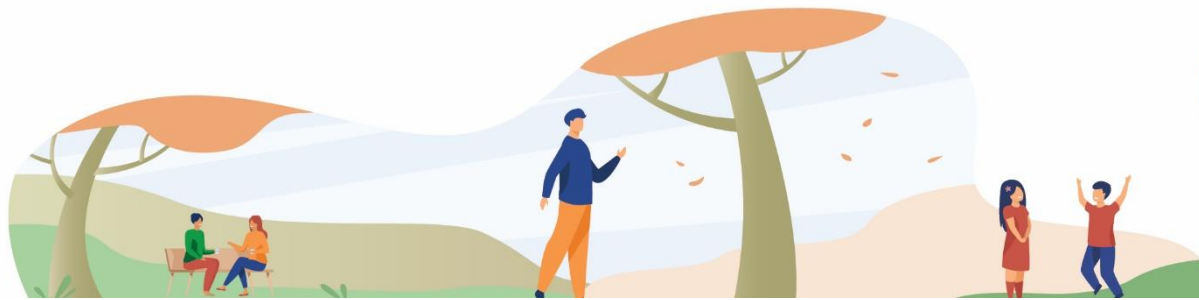
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Circles Network works in partnership with many community-based groups and charities. In particular, the charity the Lifecare Charitable Trust receives management support directly from Circles Network. Some of our key charitable partners include:

Age UK

Arc School, Napton  
Autism West Midlands  
Avon Valley School, Rugby  
Bailey Thomas Foundation  
Bawnmore Infant and Primary School  
BBC Children in Need- England  
BCE – Training Consultants  
Bilton School, Rugby  
Bilton Grange School, Rugby  
BNI East  
BNI Rutland  
Brook School, Rugby  
CAMHS  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical  
Commissioning Group  
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foundation Trust  
Cambridgeshire Police  
Clementine Business Coaching  
Communitas, U.S.A.  
Council of Disabled People  
Coventry Rugby Club  
CQC  
Cemex  
Coop  
Coventry & Warwickshire CCG  
Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust  
Crawley Town Football Club  
Cummins  
Ever Green School, Warwick  
Fife Council  
Go Car Credit Ltd  
Greater Glasgow NHS Trust  
Guide Dogs Association  
Inverclyde Council HSCP  
Jaguar Land Rover  
Learning Disability Wales  
Lincolnshire County Council  
Make Good Grow  
McDonalds  
McMillan Cancer Support  
MIND  
Moray Alcohol and Drug Partnership  
Moray Health and Social Care Partnership  
Moreton Morrell College

National Recovery Advocacy Network  
Network Rail  
NHS  
Noah's Ark Organisation, Australia  
Northamptonshire County Council  
91 Untold  
North Warwickshire Probation Service  
Nuneaton Youth Justice Team  
Nurse Buddy  
Nyssadri, India  
Peninsula  
Peterborough City Council  
Peterborough Council for Voluntary Services  
Pets At Home Foundation  
Princethorpe College, Rugby  
Queen Elizabeth School  
Quest, Rugby and Nuneaton  
RDA  
River House School, Henley in Arden  
Royal Artillery Centre for Personal Development  
Royal National Institute for the Blind  
Royal Association of the Deaf  
Rugby Free School - Secondary  
Rugby School  
Rushey Green  
Round Oak School, Warwick  
Royal National Institute for the Deaf  
Ryder Cheshire  
Scottish Government  
Scottish Recovery Consortium  
South Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership  
South Ayrshire Council  
Spencer's Ball  
Sussex Partnership NHS Trust  
Signposts (Mid Sussex) Ltd  
St Edmunds Trust (Eddie's)  
Tesco Bags for Help  
The Edmund Trust  
The Welsh Assembly  
The World of Cars  
United Response  
University of Coventry  
University of Reading  
Warwick Disability Forum  
Warwick District Council



Warwick University  
WCS  
Warwickshire College  
Warwickshire County Council  
WCAVA (Warwickshire)  
Warwickshire MIND  
Warwickshire Young Carers  
West Sussex Council  
WRVS  
ZenZero

## Auditor

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The auditor, Fruition Accountancy were appointed this year 2023.

## 3D & 4D Community Support Midlands

3D and 4D Community support in Rugby is a service that offers assistance on a one-to-one basis to people of all ages who experience disability or disadvantage. We have a team of facilitators who work alongside a variety of individuals providing opportunities to take part in, employment, social events, leisure, relationships with others and within their own homes. There has been a steady growth of support throughout the last quarter. 4D community support is available for people needing an intense or consistent style of provision to enable them to transition through a difficult or different time in their lives.

### Highlights

We have established stronger links with Warwickshire County Council, Children's Disabilities Team and the Adult Mental Health service.

We had another successful Summer Activities through the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme where we supported 20 children per day, four days a week over a four-week period. Every day was full of activities from equine to art and crafts to den building, sport activities, bug house building and learning about the environment. From a recruitment campaign we were successful in recruiting several team members to support the children who required additional support to join in the activities. Statistics received from Warwickshire County Council, reflect on the impact that this project has had on families across Warwickshire over the weeks of activities during the summer and they expressed gratitude for all the support that we have provided. As one of only 100 providers across the county we contributed to the grand total of 32,078 HAF spaces that were available. At least 128,312 hours of enriching activities were delivered and over 30,000 children's meals were distributed.



Recruitment has been successful over the past year. The community team has grown with team members working full and part time hours. We have promoted one person into taking on a lead post and permanent contract. Alongside these increases there has also been an increase in support hours provided.

## **Challenges**

Lone working challenges for colleagues have included risks to mitigate against, where neighbours within the immediate vicinity of a person we support lives, use drugs and other substances. Although the person doesn't want to move as they feel so settled there, social disturbances are regular and can be intimidating.

No two days, nor two situations are alike, and we have experienced people sharing many extreme difficulties, from struggles to pay their bills as the economic crisis worsens, habitual hoarding of possessions that decrease space available to live in, distress over poor housing, conflicts with family and

neighbours, health and disability challenges to overcome and many other scenarios. Team members collaborate to find the best solutions, always ensuring the person is central to any decision making and receiving the best possible support to live towards their dreams.

## **Development**

We continue to build our relationships with the Mental Health Teams and Adult Disability Teams, Commissioning and children's Disability Team locally. Developing strong Partnering relationships has enabled an increase in hours and new introductions.

## **Stories of Change**

*Robert is a 15-year-old boy who is attending school spasmodically, struggling with motivation in all things, he tends to hide behind his mobile phone and finds it difficult to make friends. When Robert began support through 3D Facilitation, he seemed to have very little self-esteem, he would say that he did not have any friends as he thought he was fat and ugly. Robert became friends with our equine herd very quickly and when he was feeling overwhelmed, he would often ask for time with the horses. As weeks went by, Roberts would go straight to the tack room to put his helmet on and prepare to relax at the stables. Robert's self-esteem improved as he stopped talking in a negative way about himself, and we soon noticed that his swearing decreased during these sessions. Robert's school attendance also improved with him attending more lessons and taking part in class activities. Finding an activity this young participant could enjoy and excel at was key to him finding himself. Everyone around him has noticed the resounding difference that a couple of hours of truly person-centred support can make to enhance his whole life.*

*Graham is a young person that we support in the community. He has many complex requirements, due to his mental ill health, and this has led him to be a school refuser and a reclusive, depressed young man who very rarely leaves his home. Graham is a keen computer gamer; he also collects games, and he loves football. The facilitator that supports Graham has been led by Graham's pace, this can include just sitting within the lounge doorway until invited in, as the lounge is where Graham sleeps, eats and lives. Perseverance and endless patience have begun to pay dividends and after several months of simply being there, sharing these interests, talking about them despite no response, and making occasional suggestions and options, the Facilitator noticed Grahams's face emerging from inside his upturned hood, clearly indicating an acceptance of his presence and a willingness to quietly acknowledge their growing companionship. Although these are small*

*steps by other standards, for Graham and his family they constitute a breakthrough and shine hope on a life worth living.*

**Carol Judge**

**Community Compliance Coordinator**





## **3D & 4D Community Support**

### **East of England**

3D Community Support in Peterborough is a dynamic and vibrant service that offers support on a one to one and a group basis to people of all ages and disabilities.

The project is led by a registered manager. The Hub, from where the team is based, is a registered location with the Care Quality Commission and has a rating of "Good."

The highly trained and experienced team of facilitators work alongside a variety of individuals to enable and empower them to take part and excel in education, employment, leisure and to develop and maintain relationships with others. The project is financed on a self-funded 'fee for service' basis and charges for every hour of support that is delivered with each individual. In most situations the local authority provides the fees for people that access the service, and some provide their own funds. 3D Community Support has grown over the past three years despite the difficulties and changes in working practices brought about by the COVID 19 pandemic. We continue to listen carefully to participants and provide a unique service for those people that require a truly personalised approach.

#### **Highlights**

We started our Fundraising Campaign with the goal to raise seventy thousand pounds for a respite cabin. The intent is that people we support will have the opportunity to have overnight stays away from home and get a feeling of what it may feel like in the future living away from their family home but still have the level of support they would need. It will be designed to give families the well-deserved break that they need. To raise money the team have got involved with a Santa Run, a Bollywood Jubilee evening, car washes and bake sales plus participating in the Great Eastern Run.

We celebrated the Queen's Coronation with a 'Bollywood Jubilee'. This was an event that was organised for 29th May 2022, and it took place at The Everest Kitchen Restaurant in Yaxley. It was a ticketed only event and all monies raised went towards the Fundraising for the Cabin. It was a successful

evening where individuals we support, their families, friends and the community were able to dress up and socialise.

Circles Network was gifted a three-night stay at Cavendish Hall. This is located just on the outskirts of a small village in the Suffolk countryside. The country house consisted of three double bedrooms and three twin bedrooms. Due to the size of the house, we were able to offer the three-night stay to three individuals we support, two parents and we had two employees support for the duration of the trip.

## Challenges

At the end of July 2022, our 3D Manager left the organisation which resulted in people feeling unsettled as she played a huge part of the running in the day-to-day activities and had been with us for many years; from supporting individuals on the 3D service to leading the team. After her departure we had a restructure of the employees and over the year shared out some of the responsibilities across the managers and focussed on the development of the team.

We had a rise in costs for the delivery of the service that we provide. Following on from this we had some negotiations with the local authority to continue to maintain the services we have been providing and secure financial stability.

## Development

We began a 'Development Drop-In' for people we support, their friends and families and encouraged other professionals to 'drop in' too. The purpose of this was to have talks about what participants would like to see us do in the future and then put these thoughts and dreams into action. Our Drop-in was on the first Friday of every month during the morning and we saw some key families throughout this.



What they told us they would like to see is:

19–25-year-old youth group.

Support for Carers – Future proofing their finances for their dependants.

More over-night respite.

In direct response to the expressed needs, we acted on several fronts:

Empowering Youth through the 19–25-Year-Old Youth Group:

- We recognised the importance of providing a space for young adults to connect, learn, and grow. In seeking local authority funding, we demonstrated our commitment to nurturing the potential of this age group, ensuring they have a supportive community as they navigate this critical phase of their lives.

Supporting Carers and Securing Futures:

- We understood the critical role that carers play in the lives of people we support. By engaging local solicitors and hosting informative sessions, we equipped parents and carers with the knowledge and tools to secure the financial well-being of their dependents. This proactive approach has already led to the establishment of trust funds, offering a safeguard for the future.

Expanding Respite Care Opportunities:

- Recognising the importance of respite care, we worked closely with the local authority to adjust care packages. This collaborative effort has resulted in an expansion of overnight respite services, providing both individuals and their families with much-needed support and relief.

These developments reflect our unwavering commitment to listening, learning, and taking action. By creating spaces for dialogue and actively responding to expressed needs, we're not only enhancing the quality of support we provide but also fostering a stronger, more inclusive community. Together, we're shaping a future that is brighter and more promising for all people we support.

### **Differences Post Pandemic**

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed significant shifts in the landscape of emotional well-being and community engagement. Individuals we support have experienced a noticeable decline in their emotional well-being, leading to a reluctance to venture out into the community.

In response, our approach has been one of empathy and gradual reintegration. We've been working closely with individuals, ensuring that they dictate the pace of their re-entry into community activities. This patient,

person-centred approach allows them to reconnect with the world in a way that feels safe and comfortable.

Recognising the need for a holistic support system, our leadership team took proactive steps. We updated our coaching session template, incorporating well-being-focused questions. This adjustment ensures that our employees not only receive the necessary guidance in their roles but also feel genuinely supported in their own well-being.

Moreover, we've prioritised mental health within our team by seeking out Mental Health First Aid training. Two of our dedicated employees have completed this programme, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to provide vital support to their colleagues and people we support. These developments show our commitment to adapt and evolve in the face of change. By placing a strong emphasis on emotional well-being and providing tailored support, we're paving the way for a more resilient and connected community moving forward. Together, we're navigating this new landscape with compassion and determination.

## Partnership Development

During this period, we have taken remarkable strides in cultivating and fortifying partnerships that are poised to make a transformative impact on our community of disabled individuals.

Through the establishment of organised network groups, we have created a space for collaborative growth and mutual support. These partnerships not only amplify our collective voice but also open new avenues for shared resources and expertise.

Furthermore, our deepened connections with the Local Authority, Schools, Colleges, and the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Foundation Trust are paving the way for more comprehensive and tailored support. These strengthened ties are instrumental in ensuring that our services are seamlessly integrated into the broader support network, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for those people we serve.

Together, we are building a stronger, more inclusive community where individuals can thrive and achieve their full potential.



## Stories of Change

*A's transformative journey commenced with support from Circles Network's 4D service in early 2021. Facing the challenges of anorexia and an autism diagnosis, A had experienced three unsuccessful community discharges and was at that time on her fourth hospital admission. Building a profound*

therapeutic rapport with her 4D facilitator, A achieved remarkable strides in her journey towards greater independence. Tragically, on June 21, 2022, A's hospital acquaintance passed away, triggering a regression marked by severe OCD. Leveraging the strong therapeutic foundation, the facilitator employed person-centred planning tools to champion A's needs, facilitating her reintegration into mainstream school to complete her desired A-levels. A dedicated effort to adhere to a prescribed meal plan, coupled with exploration of various emotion expression methods, underscored A's remarkable progress. Today, A stands as a testament to personal growth and achievement, with a newfound capacity for self-identification of emotions and self-reflection that sets her on a path to continued success.

Written by Courtney Mullane 4D Transitions Coach

Circles Network have helped me and my son since 2014. My son has learning disabilities and some problems with his health. I have really tried hard to bring up my son the best I can and the people at Circles Network are like a family to me.

In 2014 I started going to The Hub regularly to get help with filling out all the forms I must fill out and to get help with all the meetings I have to go to, and speak up in, about my son. At the time I wasn't eating too many vegetables or a variety of food, so Caroline started to cook with me. We turned this cooking into a Friday thing, more and more people joined us, and it was increasingly popular.

When Circles Network moved into a bigger Hub, in Peterborough, in 2017, it was important that we had a kitchen so that we could carry on with what had become known as Café Friday.

I now volunteer at Café Friday every week with another parent. Lots of people come together to share a lovely healthy meal and I get chance to talk to others about how I'm doing and seek any help I need.

My son still attends Circles Network too. He has one to one support every week. He used to come to the youth club but he's nearly 20 years old now and wants to do his own thing. My son really trusts the people at Circles Network. He is much braver at the doctors or dentists if he has a member of the team with him and he listens to them about his behaviour too.

I love helping with fundraising and all the celebrations that we have at Circles Network. We always make sure we celebrate people's birthdays with a card and our famous buffet!

The team at Circles Network have worked hard with my son.

Written by Rosie Dines, volunteer and parent.

**Caroline Hunte**

**Head of Operations England**



## **3D & 4D Community Support South-East of England**

The 3D and 4D Community Support projects in the South East offer one to one and group support either in the community or in individual's homes. Many of the individuals are experiencing social isolation and are looking to expand their social circle and broaden their general life skills. The support provided is truly person centred, ensuring that all elements work for the person concerned. We connect with people in a setting and at a time that works for them, providing support on the same days each week with facilitators that they know. This allows for the foundations of trust and positive working relationships to be built, paving the way for amazing outcomes for both the individual and facilitator. Most of the individuals supported, are funded by the local authority, West Sussex. Support plans with chargeable hours are in place and this ranges from two hours per week to seventeen hours per week. There are also individuals who self-fund their support and they too have agreements in place for their support hours - ranging from two hours to six hours per week. 4D Community Support is a targeted service, usually facilitating intensive support with an individual who is going through a period of change that they are adjusting to.

### **Highlights**

The growth of 4D support over the last financial year, with one new introduction and increase in support hours of 437% was a real highlight.

3D support has also continued to grow, with an increase in support hours of 7.2%.

Our Lead Facilitator has successfully led the team alongside a part time Project manager, we have recruited an additional part time administrator. We advertised a new role of Community Compliance Co-ordinator, which the Lead Facilitator was successful in application for and started this role in March 2023.

Using the Function Room at Crawley Football Club has been also a highlight over the last year, giving us many more opportunities to bring the people we support together and provide opportunities for socialisation.



## Challenges

The communication surrounding the move into Crawley Football Stadium remained a challenge, with the date of the move constantly being set back, there was a change in their management which impacted on this. Whilst we were active in seeking clarification on details of the move, we were told, after some time of chasing this clarification, that the space was no longer available. With the growth of the team and people we support, the additional space is very much needed.

Recruitment has continued to be slow; we have been working on new ways to promote employment with Circles Network in the Southeast.

## Development

In March the Lead Facilitator was successful in application of a new role of Community Compliance Co-ordinator. This role will focus on delivery of Safe, Well Led, Effective, Responsive and Caring support in-line with Care Quality Commission standards.

## Differences Post Pandemic

Post Covid there has been a significant increase in isolation where individuals find themselves separated from their community and therefore struggling with their mental health. Mental health concerns stretch past isolation however, with many people experiencing heightened anxiety around real-world issues, physical health, and a need for extra support available to improve their mental health. There is a much higher demand on services, including West Sussex County Council. This is causing increased wait times (in some cases, up to one year's wait) for personal care reviews and therefore some folks are not receiving the correct type or amount of support they require. Financially, the increased cost of living has left some individuals struggling to manage their finances and unsure they can meet all their physical needs independently.



## Partnerships

Social media: Circles Network Crawley's online presence has been improved, helping us to reach the local community and strengthen connections with organisations we personally encounter such as Crawley Community Shop, The Easter Team, and British Heart Foundation. This helps us to continue finding/holding volunteering positions within the community. We also received two large financial donations from Crawley Community Shop which have helped us buy new equipment for our new premises.

We have connected with The Hygiene Bank who gave a substantial donation of toiletries, with another donation being arranged this month. This allows individuals we support to access free hygiene products alleviating cost concerns and improving self-worth through cleanliness.

Crawley Town Centre Business Improvement Development (BID) have spoken with an employee personally and advised us to reach out to strengthen our community partnerships and get more involved as an organisation. This connection is still developing but it hopefully benefits all businesses in the Manor Royal area so we will reap the rewards too.



## Stories of Change

*Drew is a volunteer with the British Heart Foundation in Burgess Hill. Having volunteered for eleven months, he enjoys spending time in their friendly environment, working as a valued and trusted member of their team. Prior to volunteering, Drew completed online training with his facilitator (who also undertook the training) to ensure he understood the role he was fulfilling and what would be expected of him. Drew's main responsibilities are to sort and label the CDs, making sure they are all in the correct cases, and upkeep the general organisation within the store. Drew is helping to maintain their welcoming environment every day he's there. This volunteering is part of a long-term goal for Drew to re-enter paid work and reconnect with his community. For some time, Drew has battled an alcohol dependency which has led to periods of isolation and times of emotional distress. Drew used his goal of volunteering as motivation to reduce his alcohol consumption, and now uses his position to remain vigilant and mindful of his lifestyle choices. He puts his best foot forward each day he attends the British Heart Foundation and knowing he has this responsibility gives him something to be excited about! Drew says: "I'm enjoying my work! I look forward to going to work every week and I like the people there; they are friendly. It makes me feel good doing something for the community. I love being back at work – I used to work at a garden centre and missed not working when I left, so going to the British Heart Foundation gives me something to look forward to every*



week. I feel proud to be working there and I like my facilitator coming with me as he helps me." Drew's commitment to this volunteering role has not only benefited the local community (as they have a lovely shop to visit with a very friendly individual to help them), but Drew's immediate family also feel much happier knowing their relative has a purpose and a goal that he is dedicated to. He has something positive to think of and focus on and spends less time alone indoors. Drew's self-confidence has been boosted above and beyond and he is also inspiring others within the Circles Network community; proving, with some effort, a little hope and a lot of self-belief, goals are not just set – they are achieved!

Andrew has Schizophrenia which impacts his daily life in many ways. He lives with his mum, Penny, who is elderly and has reduced mobility due to a previous stroke. She has a significant deformity to her foot that impacts her walking and therefore her ability to get out in the community. Andrew loves nature and the outdoors but finds it challenging to mix with his local community also, as it can be overstimulating and therefore quite overwhelming. Penny used to like to get out in the garden when she could, looking at the flowers, listening to the birds, and enjoying the fresh air. Neither Penny or Andrew have been able to do this as their garden was very run down and overgrown. A facilitator – who is a keen gardener himself – teamed up with another facilitator to visit Andrew and Penny to assess what could be done to improve their outside space and make it more accessible and welcoming. After a few detailed discussions with Andrew and Penny, it was agreed to purchase some tools, gardening equipment and a bird bath which Andrew chose. Andrew was encouraged to go out and help with the gardening which he enjoyed very much. Now, they both enjoy their garden and are delighted to see local wildlife return to a space they can continue to maintain and improve with a little help along the way. This has had an extremely positive impact on their emotional and mental wellbeing. Each are now able to step outside and not face an enormous task that must be completed; they are just welcomed to their own little piece of nature that Andrew gave time and effort to creating for himself and his mum. They can both look out on something they are proud of; something they've accomplished with a strong team effort.

**Stevie Ruxton**

**Project Manager**



## Youth Groups

### Peterborough

Circles Network continues to run seven Youth Groups which are funded by Peterborough City Council as part of their Community Short Breaks portfolio. Our main large group is called 'Fun United', which is for 11–19-year-olds and held for two hours on Wednesday evenings; term time, and then for two five-hour sessions per week during the holidays. Our other large group is called 'Circles Stars' and is for 7–19-year-olds. This is a dance-based group which takes place on Saturday mornings between 10am-12pm. Our Small Groups are divided into two age brackets, 7-11- and 11-19-year old's, except for the Holiday Only groups, where children are grouped according to their needs, rather than age. Our Small Groups take place on Monday evenings; term time for two hours per age group, and Saturday daytimes; throughout the year for three hours per age group. The children and young people that attend the Monday sessions are also provided with two five-hour sessions per week throughout the holidays, alongside those young people that are introduced for Holiday Only groups. The Holiday Only sessions provide children with five hours of support for one day a week during the school holiday periods, although we do have some children who have been given funding for more than one of these sessions per week.



### Highlights

We successfully recruited and on-boarded ten new team members during the summer of 2022, following two productive recruitment evenings held in mid-June. These new team members seamlessly integrated into our youth group team, working across Small Groups and Large Groups during the summer holidays. They quickly built rapport with club members, who warmly

welcomed them and fostered friendly relationships. Existing staff members rose to the challenge of coaching and supporting their new colleagues during our busiest period, ensuring a smooth transition. The collective efforts of our expanded team resulted in enhanced service and support for club members.

This year, we have maintained consistent peer groups within our Small Group Holiday clubs, resulting in the development of meaningful friendships and increased social interactions among group members. Previously, individuals prone to isolation or preferring the company of team members exclusively are now actively engaging with their peers. This positive outcome is reflected in the anticipation expressed by members towards reuniting with one another during each holiday period. Moreover, the continuity provided by these consistent peer groups has contributed to establishing a sense of stability and routine for our members.

In January 2023, Justine Langman successfully completed her Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management in Adult Care, including a rigorous End Point Assessment involving a one-hour presentation and a ninety-minute discussion. This accomplishment not only showcased personal growth but also contributed to the development of our team and served as a catalyst for continuous learning and improvement within our youth group team.

## **Challenges**

During the financial year, we faced a significant challenge when our Lead Facilitator for youth groups unexpectedly left in February 2022. This created a gap in our team, particularly during the February half term. Our team members rallied together and ensured uninterrupted sessions for group members. To address the vacancy, we advertised, interviewed, and successfully filled the position by the end of the financial year. This accomplishment reflects our commitment to maintaining a strong and capable team, providing uninterrupted services to youth group members. Through teamwork, resilience, and strategic recruitment, we overcame the challenge posed by the departure of our Lead Facilitator, demonstrating ability to adapt and thrive in unforeseen circumstances.

Our Holiday Only Small Groups reached maximum capacity, although we had available spaces in several of our term time Small Groups and both of our Large Groups. We actively strived to fill these vacancies whilst making efforts to accommodate more children and young



people during the holiday periods, as this is where the demand appears to be concentrated. We successfully welcomed several new introductions to our Large Group, and a couple of additions to our Small Groups too. The challenge this year was experienced when we encountered instances where individuals did not attend their holiday group sessions due to family holidays or pre-existing plans. Unfortunately, we were not notified about these absences, resulting in unutilised spaces within the Small Groups that could have been offered to others on the waiting list. To address this issue, we implemented a process wherein parents/carers can confirm attendance for the holiday clubs in advance. This way, if any spaces become available, they can be offered to others who are awaiting a place.

## **Development**

As part of our ongoing development efforts this year, we implemented a distinct approach that deviates from our previous reliance on the Six Station Programme. Instead, we have embraced a more proactive and individualised strategy, emphasising the importance of member engagement and satisfaction. While we continue to plan and organise set activities, our primary focus is now centred around the preferences and interests of our members. Recognising that not all individuals may be inclined to participate in these predetermined activities, we adopted a person-centred approach, wherein our team supported members in pursuing alternative engagements that better resonated with their personal inclinations, whilst also working towards achieving their set outcomes too.

To achieve this, we have restructured our planning process by incorporating a person-centred perspective, considering their unique preferences. While we maintained a level of structure in our activities, we acknowledged that some children may not find it conducive to replicate a school-like environment. Hence, we adopted a more flexible approach for those individuals, allowing activities to flow naturally according to their interests and desires. We have also invested resources in supporting our staff team to adapt to this new concept.

In preparation for the upcoming 2023 summer holidays, we are organising a comprehensive meeting to address various topics, including the utilisation of initiatives in our sessions. This gathering will encompass discussions on incorporating a wider range of activities and implementing our newfound approach. In addition, we will continue with the use of a whiteboard as a visual aid to enhance task focus during sessions and delegate responsibilities among team members. Preliminary results indicate that this implementation will effectively enhance productivity within the team and foster improved teamwork skills overall.

## Differences Post Pandemic

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a noticeable increase in the demand for children and young people to participate in our youth groups. This could be attributed, in part, to the closure of various local clubs during the pandemic, many of which have remained closed permanently. Throughout the pandemic, our dedicated team members actively promoted and implemented social distancing measures, recognising the importance of public health during these difficult times. As the pandemic gradually subsided, our focus shifted towards guiding individuals in the transition from practicing stringent social distancing to re-engaging in more typical social interactions. This transitional period required substantial support and guidance to help individuals adapt to changing circumstances.

A portion of our current youth group members joined during the pandemic and, as such, lacked direct experience with our groups prior to the Covid-19 era. Our efforts have been dedicated to facilitating their integration into youth groups, which entailed assisting them in reacclimatising to community spaces and social interactions. This process has encompassed helping children and young people re-adjust to being in the company of their peers and actively encouraging the development of new friendships. Additionally, we have encountered certain challenges among individuals who joined our groups after the pandemic, some of whom experienced prolonged isolation during the lockdown periods. These



individuals have at times encountered difficulties in socialising, exhibited behaviour that challenges, or have struggled with emotional regulation. Our team remains committed to providing tailored support to help all children overcome these obstacles and thrive within our youth groups.

## Partnerships

Our collaboration with PROACT-SCIP training has been a foundation in our endeavour to address challenging behaviours among our youth group members. This partnership offers us a direct line of communication with an experienced instructor, who has generously offered her expertise directly if we require any additional advice and information. This partnership is particularly valuable as it equips us with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively support individuals whose behaviour may pose challenges within our group dynamics. Moreover, the instructor's willingness to engage with us, provide guidance on positive behaviour support plans, and offer fresh perspectives has and will continue to be proven invaluable in resolving complex behavioural issues. This partnership will continue to play a key role in our ongoing efforts.

Our partnership with the local council has also been instrumental in strengthening our project's foundation. Throughout our interactions with council commissioners, our commitment to transparency and open dialogue has been unwavering. This approach has not only allowed us to pinpoint areas where our project may encounter challenges but has enabled us to collaboratively identify and implement effective solutions. Our engagement with the council has consistently garnered positive feedback, reaffirming our shared dedication to enhancing the prospects of our youth group members.

### **Stories of Change**

*Harry joined the Saturday 7-11's group at the onset of February, initially exhibiting a reserved and introverted demeanour. He displayed notable signs of anxiety, donning ear defenders and concealing his face beneath a hood, evading eye contact and responding to inquiries solely through gestures. Recognising his affinity for Lego games on the Xbox, we astutely employed this shared interest as a catalyst to foster communication between Harry and our team members during his initial sessions. Remarkably, this approach proved effective, as Harry gradually developed confidence, engaging in conversations about the game and cultivating trusting relationships with our team. Subsequently, he arrived at the club without his ear defenders and with his hood lowered, evidencing a growing comfort level among our team. Capitalising on this progress, we introduced new activities, uncovering Harry's fondness for Pokémon. To accommodate this passion, we devised a Pokémon hunt within our facility using visual aids, which captivated his interest and further ignited his enthusiasm. Upon completing the hunt, Harry eagerly assumed the role of a game master, concealing the Pokémon for our team members to find. Additionally, we procured a Pokémon Battle card game, which has emerged as his preferred choice. Driven by his competitive nature, Harry delights in challenging different team members to engaging*

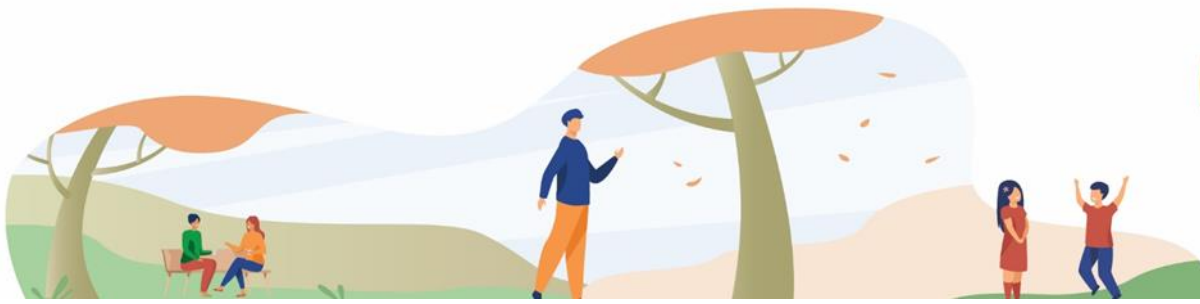


battles, whilst imparting rules and sharing knowledge about the diverse Pokémon species. Our intention is to sustain this momentum, continually introducing novel activities and encouraging Harry to explore new avenues as our sessions progress.

Luella has been an active participant in our Saturday 7-11's Small Group since November 2020, and her progress has been truly remarkable. Initially reserved and reticent, she would spend the entire weekly session in her wheelchair, declining opportunities for engagement or mobility. In addition, she would forego beverages, relying on periodic peg flushes of water to maintain hydration. However, our team remained dedicated, ensuring consistency in our interactions, fostering the development of trust, and deepening our understanding of Luella's needs. We soon discovered that she possessed a delightful sense of humour and an imaginative spirit, which we leveraged by introducing imaginative play activities involving dolls and Play-Doh. These interventions were instrumental in fostering communication and encouraging Luella to express herself more freely. In a relatively short span of time, she underwent a remarkable transformation, becoming talkative and exhibiting a notable increase in confidence. Consequently, Luella made the decision to attend our club sessions without her wheelchair, fully embracing the opportunity to engage in dynamic play alongside our team. Luella has found great enjoyment in various aspects of our Six Station Programme, and we have taken special care to tailor activities to her preferences and interests. For instance, we have incorporated activities such as baking unicorn cakes and crafting Play-Doh food for her dolls, providing her with meaningful and fulfilling experiences. Notably, we have achieved a significant milestone this year: establishing a regular routine of mid-morning refreshments, thereby eliminating the necessity for the peg flush. Nowadays, Luella arrives at our hub each week with an infectious smile, eager to discover the planned activities for the session.

**Justine Langman**

**Project Manager**



## Keyworker Collaborative

### Peterborough

The Keyworker Collaborative is a successful programme - working with families identified as having needs that meet the Criteria for the Dynamic Support Register as described in the Care Education Treatment Review Policy. The aim is to support children and young adults up to the age of 25, diagnosed with Learning Disabilities and or Autism, and their families to have a voice, receive their care and treatment wherever possible in their local community through their local services and avoid inpatient or out of area placements. If inpatient admission is unavoidable, reconnection with their community as soon as possible is facilitated through the Keyworker function. The Keyworkers are considered "an extension" of the care education treatment review (CETR) panel and will support the CETR panel in safe discharge for young people into the community. The members of the Keyworker Collaborative work alongside the wider system to promote person-centred planning to capture strength-based approaches.

In the last 12 months there has been a steady increase in the number of children and young adults requiring Keyworker support. As a result, there has been a reduction in admissions/re-admissions to acute children's and specialist mental health wards and significant reduction in the need for emergency department care for young people identified on the Dynamic Support Register.

Circles Network employs a Keyworker, an Enabler, a Project Coordinator, an Administrator and a Project Advisor as part of the collaborative.



### Highlights

Coproduction – Coproduction is vital to the performance and operations of The Keyworker Collaborative. The collaborative has formed robust relationships with other services in the locality and co-produced and



coordinated extremely effectively for the benefit of all people we served. This was achieved by building relationships with other services, attending community of practice groups, being actively involved in discussion, and in the set up the wider collaborative community of practice hosted by The Keyworker Collaborative.

The Keyworker Collaborative Hub - Keyworker funding has enabled the creation of this hub and Circles Network's role in ensuring Keyworkers and Enablers to get together, share learning and offer peer support. It is fully equipped as an office base and is used as a hub for children, young people and young adults as a drop in. This room is also used for meetings within the Keyworker collaborative team, wider collaborative meetings, and offers an available space for Care Education Treatment Reviews.

Recruitment -

Project Coordinator – The previous administrator has progressed to a different role due to the completion of PRINCE2 Project Management qualification. They now provide support and coordination across both host organisations, the collaborative, and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care Board.



Administrator – initiated to support the Project Coordinator, this was fulfilled on a 25 hour a week basis and based within Circles Network, to support across the collaborative.

Project Advisor (parent/carer) – one vacancy was fulfilled for the Project Advisor role on a 10 hour a week basis. This is to inform and guide the service using lived experience and knowledge. The Project Advisor also seeks feedback from families and young people after step down.

More experienced Keyworkers who have been with the collaborative from inception, have supervisory responsibilities as part of their ongoing professional development and to support the Keyworker Network Lead to focus on additional strategic responsibilities.

## Challenges

Keyworker Capacity and Resilience – Observational data and evidence from supervisions and reflections, demonstrates that Keyworkers are managing high risk situations that can be particularly challenging. Supervisions led by

the Keyworker Network Lead use a strength-based approach with added reflection to support the worker to assess perceived and real risks. The collaborative scheduled specialist training to support the acuity presented by the children, young people and young adults. Fiona Palmer from Reflect Training has provided Trauma Informed Practices, Trauma & Strength based approaches and Reflective Supervision. This has supported the ongoing resilience of the collaborative by teaching effective approaches to use in everyday practice. Due to the increasing acuity, ongoing training will continue to be offered.

RIX WIKI – Rix Wiki is a wonderful self-advocacy tool for people with learning disability and communication issues This supportive tool has worked well to support transition and knowledge sharing for some people on the Dynamic Support Register. Evidence from a survey that included team members, families and people the collaborative support, found Rix Wiki limited in its success with children and young people with autism only. Evidence from feedback informed that the strength-based approach and support required is most effective when trauma informed and personalised. *'The Rix Wikis were designed specifically for those with LD – I'm not sure if the simplicity of them makes them look basic, which might put some off (especially if they are already adept at navigating social media) ... I'm sure the wikis could work for someone on the spectrum, yet I have not found this person.'* Keyworker. Rix Wiki and the collaborative have agreed to hold licenses for ten wikis. There is the option to purchase more or utilise one through a personal health budget for individuals' licenses if required. Ideally, we create a personalised option, whether this is use of communication passports, Brain in Hand or simply notes stored in a smart phone.

## **Development**

A Remote Keyworking Pathway - over time and through reflective supervision and review of the dynamic support register. A cohort of children and young adults have been identified that do not require constant engagement, hence, a more remote approach would be useful; they may be in an active step-down process needing less frequent visits, or not in a position to work actively with a keyworker face to face. An experienced well supported Keyworker Network Lead could develop a remote key working function. Please see attached link for further information.

This was delivered to the team within a 'Focus Four' workshop.

## **Differences Post Pandemic**

The COVID 19 pandemic has left a profound impact on children and young people, particularly those grappling with trust and contamination issues. The

sudden shift to remote learning, social distancing measures and a barrage of health-related information has left many feeling isolated, anxious and uncertain. Trust in both the systems that govern their lives and in their own safety has been shaken.

For some, the fear of contamination has become a daily struggle. The emphasis on hygiene and constant reminders of virus transmission have exacerbated pre-existing concerns, such as obsessive-compulsive disorders (OCD) and eating disorders. These young individuals find themselves trapped in cycles whether that be handwashing, disinfecting, fear of food or constant exercise rituals, further isolating them from their peers and at risk of life for those with eating disorders. We have seen an influx of introductions that require intervention from eating disorder specialists and person-centred planning work to combat the obsessive-compulsive disorders.

### **Partnerships**

The Keyworker Collaborative has closely aligned with Centre33. A proposal has been agreed for them to develop and further their support of young people with autism and mental health conditions inclusive of their families. They have been funded through the Keyworker Programme to provide a Sibling Support Service to support the siblings of the children and young people on the Dynamic Support Register. This alignment with Centre33 will also aid the stepping down process to ensure there is still some support and direction in place once children, young people and young adults no longer require active Keyworking. It has also been identified that there may be several children and young adults that Centre33 are supporting who may meet requirements for the Dynamic Support Register or are likely to in the future. Therefore, this will support the early identification and increase the number of children and young people on the Dynamic Support Register.

### **Stories of Change**

*'I met this young person on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022 with his allocated Keyworker. At this point the young person was attending school as and when he wanted and did not engage within the community. He had issues with youths in the community and rarely went out, if he did these youths would target him. There were issues at home with managing his anger, emotions and this would often result in arguments or destruction of the home.*

After two initial visits with his Keyworker, I was then able to work with him independently. Discussion with my mentor and the young person led to working out how best I could support and create a person-centred action plan. The first few visits were more about getting to know this young person



and building up a trusting relationship with him whilst talking about the issues that were going on. We looked at and worked through person centred tools, confidence building and emotions. He began attending school regularly, and he also started to recognise his emotions. One day he had an argument with his dad, he removed himself and went to his room, later he went and apologised for his actions, his dad told me that this was the first time he had ever done something like this. I discussed this with the young person, he said that

when he walked away, he thought about what we had spoken about and went through and thanked me for my help as this was why he was able to do what he did.

We began looking at community engagement and groups available for him to join. He said he wouldn't mind joining cadets. I passed all the information on to his mum, who contacted cadets. The young person now successfully attends cadets twice a week, he can listen, follow instruction and is engaging well with his peers. He thoroughly enjoys going and has been in no trouble whilst there.

He now uses drawing and a punch bag at home to help manage his emotions and his parents have said this is a frequent strategy and is helping. He has also just started a new school placement on a working farm, which he is eager to attend. He looks after the animals and completes all tasks asked of him.

As a result of the changes, we have now begun a step back plan. The young person and his parents have expressed sincere thanks.'

Sam Dunstan – Enabler

' We are XX's parents and Rob acted as Keyworker for XX for the last two years. Please take your time to know our experience and feedback. It may help you fulfil the purpose of your role.

Before onset of a severe mental illness (ASD with severe comorbid OCD), we were a happy and prosperous family. XX was an exceptional learner and was performing very well in school. He is a creative thinker of mathematics, basically a future mathematician. Parents are scientists at the Department of Pathology, University of Cambridge. (sister) and XX were happy siblings. Everything fell apart during the lock-down when symptoms of OCD appeared. The symptoms were so severe that finally we had to admit him at the Darwin Centre. A new phase began, and we realised that the mental

health care system is broken, and it is extremely inadequate as if there will be no difference if mental health care does not exist. The experience with the mental health care system is so bitter that we believe (and this belief is evidence based so it's a fact and we can build a very strong argument). Still, we believe it was the biggest mistake in our life to take him to the Darwin Centre or seek mental health care help. However, the experience with Rob was totally opposite. Presence of people like him makes a difference and raises hope during crisis moments. Our son is still alive and there is still some hope left because of him and two more people's contribution. In the system, we found only a few people are doing their job purpose-driven like Rob. He was creative almost everywhere in critical situations. He is a great listener, maybe that's the key for his great success dealing with the situation. It's not just about the patient, XX, but also in many group meetings (including multi professional meetings as well as meeting with the family) he handled many sensitive situations carefully and positively, in a creative way, positive in a sense to bring the positive outcome, not just adhere to the rule "tick box job done".

We learned from his role. We are scientists and do purpose driven creative work performing experiments. We are now better listeners, and this improvement is observing and reviewing his role.

Many positive things we are not writing to reduce your read time and obviously we are forgetting some because he has so many good characteristics.

Wish him all the best and we will remember his great contribution bringing a positive outcome against all the odds. We will miss his presence, but the community needs his presence with their critical situations.

He is an angel in real life. When we say this, we cry.

Please feel free to ask any question you have,

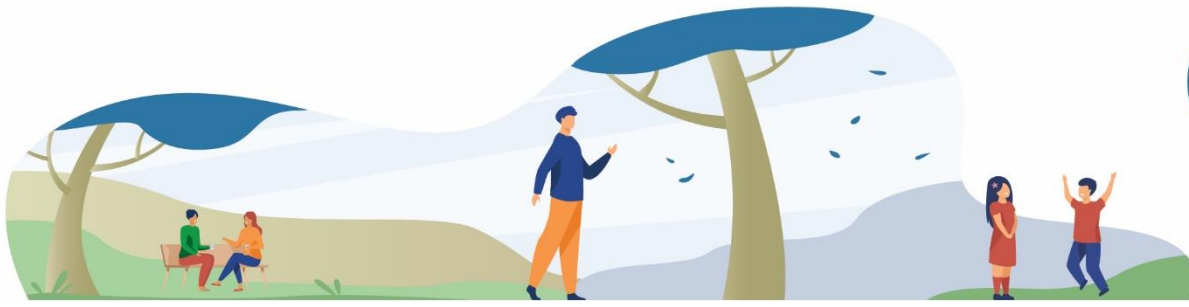
Best wishes,

XX Parents.'

Parents feedback regarding Rob White - Keyworker

**Zoe Inglis**

**Project Coordinator**



## Circles Advocacy

### Glasgow

Circles Advocacy, Glasgow provides a professional, independent advocacy service for individuals detained under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 or the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995. We are based in Glasgow and operate at Rowanbank Clinic, which is a medium secure setting, the low secure wards based at Leverndale Hospital, and our service also provides three months of community provision for people who are discharged from these services. Predominately Circles Advocacy in Glasgow provides support to those who have offended and are detained due to their mental health which as a result means they are involved with Forensic services. The core funding of our service is received from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde as well as the West of Scotland Forensic Directorate. The areas of service covered includes male and female admissions, male and female rehabilitation, the national learning disability unit, pre-discharge, and community outreach.

#### Highlights

- The first highlight from the past financial year has got to be the resilience of the team and their ability to adapt and continue to meet service needs despite all the staffing disruptions. The team managed to deliver a high standard of advocacy despite running without a manager for a short time. This was a difficult time for the team who were undoubtedly under a lot of pressure to meet the demands of the service yet managed to continue to secure many positive outcomes for the individuals we advocate for and ensure that individuals' voices were heard throughout this time.

- The second highlight is the maintenance and strengthening of relationships with other bodies, including but not limited to NHS Greater Glasgow &





Clyde, The Mental Welfare Commission, Mental Health Tribunals Scotland, and Human Rights Consortium Scotland. In addition, the service managed to maintain a strong working relationship with two local universities that we have been able to provide various student placements for within the last financial year.

- The final highlight to mention is that the Collective advocates have made significant headway with the issues regarding quality, quantity, and choice of meals across both hospitals. This has been an ongoing issue for years and has caused a lot of frustration for the individuals we advocate for, as they felt that they had little to no control with regards to mealtimes. With ongoing Collective Advocacy input we were able to ensure that individuals felt listened to and that the concerns regarding meals would be taken seriously. Advocates have attended several working group sessions to try and resolve mealtime dining issues and now have assurances that the situation will improve. Individuals especially enjoyed a tasting session where they were able to rate the proposed food choices and see some of these incorporated into the existing menu. Circles Advocacy have received lots of positive feedback from individuals regarding this piece of work and it has been rewarding to see a positive outcome achieved after finally resolving this.



## Challenges

There have been several major staffing changes over the last year; along with many other similar organisations facing post pandemic recruitment and retention difficulties, which has proved challenging for the team and the service.

Despite all the staffing disruptions, the service has been able to continue to deliver a high standard of advocacy and embrace new opportunities for growth. This is largely due to having supportive and conscientious, diligent, and driven team members.

The other main challenge faced by Circles Advocacy over the previous financial year was the reduction and later cessation of Covid-19 restrictions which meant that the team were able to access their office and wards more freely than before. Some Mental Health Tribunals began to return to in-person, but most were still via Teleconferencing. Care Plan Approach meetings were mostly conducted via video conferencing. As restrictions on our office reduced, more of the team were able to access the office at the same time which brought adjustment challenges such as office noise whilst in

meetings and internet connection issues. The team adjusted well and maintained a high-level service delivery.

## **Development**

Collective Advocacy was able to return to in-person collective sessions and the team were subsequently approached by members of NHS Management who invited advocates to support with gaining views from individuals on changes to their care and treatment. For example, person-centred visiting, meals and to improve policies on intimate relationships and pets visiting the clinic. Collective advocacy continues to grow and has tackled some national level issues such as the disadvantageous financial implications of the Transfer for Treatment Direction order.

## **Differences Post Pandemic**

Covid restrictions dropped, and advocates were able to return to their office and wards on a more regular basis and without as many PPE requirements. Unfortunately, on return to the office we initially had an outbreak of covid, and the full team fell ill which seriously impacted the service for around a week. Following this, NHS management ensured that all staff began to test regularly again and encouraged those with positive test results to stay home to protect the team and individuals we advocate for. Some meetings and hearings continued to be conducted online or via telephone whereas others returned to being held in-person. Advocacy issues regarding covid that were being raised by those we advocate for trailed off with the reduction of restrictions and the consensus was that individuals were happy for these restrictions to end and for there to be more normalcy. Circles Advocacy gained views via the collective model on what individuals' preferences were for meetings and hearings. The team continued to offer support at these both remotely and in-person.

## **Partnerships**

Circles Advocacy Glasgow has strengthened its partnerships with local universities which we continue to provide Student Placements for, and they were able to advertise our recruitment opportunities on their student platforms which led to an increase in appropriate applicants. In addition, we have strengthened our partnerships with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Improvement and Food, Fluid and Nutrition and person-centred visiting groups and continued to run issues through Collective Advocacy in the





pursuit of having individuals' voices heard especially when it comes to aspects of their care and treatment. Advocates have worked alongside NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to secure more and more positive outcomes for individuals within the hospital.

Furthermore, Circles Advocacy Glasgow strengthened their relationship with Scottish Government who conducted a Mental Health Law Review, and the Collective Advocates were able to facilitate meetings for Ward Representatives to share views on behalf of the collective cohort. This feedback shaped the recommendations following the legislation review and collective work regarding this is still ongoing.

## **Stories of Change**

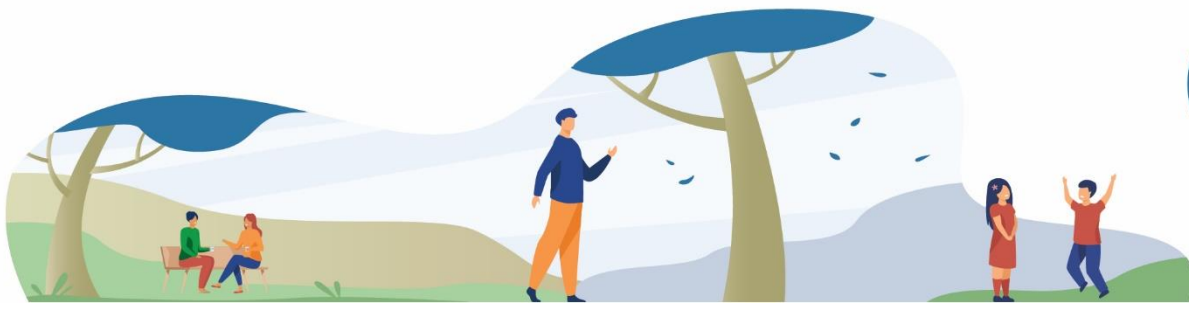
*Lewis has been waiting since 2020 to receive an inheritance payment for just over £6,000. He has sporadically chased it up over the last few years but has never had any luck moving forward with it. The rest of Lewis' family had all received their inheritance a few years ago and this was making Lewis wary of the solicitor and where his money had got to. It was agreed that an advocate would, on Lewis' behalf, continue trying to reach the solicitor on a regular basis about the inheritance payment. After months of back and forth contact with the solicitor and promises being made that the cheque would be posted to Lewis, he decided he wanted to lodge a formal complaint with the firm. Lewis was apprehensive about "rocking the boat" because he liked the solicitor and felt he was a nice guy. We reminded Lewis that we could support him in writing a formal complaint and that he would have full control over what was said within it. It was agreed that an advocate would write up a draft for Lewis to read over, edit if necessary and sign before it was sent away. The solicitor responded quickly to say that he would be posting out a letter of apology and Lewis' inheritance payment within the next couple days. Fast forward to July 2022 and despite frequent attempts to contact the solicitor directly, Lewis had still not received his cheque and letter of apology. Circles Advocacy discussed possible options to move forward, such as lodging a complaint to the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission (SLCC) or contacting someone else who works at the firm instead of trying to contact the solicitor personally. Lewis felt that he wanted to give the solicitor another opportunity to respond before escalating the complaint and asked for an advocate to try and contact the solicitor's secretary. In August 2022 Lewis received his cheque and letter of apology from the solicitor. Lewis was incredibly grateful for advocacy support to resolve this issue.*

*Max wanted to buy an MP3 player for over a month, however at the time there had been inconsistency about the use of these devices with internet access within the hospital. Max was frustrated as he felt like "everyone else in*

*the ward is allowed one” and ‘didn’t understand why there was a problem with him having one’. Circles Advocacy was able to inform Max that these types of items are permitted based on an individual’s risk assessment and offered to liaise with Max’s Registered Medical Officer (RMO) to gain a better understanding of why there was a delay in Max being allowed an MP3 player. An advocate was able to speak with Max’s RMO and get an update on the ongoing discussions surrounding permissions for Max to purchase an MP3 player. Max was still frustrated but understood that certain conversations needed to take place before a decision was reached about him buying an MP3 player. He thanked his advocate for keeping him updated with how the discussions were developing. Based on his individual risk assessment, Max was granted permission to be able to purchase an MP3 player on his next electrical shopping outing. Max falls under Adults with Incapacity (AWI) legislation and asked for an advocate to find out a date for when this outing was planned to go ahead. Max thanked the Circles team for keeping him informed throughout the process and for empowering him to use his own voice and “ask for something when he wants it.” Max said he couldn’t wait to get his MP3 player so that he could learn Spanish, read audiobooks, and listen to music.*

**Rhiannon Harrison**

**Service Manager**



## Circles Advocacy

### Fife

Circles Network in Fife provide advocacy to the entire Fife region and have a large remit which includes supporting individuals who experience mental health difficulties, dementia, disability, chronic illness, acquired brain injury and autism. The team can also provide advocacy support for children under 16 years who are subject to compulsory measures under the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) Scotland act 2003.

### Highlights

We are now providing face to face advocacy and drop ins in hospitals, although COVID is still present we are working as flexibly as possible and in line with the procedures in wards and care homes to continue to provide advocacy to those people who require us to.



We were awarded an extension on our funding this year.

We have completed a series of Podcasts where we chat about the project and how we can support individuals, this was broadcast on Spotify, YouTube and the Circles Network website.

## **Challenges**

We have had difficulties with recruitment this year, which we, along with HR and the senior leadership team have strived to overcome.

The demand on the service has been a challenge at times, especially when we don't have a full complement of staff, also some of the issues we are supporting people with have taken longer to resolve due to the complexities posed by people we support and the ravages of Covid. The team have operated flexibly to accommodate this.

## **Development**

Our collective meetings have restarted in this year, which we are delighted about as this gives us the chance to bring people together who share similar concerns to work towards solutions.

## **Differences Post Pandemic**

Some issues take longer to resolve or to receive an outcome from other services, the length of time waiting on this is due to a back log in many services, impacted by Covid.

We also have a high priority project on gaining individuals' views on moving out from hospital. There is pressure on NHS Fife, and we receive introductions to gain views on where an individual wants to move on to when ready to be discharged. This causes an impact as the team are required to visit each person as soon as they have received the introduction; next day or day two from the first contact. This allows social workers to support individuals to move on from hospital and not become stuck.



## **Partnerships**

As part of our advocacy role, we continuously develop partnerships with other services and professionals.

Some of the team completed the New to Forensic training which is provided by NHS Fife and is accredited training and free to the service, team members met with a NHS Psychologist while completing the training and they have

now offered New to Forensic: Essentials of Psychology Care, this training will provide a basic understanding of the key principles of delivery of psychology care in forensic services.

## **Stories of Change**

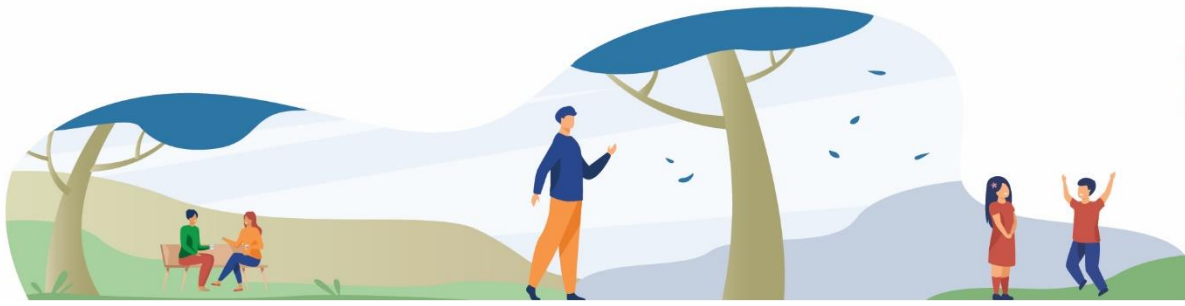
*Kathrine was introduced to the service in April last year and initially requested moral support in meeting with a solicitor. Her child had recently been placed into emergency foster care and she experienced no contact with her child, which was against her wishes as she had only asked for respite. Moving forward Katherine required help with meetings with a social worker as she felt they were making her out to be a bad parent one minute and then praising her the next, which left her feeling confused and unable to say what she wanted. This led her to seek help from an advocate, who would help her understand her rights and assist her to voice her concerns effectively. Katherine has since only required an advocate to support her at weekly review meetings with the social work team and has found her voice to question social work methods as they have admitted fault within their course of action. Her child was then rehabilitated home in within a few months. Katherine has praised Circles Advocacy and said she would never have got through this without our continuous support.*

*Liam had been admitted into hospital from his care home after an altercation with another resident. The care home could apparently no longer meet his needs. An advocate was asked to speak with Liam to gain his views on where he would like to move to after his hospital stay was over. Liam was able to lay out what he was looking for and was happy for an advocate to go through all the information provided with the social worker. The Social Work department also wanted Circles Advocacy to gain views on how Liam felt about the Local Authority applying for welfare guardianship, we visited with Liam and gathered his views on this to allow him to be moved somewhere permanent.*

*“Thank you for all your work and time, you went above and beyond to make him feel included and took away any frustrations he had due to his conditions. He sang your praises and appreciated that you saw him as a person and not as a man with a disability. Person centred at its finest.” Partner Feedback*

**Carolann Haddow**

**Service Manager**



## **Circles Advocacy – Unpaid Carers Project**

### **Fife**

Circles Advocacy provide advocacy to unpaid carers throughout Fife and help understand the importance of having a Power of Attorney, this is to ensure unpaid carers have the legal powers to make decisions should the person they care for lose capacity, and to support both the carer and cared for person to choose and arrange a suitable Power of attorney. The service also supports carers who find themselves in a situation where, due to not having Power of Attorney in place a Guardianship is required.

### **Highlights**

Highlights this year included being awarded another year's funding from the Health & Social Care Partnership, this is very positive as it will allow us to build upon the foundation which we have built up over the past year.



We have also seen an increase in people accessing the service as awareness and trust in the project have risen.

We have completed a first podcast discussing the benefits of Power of Attorney and how our project can support unpaid carers through the process. This is an accessible way for people to find out more about the project and Power of Attorney.

### **Challenges**



Recruitment has been extremely difficult in this post Covid year, and we have tried to attract new applicants by making the hours more flexible (full time or Part time). We have been advertising on different platforms to widen the search area and remain positive that we will find the right candidates for the role. We know that recruitment across the sector has been facing universal challenges.

We have continued to see the take up for the project remaining low despite considerable effort in reaching out to communities and marketing the project. We are however beginning to see an increase in introductions and know that the service can have very positive outcomes for individuals and their carers.

## Development

We are planning to carry out a whole Fife mapping exercise over the coming months, leaving no stone unturned as we seek to find the carers and individuals which would benefit from the service. We have continued to reach out to develop partnerships across health and social care and will build upon this work already completed.

## Differences Post Pandemic

We were delighted to be able to carry out more face-to-face visits, this has allowed us to meet with people and build the trust needed in supporting them to move forward. We also provided drop-ins and were able to attend events and spaces in which to connect personally with people.

## Partnerships

We have continued to build good working relationships with professionals and services. We have found hospital care workers have been a source of much knowledge and useful links. The introduction to carers needing support and those wishing to get Power of Attorney in place is reliant on strong partnerships with professionals working alongside carers and those that they care. Building an understanding of this advocacy project has been vital in ensuring that this is possible.

## Stories of Change





Sam came to our project for support and information with regards to Power of Attorney. His mum was in the early stages of Dementia, and he was beginning to experience difficulties dealing with her financial affairs. His mum's bank had turned him away when he tried to do some banking for her. The advocate met with Sam and his mum and explained the process. They wanted to go ahead with a solicitor's appointment, as the advocate explained to them that a solicitor was able to provide a capacity assessment.

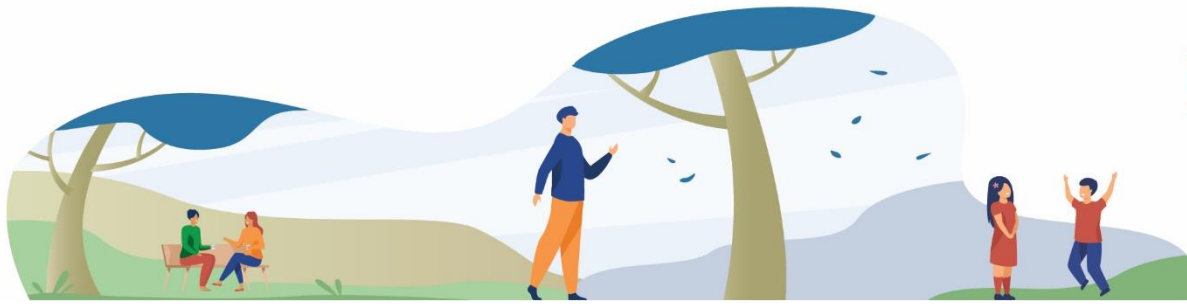
The appointment went well, and the solicitor decided he was able to proceed as Sam's mum was able to answer his questions appropriately. The Power of Attorney document was drawn up and a second appointment was made to sign it. Sam invited the advocate to come to that appointment as well. At the next appointment a week later, the solicitor provided another quick assessment of Sam's mum and was then happy to proceed. The document was signed, and the solicitor sent it off to be registered.

Sonia has looked after her mother at home for several years without any issues. Recently she had to do some banking for her mum but was refused due to their local bank branch being closed and moved elsewhere. New staff at the bank were not aware of the family and were unable to allow the transaction without legal powers. Sonia contacted Circles Advocacy for information. An advocate arranged to visit to provide information and support if required. Sonia explained she wanted to go ahead and seek legal advice but would like the advocate to be there as well. Sonia chose a solicitor from the list and the advocate called and made an appointment. Sonia was happy that she understood the process and went ahead with the solicitor to apply for Guardianship. Sonia then felt confident to continue with the solicitor appointments on her own.

*"Oh my goodness Thank you for coming to the solicitors with me, I was so flustered. I wouldn't have done that on my own. Circles Advocacy is such a good service, I'm so glad I was told about it."*

**Carolann Haddow**

**Service Manager**



## **Circles Advocacy – Recovery Project**

### **Fife**

Circles Network provide independent Advocacy to individuals right across Fife who have or are accessing Drug & Alcohol services. This is a Peer Advocacy Service provided by people with lived experience of drug & alcohol recovery.

### **Highlights**

We have been awarded another one year's funding which will take the project to September 2024 and worked very closely with the partnership to ensure that we are capturing the data and stories which they need to be able to effectively evaluate the impact of the service provided.

We have recruited and now have two full time Recovery Advocates with personal lived experience, and they have really settled in well to their role.

Our project is being sought by a wide variety of professionals and individuals and the types of issues raised are increasing. Trust in the advocates is building and many of the new introductions are coming through word of mouth.



### **Challenges**

Recruitment struggles had been a challenge, it can be a stressful job due to the types of issues we support with people, which, with other factors can be amplified in Peer provision and support. It can also be difficult to recruit someone who is in a stable position in their own recovery journey, where they are able to identify and manage triggers which they face. After some time and patience, we did find the right candidates.

Raising Awareness of the project was difficult when we only had one recovery advocate in post and that advocate had to concentrate on the introductions we were receiving and this left little to go out and about raising awareness at the beginning of the year. She did however start to build strong connections.

## **Development**

We had always planned to recruit volunteers with lived experience to the team, to enable us to reach out to more people and further enhance the project. Now that we have two full time recovery advocates in post, we plan on recruiting volunteers to help raise awareness of the project.

## **Partnerships**

Partnerships with other Drug & Alcohol services has strengthened, and people are identifying the project as beneficial for individuals and introducing people. We are also welcomed by other services to provide drop- ins as they believe that Circles Advocacy is a great service to come along to. We know that the strength of our partnerships is vital for the success of the service, and we will continue to map and grow our connections within Fife.

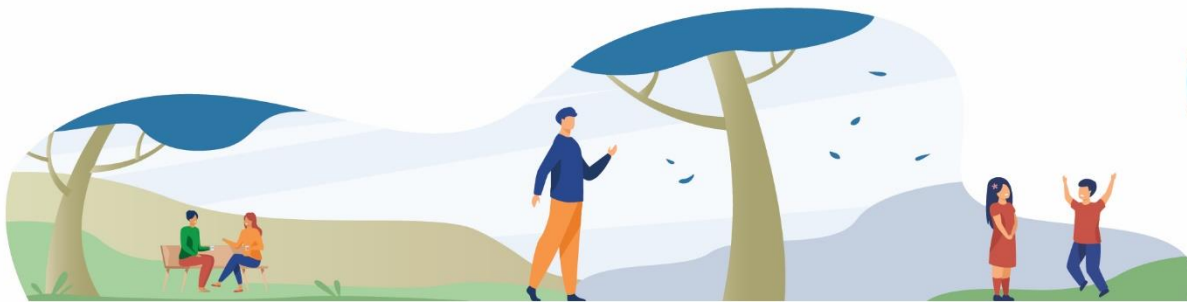
## **Stories of Change**

*Rebecca was introduced to Circles Advocacy several months ago for support at meetings via DAPL. Her son had been taken into foster care at six weeks old. Rebecca had a history of drug use; she wanted her son back in her life and was struggling with her mental health and lack of friend and family support. As part of a social work assessment, Rebecca was partaking voluntarily to weekly drug testing and regular supervised visits with her son. Rebecca experienced many challenges over the past months, including completing a Parental Capacity Assessment over a period of weeks, which was initially delayed considerably, frustratingly resulting in Rebecca revoking her voluntary agreement section 25 due to the ongoing delays, coupled with illness through contracting COVID, missed appointments, faulty drug test results all of which caused further delays and stress whilst tests were sent to the lab. Our role as advocates included assisting Rebecca to employ a solicitor, supporting Rebecca in person and online at various child protection meetings, children's panel hearings and LAC reviews, liaising with Rebecca's social worker and housing officer regarding other concerns and signposting Rebecca for other support, which included counselling. Following the successful completion of the Parental Capacity Assessment, Rebecca is now being rehabilitated into caring for her son on a full-time basis. Rebecca's supervised contact has been changed to unsupervised and extended for longer periods with a view to*

overnight stays in the coming weeks, whilst continuing to work closely with the foster carer and social worker to continue to meet the needs of her child. Rebecca continues to carry out weekly drugs tests and engage with services, including counselling and advocacy. Rebecca still requires and requests advocacy support at meetings through choice and continues to engage well with our service. Rebecca has worked hard to achieve her goals and I feel privileged to have been able to support her in some way throughout that process. In recent days, the process has somewhat quickened in that her son has been allowed to return home on a full-time basis and although there will continue to be future meetings, Rebecca feels that she is better able to cope with these on her own now. As a charity we can access a local project called The Big House, where household items, including clothing and baby items, can be accessed, and given to people in need. We submitted a referral on behalf of Rebecca and her son to help contribute in some way to the additional expense of running a house with a young baby, whilst benefits are being assessed.

Gordon had a brain injury after sustaining a stabbing to his head many years ago. Gordon had introduced himself for help with his PIP, a complaint against the NHS, and how they had handled dealing with someone with brain injury and inadequate housing. We visited Gordon and he asked us to enquire as to why his PIP is reviewed every three years as his condition will never change. We introduced Gordon to the Citizens Advice Bureau, and this was appropriately dealt with. Gordon also wanted us to help with a complaint against the NHS for what he felt was negligence and help with a request for a house move. Gordon explained he is happy with the flat, he enjoys the views but wanted a flat in a different area. Gordon had a lot of problems with the tenants in the block of flats and blocks next to him. On one occasion a couple of individuals came to his door, smashed the glass to gain entry and Gordon was assaulted which resulted in police presence. Gordon explained that all of this does not help with his recovery from drug misuse. We supported Gordon to attend the local housing office where his live housing application was updated, and he also completed a medical form. Gordon provided evidence of his brain injury, and the recent assault at his property. We met with Gordon again who explained that Fife council had been in touch and had offered him a flat in Rosyth, which was his desired area, Gordon is really looking forward to this and a fresh start. Gordon decided not to go ahead with the complaint against the NHS as he felt that he had a lot to deal with now regarding the house move. Gordon is aware that he can come back to us at any time in the future if he wants to take the complaint forward. He thanked Circles Advocacy for all our help.

**Carolann Haddow**  
**Service Manager**



## **Circles Advocacy – Inverclyde**

Circles Advocacy in Inverclyde delivers a free, independent service to individuals aged sixteen and over who reside within the boundaries of the four main towns of Greenock, Gourock, Port Glasgow and Kilmacolm, and to the outlying villages of Bridge of Weir, Inverkip, and Wemyss Bay: comprising a population of over 79,500 people. We deliver advocacy to the outlying communities by providing drop in hubs within ordinary resources, and we offer home visits to individuals who are unable to access our central office, which is situated in the heart of the community. The service is generic and promotes equal access opportunities for anyone who requires advocacy from time to time with their issues. We support people who are: Elderly, Carers, Homeless, Prisoners, detained under the mental health act and women in refuges. We also support people with Learning Disabilities, Learning Difficulties, Autism, Physical Disabilities, mental ill health, Acquired Brain Injury, Alcohol or Drug Dependency, Dementia and individuals with long term health issues and parental rights.



Advocates also support individuals who are subject to the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, The Adult Support & Protection (Scotland) Act 2007, and the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000.

We support people with their specific issues, providing information on the options available to assist them to make decisions. Our support can be short or long-term, depending on the individual's circumstances, and proceeds at a pace that they are comfortable with.

We work in partnership with many local organisations, since advocacy is important to ensure social inclusion, social justice, equality, and fairness. We are jointly funded through the Health and Social Care Partnership for the core service, and we receive additional funding from the Scottish Government to deliver the Self-directed Support Project.

## Highlights

During this year, we have delivered one to one advocacy to 606 individuals. Resolving 592 issues with a positive outcome for our advocacy partners. Supporting individuals to challenge tribunal decisions/carers allowance/universal credit backdated mandatory reconsideration, securing backdated benefit payouts in total of £48,601.00.

## Challenges

After coming through covid we found that many individuals had lost confidence in themselves and because of this they had been asking for advocacy support with issues beyond the remit of the service. These requests could become demanding, and it has been a challenge for the team, who always want to do the right thing. Also, because of other services having extremely long waiting lists and individuals not being prepared to wait, many became anxious and insistent that Circles Advocacy should respond immediately to issues that were relatively minor and yet added to the pressure.

We have moved forward in a very positive and confident way, ensuring our boundaries were upheld and our reasons clearly explained. The team worked to signpost and guide people to the appropriate specialised agencies, taking any necessary extra time to explain the reasons why we are not a one stop shop to replace agencies who are not operating at full capacity.



## Development



One area that required a different approach was ignited due to the number of new introductions we received regarding people who were detained under either the mental health care and treatment act or adults with incapacity act. We provided a weekly surgery within all the clinics, however, to accommodate the increase in admissions we changed our delivery approach from a weekly surgery with one advocate attending to two advocates doing alternative days. This has worked effectively, and we were able to meet individuals as soon as their detention began to explain their rights under the acts.

### **Differences Post Covid**

Many people have become more anxious in their demands for services, looking for instant outcomes to concerns. An example that we experienced was an instant increase with housing issues, people couped up at home, having trouble with neighbours or landlords, unhappy with their situations. Housing services were operating from home-based offices, not having face to face contact with people. We noted a significant rise with individuals wishing to raise complaints or apply for housing. We initially supported them to do this but were overloaded in our attempts to manage this effectively and welcomed services returning.

### **Partnerships**

We continually worked at building and maintaining our partnership developments, it enables easy access for individuals to be introduced to our service through these partnerships and this works both ways when signposting people. Over the year we have strengthened our partnership with our local housing associations due to the rise in need, and with our Legal Service Agencies who support individuals with housing complaints.

### **Stories of Change**

*Hope was an artist, however, beneath her artistic personality, she struggled with her own mental health challenges. She found herself at odds with an order under the Mental Health Care & Treatment (Scotland) Act. This order mandated a course of treatment that she felt was not aligned with her needs and preferences. It was a daunting prospect, and Hope felt desperate to find a way to express her wishes and stand up for her own mental well-being, this is when she decided to seek assistance from Circles Advocacy.*

*At her first meeting with an advocate, Hope hesitantly shared her concerns and fears about the treatment order. The advocate listened intently, her warm demeanour creating a safe space for Hope to open up. The advocate explained the legal process, ensuring that Hope understood her rights and the potential paths ahead.*



With the advocate's support Hope's story transformed into one of resilience and empowerment. They meticulously gathered information, expert opinions and testimonies from friends and family who understood her wishes. The advocate ensured that Hope's voice was heard and respected.

As the legal proceedings unfolded, Hope and her advocate faced challenges that tested their resolve. The mental health system, while well-intentioned, was complex and sometimes rigid. The advocate's determination was unshakable. She navigated the intricate legal landscape using her expertise to present a compelling case for Hope's right to choose her treatment plan.

Through their collective efforts, the day of the Tribunal arrived. Hope, supported by her advocate articulated her desires, fears, and hopes for her mental health journey. Hope's journey did not end with the hearing. Her aspirations were also for others, who faced similar challenges within the mental health system. Hope became an advocate herself, using her artistic talents to raise awareness about mental health rights and the importance of self-determination.

Hope's triumphant journey through advocacy under the Mental Health Care & Treatment (Scotland) Act became an inspiration. It was a reminder that even in the face of adversity, the collaboration between determination, compassion, and advocacy can make for positive change.

## **Jai**

Jai was referred to the service by his Mental Health Officer (MHO) who had earlier advised him that she was applying to vary his Compulsory Treatment Order (CTO). Jai was informed of Circles Advocacy by his MHO, and confirmed to her that he wanted advocacy support. Jai was involved with the service during an earlier admission to hospital when he was subject to measures under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. He had built up a trusting relationship with his previous advocate and requested the MHO to ask for that person by name. The MHO agreed to this and made the introduction to the service on Jai's behalf. Where possible, the service always attempts to meet the needs of individual requests of advocacy partners and Jai was appointed the advocate he requested.

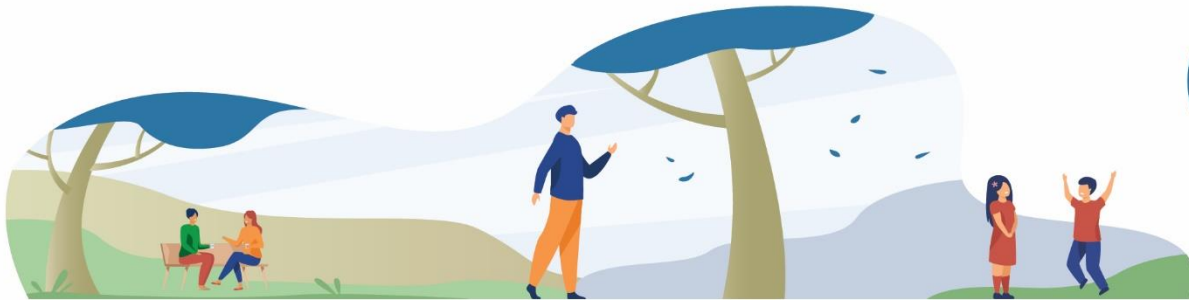
Jai had been residing at home for quite some time following a long admission to hospital. His mental health was well maintained by his medication, with which he agreed, and he also had a care plan that provided him two hours of daily support from the Richmond Fellowship. Jai was prescribed a medication that required close monitoring by regular blood tests. Routine tests of Jai's blood showed abnormal results. Unfortunately for Jai this meant the withdrawal of medication that had kept him well and was offered a normal way of life out of hospital and without repeat admissions.

Despite Jai's willingness to return to hospital, the multidisciplinary team decided an application to vary and extend CTO was necessary. Jai asked his advocate to contact the legal firm who had represented him previously. An appointment was made for his solicitor and his advocate to make a joint visit to Jai. At this meeting Jai, his advocate, and his solicitor discussed the circumstances which led up to his admission to hospital. It became evident that Jai had complied with all conditions within his order, and that it was unfortunate his medication had to be withdrawn due to side effects. The solicitor discussed independent medical evidence and suggested that this may support Jai's request to remain a voluntary patient on the ward whilst a review of medication was performed, and alternative treatments initiated. Jai thought that he should be able to remain on the ward voluntarily until his medication was changed and titrated to therapeutic levels. Jai would say that he has good insight into his illness, and he should be afforded the responsibility to take more control, instead of all decisions being taken by his clinical team.

The solicitor assisted Jai to arrange a meeting with the Responsible Medical Officer (RMO) and multidisciplinary team. In preparation for the meeting his advocate assisted Jai to put his views regarding his treatment in writing, in particular his desire to remain on the ward informally without the need for variation of his CTO. When the meeting took place Jai's treatment, medication, care plan and his legal status were discussed. Jai's RMO, MHO and multidisciplinary team took account of Jai's views and agreed that they were willing to allow Jai to remain in hospital as an informal patient. They would leave the CTO as it was without varying it to a hospital-based order.

**Moya Sweeney**

**Service Manager**



## Circles Advocacy – Self Directed Support Inverclyde

Self-directed Support (SDS) was introduced in Scotland on 1st April 2014 following the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013. Its introduction means that people receiving social care services in Scotland



have the right to choose, control, and have the flexibility to meet their personal outcomes, and Local Authorities are required to ensure clients are offered a range of options on how they receive their social care services and support. Circles Network SDS Project aims to raise awareness and understanding of SDS and

the process across Inverclyde amongst people accessing services, their families, and carers by sharing information, supporting them to put across their views, and by facilitating peer groups. This project works on a one-to-one basis with individuals to support them with the issues they come across in relation to their own Self-directed Support package. The aim is to encourage them to participate in managing their own care, and to provide group support through our SDS peer groups. These groups are led by individuals who have personal experience of Self-directed Support and are happy to share their journey with others, to help them think outside of the box and understand the processes more clearly. Our project is funded through the Scottish Government.

## **Highlights**

We successfully recruited two new members of staff who are now settled into their roles. We supported ninety-seven new introductions and supported forty-five individuals to gain a positive outcome.

## **Challenges**

One of the challenges was upholding no waiting list policy whilst struggling to recruit to a vacant post. We were able to overcome this by our volunteers dedicating more hours to the service. Our advocacy team were able to work with new introductions to ensure no individual had to wait for the service. Another challenge for our staff has been supporting individuals to recruit personal assistants. This had proved exceedingly difficult for individuals, and they came to us for support. We made posters for each individual and the details of the person they hoped to recruit. We advertised these on our shop front window and Facebook. We have been successful for two individuals who have now recruited four personal assistances.

## **Development**

We were able to develop our reach to engage with services and organisations. Our two new members of staff held community events across Inverclyde, as we had not been able to do this over the past few years. We developed a plan of action to enable us to reach and target as many organisations and individuals as possible. This has taken 6 months, and we feel the benefits already as more individual are accessing self-directed support.

## **Differences Post Covid**

Greater demand on services post covid with organisations haemorrhaged staff and were not able to quickly replace trained staff. In response to this families have now engaged more with SDS to request option one and employ personal assistants, as they themselves provided full support throughout covid.

## **Partnerships**

We have engaged more with HSCP lead in self-directed support. We have also attended HSCP events to strengthen partnership working. We are provided with funding to support individuals from the beginning to the end of their self-directed support journey. We have on many occasions tried to develop a pathway of induction by receiving new introductions from

HSCP. It is with this in mind that we have met up with the lead to discuss our pathway and develop a robust induction through this engagement. The impact would be a smooth transition with individuals being fully engaged and have time to understand and ask for support through each stage of the sds process.

## **Stories of Change**

### *Tiffany*

*Tiffany was introduced to our service by her GP. Tiffany had complex living requirements and was extremely unhappy with the care services that were being provided to her and Tiffany did not know what options were available to her.*

*Self-directed support (SDS) is an approach to social care that empowers individuals to have more control and choice over their care and support services. It is designed to enhance the person's independence, dignity, and quality of life. With SDS Tiffany can make decisions about her care and support. Instead of services imposed upon her, Tiffany can choose the type of support she would like, when she receives it, and who provides it.*



*This allows Tiffany to customize her care to meet her specific needs and preferences. With the support of her advocate, she was able to sit and design her own care plan that aligns with her own goals and aspirations. Tiffany can adapt her support plan as her needs change over time, which was not currently happening. Along with her advocate Tiffany received a personal budget from the local authority to fund her care. With SDS she decided*

*how her budget is used, whether it is for personal care, assistance at home and participating in the community. With her advocate sitting by her side Tiffany gained more control over her care and support and stated she was experiencing a higher quality of life as she could focus on the things that mattered most to her and she felt she was living a more fulfilled life because she now had her support in place.*

*Tiffinay was able to build relationships with her personal assistants and became fully involved, with advocacy, to advertise and recruit her support workers. Tiffany with the support of her advocate navigated the SDS process, and her advocate ensured that her rights and choices were respected, by individuals involved. Tiffany felt empowered and was able to shape her support and with advocacy support was able to obtain a better outcome.*

## Gilbert

Gilbert's mum introduced him to the project. Gilbert lives with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder. He has extremely limited verbal communication but can point to things he wants. His mother was looking for ways to engage Gilbert with the community, and the possibility of some daytime activities. She had heard of Self-directed Support (SDS), and she wanted to know more about SDS and whether Gilbert could benefit from a package of care that fits his needs.

Gilbert's advocate provided various information leaflets for his family to read over and arranged a follow up visit to meet with Gilbert the following week. During the first home visit his parents showed Gilbert a pictorial easy read guide explaining the role of an advocate. They also gave his advocate a detailed history of the reasons why Gilbert had disengaged with various services and providers who had supported him in the past.

Gilbert found the constant changing of staff by one provider challenging. On returning home from day centre care or being out in the community for a few hours he took his frustrations out on his parents. This went on for a lengthy period.

Gilbert no longer wished to go out or engage with his former support services, advocacy suggested looking at a different approach. SDS can fund the employment of a Personal Assistant (PA), and Gilbert's parents wanted to pursue this with his mother being the Personal Assistant. There must be special circumstances for a close relative to become a PA under SDS, and this was further complicated as Gilbert was under a Welfare & Financial Guardianship order under the Adults with Incapacity Act 2000, with his mother named on the application as a substitute. This would also prevent her from being her son's Personal Assistant.

Due to the complexity of having his mother removed from the Guardianship and the length of time the court process would take, Gilbert's parents decided on a different course of action. They submitted a request for Gilbert's brother's partner to become his PA, constituting a switch from Option 3 to Option 1 under the Self-Directed Support (Scotland) Act 2013.



Gilbert had an appointed Social Worker and a Community Mental Health Nurse who visited regularly, and who felt that Gilbert would benefit from this form of care. The family's request was being considered at the local authority's monthly Resource Allocation Group (RAG) meetings, but on each occasion further information was required to decide. Gilbert's parents were becoming



*increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress and some of the guidance from social workers.*

*The parents asked for support to submit a written complaint to the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) regarding the lack of support from Gilbert's appointed social worker, and the slow decision process to change the SDS options. Advocacy supported them to make the complaint, and to request the appointment of a new Social Worker, an updated care plan and an Option 1 agreement including 28 hours of support, which was what Gilbert had received from the previous provider. The HSCP accepted the complaint with the result that a new Social Worker was put in place, the care plan was brought up to date and the budget for a PA was agreed at 28 hours.*

*Gilbert's advocate also supported them to register with the Partners & Personalisation who assist with payroll, employer insurance etc. The final RAG meeting agreed to the approved budget for 28 hours of support and the switch from Option 3 to Option 1. As financial guardians Gilbert's parents would manage the weekly hours and the agreed care plan; Gilbert's brother's partner would become the Personal Assistant.*

*Following 12 months of persistence, with advocacy's support, the family thanked us for helping to ensure that Gilbert received his choice of care package.*

**Moya Sweeney**

**Service Manager**





## Circles Advocacy

### South Ayrshire

Circles Advocacy in South Ayrshire provide an advocacy service for individuals subject to the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, the Adult Support & Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 and the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000. We provide support at a range of formal and informal proceedings including Mental Health Tribunals, Care Programme



Approach meetings, Social Work engagements/reviews, Children's Hearings, Looked After Child meetings and DWP health assessments among many others.

We deliver 'issue based' one to one and collective advocacy and actively promote non-instructed advocacy, enabling us to support individuals who are not able to access our service independently.

We are also funded to provide advocacy for individuals with issues relating to alcohol and drug use.

We provide information to assist individuals in making informed decisions, supporting them to express their own needs and have as much control as possible over their own lives. We support people affected by mental health issues, learning disabilities, chronic illness, physical impairments, people living with alcohol and addiction, brain injuries, dementia, autistic spectrum disorders and adults at risk of harm.

Our service works in partnership with a range of stakeholders, and recognises that advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality and social justice.

## Highlights

In October 2022, we were approached by the Priory, one of the leading independent providers of mental healthcare and adult social care in the UK.

The Priory manage a 36-bed low secure hospital outside Ayr and a further two step-down facilities - one in Ayr and another in East Ayrshire, which have 8 and 12 beds respectively.

They approached us to ask if we would provide advocacy to the patients under their care, as they were aware of who we were and of the work that we do.

We are now providing advocacy for forensic patients in these three settings working with them on a wide variety of issues and have had positive feedback from patients who are beginning to see the benefits of receiving advocacy within the hospital.

We regularly attend around 8 local and national development groups to promote advocacy and recovery advocacy, and to be involved in the development of various local and national strategies in relation to recovery and mental health.

In addition, there are 23 local groups that we collaborate with on a regular basis in the form of forums or drop-ins. Some groups exist to develop the way that health and social care is delivered at a local level. We attend these groups to be the voice of the people we advocate for, to help them have a say on what issues they deal with day-to-day and how things can be changed to help make their lives better. Other groups include community groups for vulnerable people, who are experiencing homelessness, poor mental health, drug or alcohol misuse or who are living in poverty.

We were invited to join the South Ayrshire Community Justice Ayrshire (CJA) Partnership this year. It was created to promote equality and drive local community planning activity to improve outcomes for people wherever they are on the justice pathway. It also aims to improve outcomes for their families, victims, and the wider community. It works collaboratively across the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector and the Health & Social Care Partnership to identify gaps and deliver outcomes identified for people involved in the Criminal Justice system locally. It supports and develops, for example, a knowledge and skills framework around Trauma Informed Justice for working with victims and witnesses. Our involvement allows us to highlight and raise issues that are experienced by the people that we work with who may be victims, witnesses and those being accused as perpetrators.

## Challenges

In the early part of last year our lead recovery advocate left post to pursue another path which resulted in us having to go through the recruitment process to find another advocate. It was a challenging time, losing a remarkable and inspiring member of our team and we wanted to find a person who also had lived experience of being in recovery and who shared our values and was passionate and positive. We eventually found our new recovery advocate who has again, inspired and pushed us and our work onwards – supporting people in recovery to be heard and to challenge stigma and discrimination.

Another challenge has been in working with the local authority to support them in the creation of a local advocacy strategy. We have had a few meetings but unfortunately the creation has stalled several times. We continue to raise this as being an important matter in helping the wider community to know where they can turn, to ensure that their rights are being upheld and to clarify the importance of advocacy being more widely known amongst the public.

## Development

We are now working with people who are detained in hospital in a low secure forensic setting, both in a private hospital and in the community. This presents many challenges and opportunities to increase our knowledge in this area. We have been working and training on becoming more familiar with the various pieces of legislation that are used in this area so we can effectively support the people we work with. It can be a very complex and challenging setting to work in. We have worked with people in a forensic setting before but not to this extent.

Some people who we work with have been in hospital for many years and have been moved about a lot from hospital to hospital. Many patients do not feel that they have a voice or that what they have to say matters. We help them to raise concerns, to challenge the views that exist around who they are and what they have done and to ensure that their rights are upheld.



## Difference Post Pandemic

The main differences we have found post covid, is the increase in the complexity of the issues that people are now facing in the middle of a health and social care crisis.

With local health and social care partnerships finding themselves with vastly decreased budgets and instructions to make cost savings across all services, the fallout from this is being felt by local communities.

This is taking the form of support providers pulling out of contracts to provide home care or support work, social work departments only providing support to people in critical need and many other health care sectors struggling to meet the needs of the community.

The way that health and social care is provided has shifted in that many people are struggling to understand or experience.

We work with people whose ability to maintain their employment, receive benefits and to do simple things like afford food, childcare and help with their mental and physical health has been greatly affected by both covid and the subsequent cost of living crisis.

A lot of things like dealing with utility bills, banks and benefits is done online now and a lot of people we work with live chaotic lives caused by past and current trauma and do not feel able to manage matters which lead to further debt, trauma and physical, emotional and social isolation.

For many people that we work with, we are the only people that they have contact with to support them with their issues as other traditional services no longer provide support or practical assistance due to staffing issues or cuts to funding or the changes to criteria for receiving support.

As a result, we are seeing more people coming to us with multiple issues. Some come to us as they feel that no-one else can help as they have tried everywhere. Other people are introduced to us by other services and organisations who cannot, or are no longer able to, provide the support to the person that they once did.

We have had to adapt quickly to meet this level of need and become knowledgeable in relation to what people's rights are in this new age of uncertainty. We work and collaborate closely with other 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations and the Health & Social Care Partnership to highlight where things need to change, whilst also helping to change systems and structures to respond to local need.

## **Partnerships**

We have made connections with two new care homes in South Ayrshire and have attended residents' meetings to help raise any concerns that they have about the care home. We have had valuable feedback from residents and care home staff. We have supported people to have a stronger voice in what they want to see happening in the care home, for example, where people would like to go on trips, menu choices and activities. A lot of care

homes were quite isolated during and after Covid restrictions, some care homes are keen to assist residents to be more involved and to enjoy more fulfilling lives.

## **Stories**

*Little was known about Frank when he was introduced to Circles Advocacy. He had been found on the street by a member of the public, unable to communicate and with no form of identification. Hospital staff suspected that he had suffered a stroke at home, become disorientated and then was found in the street.*

*Frank was admitted to hospital and placed on a short-term detention under the Mental Health Act. His Mental Health Officer contacted us towards the end of this period to advise that an application was being made for a CTO. During our initial visit, we used various strategies to communicate with Frank however due to aphasia he could not communicate his thoughts or understand what we were saying. We suggested that a referral be made to the speech and language department for an assessment. A curator ad litem was appointed for his Tribunal. We continued to visit Frank to explain the process and to keep him informed of the decisions being made.*

*Speech and Language practitioners began to work with Frank within the hospital and we worked in conjunction with them. Over time, his written communication improved significantly as well as his cognition. An Adults with Incapacity meeting was arranged to discuss the requirement for Guardianship. We continued to visit Frank to gain his views on Guardianship & his future residency. As before, we tried various methods of communication to establish what worked best for him. At this stage, it was apparent that Frank was able to read and understand written communication. This enabled us to write questions and he was able to point to the answer of his choice. We successfully established his views on Guardianship, what area he wished to live and what level of support he felt he required.*

*We attended his AWI meeting to support him to share these views with his wider team. The legal representative from the council spoke about how valuable our input was, given that Frank did not have any known relatives or friends to advocate on his behalf. The decision was made to progress with Guardianship to support a move to 24hour care, Frank agreed with this. With his consent, we also provided a personal statement of his views to the court.*

*At time of closure, Frank remained in hospital awaiting a court date for the Guardianship hearing. For many, 'getting better' is about returning to the way they were before their stroke. Whilst we are sure this would have been Frank's ideal outcome; we are also aware that he felt empowered in his recovery journey through his ability to communicate in alternative forms. Spending time with Frank, exploring alternative means of communication and ensuring he had access to the appropriate therapies*

allowed him to have a say about decisions made about his life & helped him to understand his options and rights.

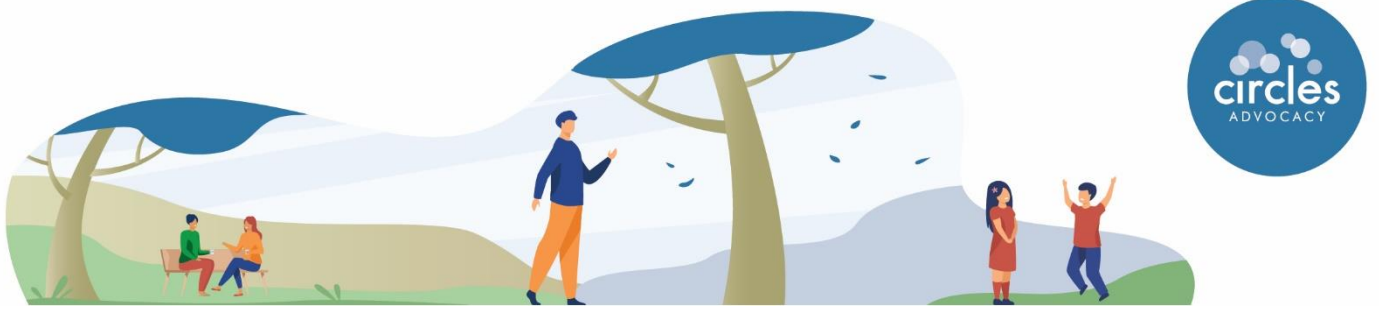
James approached us looking for some help to contact his housing association. He was extremely upset and worried about a letter he had received saying that they were going to force access to his home to conduct gas/boiler inspection of his property. The letter had been causing him a lot of distress. He said that he had been receiving letters for about a year, but he had been ignoring them. James said that he was embarrassed about the untidiness of his flat. He told us that he experienced poor mental health and found dealing with the housing association incredibly challenging. He mentioned that he had tried to phone them a few times but could not navigate the automated response and options system that they operated on their phone line. James did not have access to the internet in his home either so could not go online to speak to them.

With James present, we contacted his housing association and explained his situation and the difficulties that he was experiencing. We supported him to arrange for a suitable appointment for them to come and inspect his boiler. The housing association were sympathetic and understanding of his situation and they provided James with reassurance. His housing association were not aware of James' difficulties in communicating with them and he now has a direct line to his housing officer should he require anything in the future. This means he will have direct communication with a person and will not need to go through the automated answer and option system.

James is now more confident and able to talk to his landlord and they are aware of the difficulties he was having. James said that he didn't know what he would have done if we hadn't spoken to them and sorted it out. He iterated that he feels more comfortable talking to his housing officer about what help he needs in his flat. They intend to access some support for him.

**David Eaglesham**

**Service Manager**



## **Circles Advocacy - Recovery Advocacy**

### **South Ayrshire**

To provide an Independent Rights Based Advocacy Service to individuals and their families residing in South Ayrshire who have been affected by problematic alcohol and drug use. It is expected that this service will operate in collaboration with the existing Advocacy provision in South Ayrshire and will help to ensure that South Ayrshire Alcohol Drug Partnership (ADP) meet their statutory obligations to provide Advocacy to people who have been affected by problematic alcohol and drug use.

#### **Highlights**

In 2022-2023, we have experienced a 31% increase in introductions for people with substance use and/or alcohol dependence who are seeking advocacy support compared to 2021-2022. This is due to consistent and intensive efforts on behalf of our recovery advocate and the wider team to promote this aspect of our work.



In 2022-2023, 53% of recovery introductions were for new people accessing



advocacy who had not used it before. The majority of whom were self-introductions and not from other organisations or traditional services. Most people we advocated for with were not working with other organisations and did not have any other support in their life, either from family or friends, or other organisations.

Essentially people

who were extremely vulnerable and isolated, and people with whom other services were finding it difficult to work with, engage with, or who the people themselves did not trust.

We were supporting adults who live with substance and/or alcohol use to attend child protection meetings and Children's Hearings, providing advocacy for people where no such other service exists in South Ayrshire. We have received extremely positive feedback from parents, other 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations, the local Health & Social Care Partnership and members of the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration for the work we do in this area.

Our recovery advocate arranged for various recovery groups including ROADS (Recovery Out of Alcohol and Drugs Support), Harbour Ayr and River Garden and invited them along to our team meetings. They have also attended networking meetings with Ayrshire Council on Alcohol and Harbour Ayr. They have also attended drop-ins at Harbour Ayr, the LADDER (Live A Different Day Embracing Recovery) group, the PING (Peer Involvement Network Group), HAPI Women's Recovery group, the We Are With You family group and Ayrshire Council on Alcohol. Also, the Wallacetown community drop-in sessions and Care and Share.

The recovery advocate also attended the Overdose Awareness Day Flower Walk event in Ayr and the Paisley Recovery Walk in 2022.

We were approached by the South Ayrshire Justice Service team to ask if we could present a talk on advocacy and recovery advocacy to a group of social workers who were undergoing training in criminal justice social work. We explained what advocacy is and about the work that we do in South Ayrshire in relation to people who are involved in the criminal justice system.

Feedback was incredibly positive from both attendees and organisers.

At times, our effectiveness with supporting people to resolve their issues was linked to the limitations that exist in the wider community, such as the availability of supports, criteria for accessing other services and other wider issues. Individuals who seek our support with housing issues, for example, if they are looking for support to move tenancy from an unsuitable area to a better one, or being able to live somewhere other than in the area that is being offered by the local authority - this is an area where the resolutions are very difficult to find for people. The only thing we could offer in these situations was listen to people and help them to have a stronger voice.

Some advocacy partners became frustrated when the resolution, or progress of their issues were not dealt with quickly. Sometimes advocates waited at length for replies to questions or decisions from other services to enable issues to progress or change.

Several services, especially in health and social care, were short staffed, underfunded and extremely busy. As a result, it was taking longer to get answers or progress concerns. Due to limited or reduced resources, sometimes individuals' issues were not resolved or were taking longer to resolve.

We found that people just wanted to be heard and taken seriously. People expressed that they felt relieved that something good had happened in their life by simply speaking to us. This may not sound like much but for some people it offered a lifeline whilst they waited.

## **Challenges**

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## **Development**

We are in discussion with the local Drug & Alcohol Partnership to link in with them to increase the provision of advocacy to more rural areas of South Ayrshire. We have secured a place on a converted ambulance, which they have purchased, that will be travelling about around the more rural areas of South Ayrshire. This will offer opportunities to connect with other local organisations and we will have contact with more people to raise awareness of our work.

## **Difference Post Covid**

We have known many people in recovery, or beginning their recovery journey, who were finding it difficult to access suitable and safe accommodation. Some people being released from prison with the hope of beginning their recovery journey, found themselves with little or no support, and having to be housed in temporary accommodation within the community that they previously lived in. They were being housed next to drug dealers and old associates that they want to get away from. They were finding their recovery journey halted before it had begun. People told us that they could not access support packages due to not meeting the high criteria set by the local authority. Third Sector organisations can be relied on by the local authority to pick up the work, but they are limited to what they can do due to budget constraints.

As a result, people found it hard to move on and progress in their lives. On top of this, some Third Sector organisations found themselves unable to continue during and after Covid, which resulted in less organisations being on hand to help.

There is now some new hope for people who experience substance use and poor mental health however, with the introduction of the MAT (Medication Assisted Treatment) Standards for Scotland. This will allow people more choice, support and access to treatment for their substance use, such as having the right to access treatment or support on the day that they ask for it, or that their treatment is not conditional on them being abstinent from substances. The Standards recognise that people who use substances need to be treated with dignity and respect and that people should receive trauma informed care.

## Partnerships

We attend various third sector and partnership forums, which allows us to collaborate closely with other 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations and the Health & Social Care Partnership to highlight where things need to change. Circles Advocacy become part of that process and support people, and we are helping to change systems and structures to suit the needs of people in the community. We have attended various learning and development events over the last year to push forward and highlight issues of importance to the people we work with.

## Stories of Change

*Jim initially contacted Circles Advocacy for support to attend a Looked After Child (LAC) meeting. He had been attending Children's Hearings with his solicitor but did not have anyone to support him at the LAC meetings. He found the Hearings extremely difficult to attend but he felt better knowing his solicitor would attend these with him. He had not attended many LAC meetings however, as he was very much on his own at these. He said that he wasn't being listened to or taken seriously and that he was constantly being judged for his past substance use. He felt that all efforts that he had made to address his substance use were being ignored. He was overwhelmed at having to attend meetings comprising 15 or more people, all of whom were focusing on the mistakes he had made.*

*Jim also stated that no-one was helping him to read through paperwork in relation to the LAC meetings. He was receiving 50- or 60-page reports through the post and was not getting help to discuss or read them prior to meetings. He was finding it increasingly difficult to be involved and was worried about his mental health and his recovery due to the stress.*

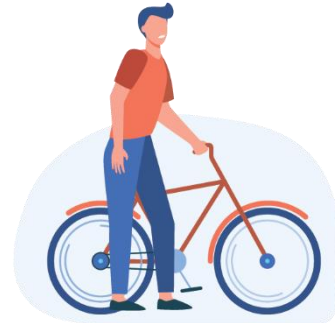
*Jim also stated that he had other issues in his life that needed to be dealt with, but he did not know where to start. Jim was worried about other family members, he also had debt issues and smaller worries that he knew would grow if not addressed. We supported Jim to read through the paperwork and ask about any issues or questions that he had. We helped prepare for and attend LAC meetings, liaised with children and family social workers and the children's reporter and attended appointments with him at his solicitors. We contacted other local organisations, that he was not aware of, to support him with some other issues.*

*As a result of explaining the paperwork to him, he felt that he had more of an understanding about what was happening at the LAC meetings and hearings and in turn, what his rights were.*

*He felt that he was being listened to more at meetings and appointments. Through talking to him and breaking down his concerns, he developed a*

clearer view about what he needed to do to self-advocate, which in turn supported his recovery journey.

John was introduced to us by a mental health liaison nurse at the local college. John was 17 and experienced poor mental health, used substances and had a history of past trauma. He was struggling with his studies and had been threatened with removal from the college due to fighting and abusive behaviour towards staff and students. He had a difficult relationship with his family and was essentially homeless as he was spending his nights staying at various friends' houses. He was a vulnerable young man, in danger of being



exploited. When we met and spoke with John, he said that he was always being blamed for trouble and never got any praise for doing anything good. He admitted that he did cause trouble, but he felt that he was afforded no respect from anyone and that he was being treated like a child at home and at college.

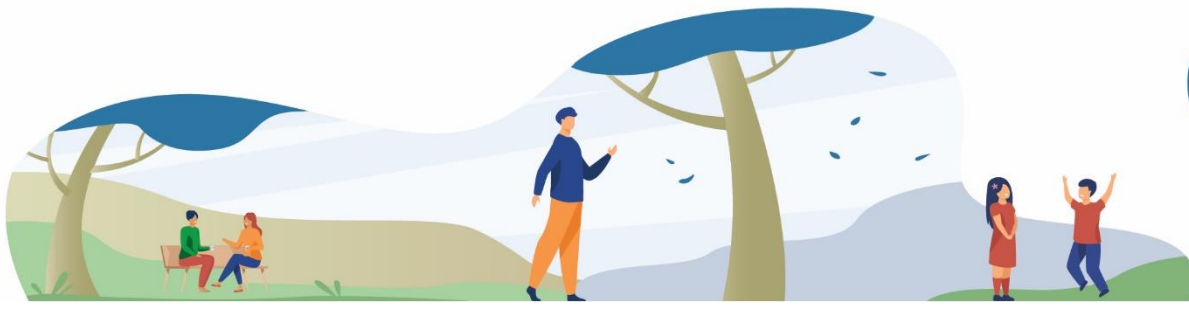
We supported John to attend appointments with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health team, and with meetings regarding his housing situation, we liaised with the local housing team, support workers, the college, social workers, the Department of Work & Pensions, his GP and then attended Team Around The Young Person meetings, to help him share his views and feelings about his situation.

As a result of our support, John was able to communicate his feelings and his dreams. He wanted to stay in college, get a job, find somewhere to stay and not be defined by his behaviour.

John said that, without our help, he would have struggled to share what he felt and wanted and would not have attended any appointments. He has now remained in college with more support, is more confident and increasingly able to cope. He has begun attending appointments and meetings on his own.

**David Eaglesham**

**Service Manager**



## Circles Advocacy

### Moray

Circles Advocacy in Moray, provides independent, professional, issue-based advocacy to adults living throughout Moray. Our key focus is on supporting people with issues relating to health and social care, and we have an extended role for those people who have, or have had, drug and alcohol related issues which have resulted in barriers to them receiving the support they need to begin or continue their recovery journey.

Priority is given to those who have been detained under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) Act, adult support and protection and adults with incapacity issues. Our main aim is to support peoples' views to be heard, provide information to enable people to make informed choices, and ensure their rights are upheld.



### Highlights

Resumption of the drop-in at the mental health inpatient ward – Over this year we have seen an increase in the number of people accessing the drop-in, having been directed to us by ward staff or other patients, ensuring people are aware of their rights and have support to have their views heard.

Adult Support and Protection (ASP) – Through joint work with the Health and Social Care Partnership, we have experienced an increase in the number of people supported by Circles Advocacy when going through the ASP process; an increase of 375% since 2019.

Social Work Students – The team were fortunate enough to have two Social Work students placed with us this year; both of whom proved to be excellent team members, bringing positive energy and new knowledge to the team.

## **Challenges**

Lack of Support in the community – The pressure on all community and hospital services has resulted in assessed support not being available for our advocacy partners. We have provided ongoing, additional advocacy support to ensure their views were being heard and their needs appropriately prioritised.

NHS delays in processing complaints and information requests e.g. an apology was received from the NHS feedback team 10 months after a complaint had been made, as they were still waiting for content from their own information governance team. As with all situations like this, we continued to request updates, and escalate concerns where appropriate.

## **Development**

Collective Advocacy – we began to provide collective advocacy within supported accommodation settings. The first situation we responded to was successful in bringing tenants together who had raised numerous complaints about the management of the housing complex. Rather than support people individually with their complaints, we took a collective approach, looking at their shared issues and how they wished to address them.

## **Differences Post Covid**

The main difference post covid has been the increased complexity of issues faced by people we have supported, combined with the lack of statutory service resources to meet assessed needs. Statutory services were still dealing with only substantial and critical work, so almost no preventative work was being undertaken. Combined with the withdrawal of domestic support over the last few years, this has resulted in us seeing more and more people living in a state of squalor and poor mental wellbeing.

## **Partnerships**

Adult Support and Protection (ASP) – Regular meetings with the ASP lead and advanced practitioner have led to improvement in services and support for people going through the ASP process. This included increasing their ability to attend case conferences and the provision of more understandable easy read paperwork.



## Stories of Change

Emma was placed in a residential home for respite following a period of ill health. At the time she was assessed as lacking capacity, and a guardianship was being progressed. She was introduced to Circles Advocacy via her Mental Health Officer, who had asked for her capacity to be re-assessed, as she believed this had improved.

An advocate supported Emma to express her wish to return home. Options were explored with Emma, including the risks that might be associated with her returning home without care. Her advocate also suggested choices that might be considered, to reduce perceived risks prior to her returning home. For example, Emma could be supported on a shopping trip to see if she could manage, as the fear that she may not be able to do so was one of the risks identified. This was put in place by a social worker, and it was found that she was more able than had been perceived.

Emma's capacity was re-assessed, and it was confirmed that she did have capacity to make decisions about her future care. Emma decided to return home without care and was glad to be reunited with her beloved pets.

Simon has Down's Syndrome and having lived at home with his parents until his late thirties, had moved into his own accommodation, with support. When his parents died, Simon's brother moved into the family home and asked Simon to move in with him. This seemed a positive step as Simon and his brother had always got on well. An advocate was asked to discuss this option with Simon in order that he was not influenced by his relationship with his brother. With the use of Talking Mats, Simon was able to say that he was happy living where he was and did not wish to move back to the family home. This wish was upheld.

*Written by the mother of an advocacy partner*

Anyone needing advocacy has a story. Ours involved the typical gaps in care mixed with toxic dysfunctional abuse of power. Circles Advocacy became involved during lockdown. After six years of headbanging, advocacy gave us air to breathe:

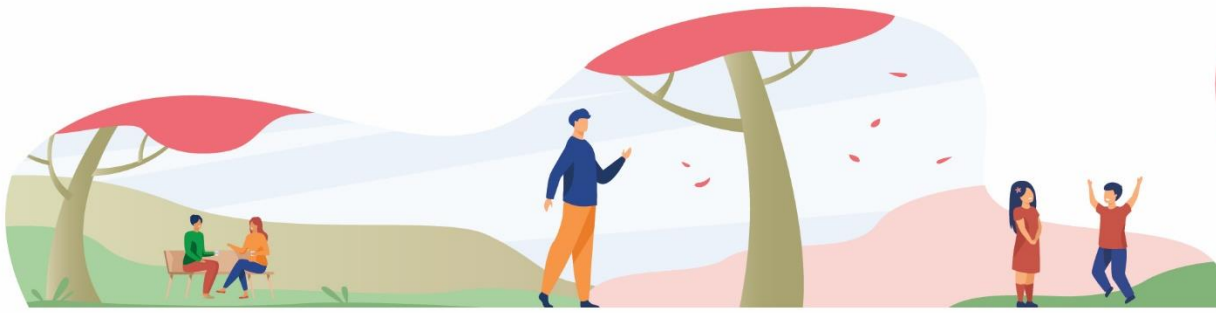
- By openness and flexibility to our trauma driven wariness. Circles Network identified a key person who could cope with the complexity of our situation, providing professionalism with genuine caring. My daughter's voice was central, she hadn't felt that since paediatrics.
- The readiness of the advocate to support my daughter by visiting the hospital when we were not allowed access was wonderful. This was key to my daughter's safety. Multiple visits that were crucial, including availability at short notice when A&E were involved. The

stability helped my daughter to cope with diagnosis etc especially when she was isolated for five weeks as an in-patient.

- Because our situation was complicated there were speed bumps that were confusing. The advocate was proactive in resolving glitches. This allowed genuine service providers to focus on my daughter, so they were not misled by distortions. This has had far reaching effects.
- My daughter's GP and new teams have the utmost respect for the advocate.
- Our medical PTSD meant that we were terrified of taking initiatives. The advocate was always respectful of my daughter's wishes but was a voice of sanity when fear was our greatest driving force. It took patience.
- It is difficult to capture three years of unflinching support by the advocate. Tenacious, kind, accepting of everyone's humanity but committed to achieving what served my lass in a system where our requests seemed impossible. My daughter would be dead if it wasn't for the advocate. There were occasions when fatality was a genuine risk.
- Even with medical interventions that now serve my daughter's care, the amount of time and energy spent by the advocate in the past year alone has involved a major commitment, chasing up vital medications etc.
- Based on the six years previous, around the time the advocate became involved, a logical option for my daughter and I was a suicide pact. I had worked in psychiatry, so I was amazed at how this became a quiet logic. Service providers who had listened to the difficulties were overwhelmed when faced with the truth of the toxic behaviours by their colleagues. (a mild example is how the ombudsman upheld a complaint against her Neurologist for ignoring the GP's letters for seventeen months). We were drowning. The advocate was our lifeline and so much more. We will be forever grateful to her.
- The NHS cannot afford to provide some services, the advocate is a vital lynch pin in ensuring those who desperately need help get it. Thank you.

**Anne Pendery**

**Service Manager**



## Circles Academy

### Midlands

Circles Academy is a new and revolutionary approach to education, offering comprehensive and person-centred learning. Situated amidst several acres in Rugby, Circles Network's hub provides an idyllic setting conducive to absorbing knowledge and stimulating growth. The sprawling landscape is thoughtfully divided into functional spaces, including indoor wooden cabins that overlook fields and ponies, a mature orchard for creative endeavours like den building and campfires, a tennis court offering both recreation and release, and a tranquil garden for rejuvenating breaks. The presence of free-roaming ponies and a warm and friendly team ensures that every individual, without exception, feels welcomed and embraced.

In essence, Circles Network stands as a beacon of inclusion and transformation, championing a philosophy of change that embraces diversity, fosters learning, and nurtures an inclusive society.



Through our innovative courses, inspiring narratives, and commitment to positive change, we continue to pave the way toward a future marked by understanding, respect, and equal opportunity.

### Highlights

### 1. Launch of the HAF Programme and Commitment to Inclusivity:

A standout achievement of the previous financial year was the successful introduction of the HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) programme. This initiative not only established a commendable reputation for our organisation but also underscored our unwavering commitment to inclusivity. We made a concerted effort to cater to both disabled children and those with family concerns regarding low income, ensuring that all young individuals had equal access to our services.

### 2. Forging Valuable Partnerships:

During the year, we placed significant emphasis on building partnerships with local schools and organisations. This endeavour bore fruit as we established meaningful connections with various local educational institutions, including Rugby Free Secondary School, Harris School, and others. These partnerships not only expanded our network but also enriched the educational experiences we could offer to our students, fostering a collaborative and supportive educational community.

### 3. Addressing Underfilled Places and Expanding Engagement:

Another notable highlight was our proactive approach to addressing underfilled places. We worked diligently to engage more schools and establish links with various local educational institutions. This outreach effort helped us fill those vacant spots and contributed to our mission of providing quality education and support to a broader audience. This expansion reflects our dedication to making a positive impact on the lives of more children and young people in our communities.

## **Challenges**

Recruitment and staff retention posed significant challenges for us, leading to the departure of some team members and the subsequent need for fresh recruits. In response, we sought to address these challenges by appointing new members to our management team. These individuals not only possess the expertise to expand our curriculum but also share a deep commitment to our person-centred values and bring a well-rounded skill set to the table.

The aftermath of the pandemic has ushered in a transformed society, where access to mainstream education has become a formidable hurdle for many children and young people. Despite these evolving circumstances, we remain steadfast in our commitment to serving the most vulnerable individuals. Our dedication to providing essential services and support continues to be a cornerstone of our mission.

As we navigate these changes, our focus remains on adaptability and ensuring that our team embodies the values and skills necessary to thrive in this shifting landscape. We are determined to meet the evolving needs within our local counties, steadfast in our belief that every child and young person deserves access to high quality education and support, regardless of the challenges presented by the post-pandemic world.

## **Development**

In January 2023, an exciting opportunity emerged for us to launch a fresh project under the banner of the "Urban Academy." We were presented with the opportunity to acquire installations for a hair and beauty salon, igniting our enthusiasm to embark on a new journey to expand the offerings of the Academy.

With this venture, we envision the "Urban Academy" becoming a hub of creativity and skill development in the realm of hair and beauty. We have eagerly embraced the challenge of planning and implementing this expansion, aiming to provide a diverse array of educational and vocational opportunities for students who are aged 13 and above.

Our commitment to this project extends beyond its physical aspects. We see it as an embodiment of our dedication to adapt and evolve, ensuring that the Academy remains responsive to the evolving needs and aspirations of local people. As we set out on this new journey, we look forward to creating a dynamic space that fosters learning, growth, and a sense of empowerment and fulfilment.

## **Differences Post Covid**

In our post-COVID society, we have noticed a rising number of children and young people who struggle to access mainstream education or become school refusers. This has underscored the need for alternative provisions to address the noticeable increase in challenging behaviour within schools.

Acknowledging this shift, we have proactively initiated new projects to support our communities. These projects are crafted to cater to the diverse educational requirements of individuals who encounter difficulties thriving in traditional educational settings. We're committed to creating inclusive, nurturing environments that foster academic, social, and emotional growth.

Our dedication extends beyond academic goals; we aim to cultivate resilience and a sense of belonging among our young learners. By addressing the underlying causes of challenging behaviour and providing effective

alternatives, we are working towards a more harmonious and inclusive educational landscape. Next steps are to purchase a small campervan which can be driven to different schools, providing seating and a safe space for young people to receive coaching and mentoring from our trained facilitators. which Our goal is to ensure that no child is left behind as we navigate the evolving post-COVID world.

## **Partnerships**

- Newly formed local partnerships have been formed from our Rugby base
- Connections with more schools from the local area, both primary and secondary
- Networking with different local organisations (Co-op, Mc Donald's, Pets at Home and other businesses)
- Deepening our relationships with Cummins and with The World of Cars, both of whom support our work and endorse our reputation

## **Stories of Change**

*Ariel*

*Ariel, who joined our academy in November 2022, brought with her a unique set of challenges that called for a tailored educational approach. The school had heard about our provision and recognised that our nurturing curriculum was the right fit for her.*

*Ariel's initial days at the academy were characterised by her reluctance to follow instructions from adults, stemming from a difficult past. She had a tendency to place herself in potentially perilous situations to attain her desires. Addressing her complex situation demanded not only patience but also a deep understanding of her individual needs.*

*Our dedicated facilitators embarked on an intensive journey to support Ariel. It required time, effort, and unwavering commitment to earn her trust. As trust began to build, Ariel started to open up, marking the first steps towards her personal growth.*

*Ariel's person-centred plan became a pivotal element in her progress. This plan centred around her interests, desires, and the support she required to thrive. Through this collaborative approach, Ariel began to actively engage in activities that initially held little appeal to her. Most notably, her involvement with the horses, which had been met with indifference in the beginning, blossomed into a genuine interest and connection.*

*Over time, Ariel's contributions to our academy became increasingly evident. She took the initiative to create a charming little shop and enthusiastically participated in various aspects of our community, including cooking, gardening, and tending to the horses. These activities not only enriched her experience but also enabled her to develop essential life skills and build meaningful relationships with her peers.*

*Ariel's journey helped transform her ability to engage with other students and to plan and execute projects that involved junk modelling, environmental improvements, animal welfare and others, it underscored the significance of a person-centred approach, where individual needs, interests, and aspirations steer the path to growth and success. As Ariel continues to flourish and evolve within our academy, we eagerly anticipate her ongoing progress and accomplishments.*

*Nate*

*Nate, a young pupil who enrolled in our Alternative Provision at Circles Academy, initially joined our programme with a reserved disposition. He appeared reluctant to engage in conversations with team members and showed hesitancy towards participating in any of the activities on offer, particularly those involving our equine partners. His interactions with fellow students were limited, and it was evident that Nate required a tailored approach to unlock his potential.*

*Recognising Nate's distinct needs, our facilitators embarked on a patient and personalised journey to provide him with the support he required. Through consistent and compassionate efforts, they worked to build trust and establish a safe and nurturing environment for Nate. Gradually, the barriers around him began to crumble, revealing a young spirit eager to find his place to belong.*

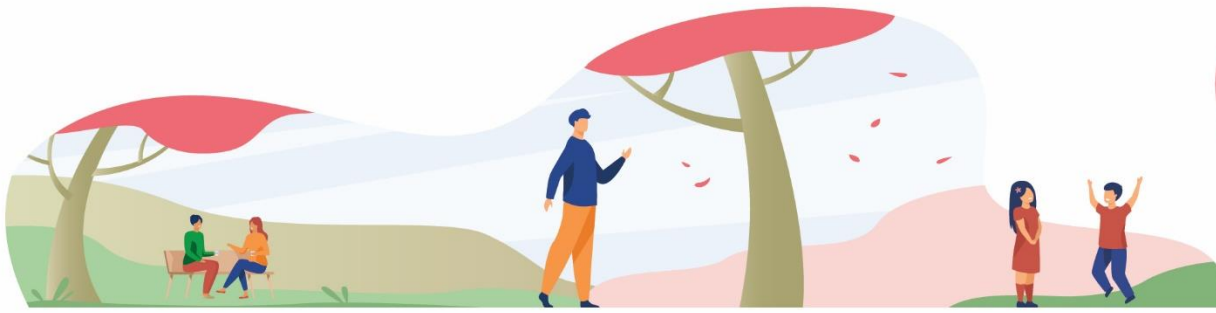
*As his person-centred plan took shape, it was heartening to witness Nate's growing interest in the horses. What had initially been a source of apprehension soon transformed into a fascination and, ultimately, a newfound passion. With the guidance of our experienced team, Nate began to form meaningful connections with our equine companions, forging bonds that transcended words.*

*With each passing day, Nate's presence at the Academy became more consistent. He not only attended regularly but also actively sought out opportunities to engage with both the activities and his peers. It was heartwarming to observe him gradually step out of his comfort zone, discovering the joys of shared experiences and learning through interaction.*



*Through each term, we watched as Nate blossomed within the Academy and within himself. His confidence grew, and his self-expression flourished. The once-quiet boy had found his voice, and it resonated with newfound enthusiasm and curiosity.*

**Mandy Neville**  
**CEO**



## Circles Academy - Ready, Steady, Go

### Midlands

Ready Steady Go is a project funded through BBC Children in Need. The aim is to provide support for disabled or disadvantaged 0 – 5-year-olds, through sessions which link with the early years' foundation stage. Parents and carers are in attendance and get the opportunity to socialise and make new friends during the six-week programme. Children learn, alongside ponies and each other; development skills in relationship building, language and communication, early maths, and literacy, play and relaxation. We have promoted the programme widely to include children in this age group who have been adversely affected by the pandemic, knowing that the last two years have prevented most little ones from socialising with anyone outside of their closest family members.

### Highlights

**Sensory Engagement and Emotional Regulation:** One of the notable highlights was observing significant improvements in sensory engagement and emotional regulation among participating children. Through interactive activities with horses, such as brushing, feeding, and leading, children learned to interpret non-verbal cues and develop emotional awareness. The programme witnessed instances where children displayed better self-regulation, improved attention spans, and enhanced emotional understanding, laying a foundation for better social skills.



**Enhanced Communication Skills:** Another highlight was the noticeable improvement in communication skills among the children. Engaging with horses can often stimulate verbal and non-verbal communication. Children learnt to communicate their needs effectively, both to the animals and to the facilitators. This improvement in communication skills manifested in clearer speech, better vocabulary, enhanced social interaction, and increased confidence in expressing themselves.

**Development of Empathy and Compassion:** Equine interactions often foster empathy and compassion in young children. Through understanding and caring for the horses, children learned about empathy, responsibility, and kindness. Notably, this past year brought about instances where children exhibited increased empathy towards animals and peers, demonstrating a deeper understanding of others' emotions and needs.

## **Challenges**

**Programme Adaptability and Individual Needs:** Tailoring activities to suit the individual needs and abilities of each child can be challenging in a group setting. Children come with varying developmental stages, personalities, and comfort levels around animals. Adapting the programme to accommodate these differences whilst ensuring equitable participation and meaningful engagement for all participants was at times demanding. Flexibility in programme design and facilitation was essential to address the diverse needs of the children effectively.

**Seasonal Limitations and Weather Conditions:** Weather-dependent activities with animals brings challenges due to seasonal variations or adverse weather conditions. Low temperatures, heavy rains and other weather-related constraints sometimes impacted us as we used the cabin or the stables to ensure we could keep children sheltered.

## **Development**

Expanding the programme by adding an extra course each week reflects a commitment to accommodating the needs of the participants and their families.

By offering an additional set of sessions, the programme became more accessible to families with varying schedules. This flexibility allowed more children to participate, accommodating those who couldn't attend the previous schedule due to conflicts or logistical reasons. This also enabled us to increase the numbers of children supported.

## Differences Post Covid

Post-COVID-19, the Ready Steady Go programme, like many other educational initiatives, experienced significant changes and trends. Here are some notable shifts and trends that emerged:

**Increased Demand for Outdoor Activities:** With restrictions and lockdowns in place during the pandemic, there was a heightened appreciation for outdoor activities that offered safe and socially distanced learning environments. Ready Steady Go being primarily outdoors and conducive to social distancing, saw increased interest and demand.

Parents sought such programmes that provided experiential learning opportunities while ensuring safety amid the pandemic.

**Emphasis on Mental Health and Well-being:** The pandemic heightened awareness about mental health concerns, especially for young children who experienced disruptions in their routine and limited social interactions. Ready Steady Go, known for its therapeutic benefits, witnessed a surge in interest due to its ability to promote emotional regulation, reduce stress, and support mental well-being.

## Partnerships

**Increased Credibility and Visibility:** Collaborating with a well-respected organisation like BBC Children in Need enhanced the programme's credibility and visibility. Being associated with such a reputable partner has elevated the programme's profile, attracted more participants, and strengthened relationships with other stakeholders, such as local authorities, nurseries and potential donors. This heightened visibility might have also encouraged more families to enrol their children in the programme, recognising it as a trusted and worthwhile initiative.

## Stories of Change

**Lewis** Lewis is a 4-year-old boy, he loves exploring and had so much energy that sometimes it was hard for him to stay calm at home. His parents heard



about our programme called Ready Steady Go, where children like Lewis could spend time with horses, learn new things and make friends.

When Lewis joined Ready Steady Go, he met a friendly horse named Peiskeo. Peiskeo had a calm and soothing presence that helped Lewis feel relaxed. As they spent time together, something magical started to happen.

Lewis learned that being around Peiskeo made him feel calm and focused. The horses taught him how to take deep breaths and use his energy in positive ways. He discovered that by petting Peiskeo's soft coat and talking to him gently, his energy level started to balance out.

During the programme, Lewis learned about patience and self-control. He discovered that when he listened to the Facilitators and followed their guidance, he and Peiskeo could do amazing things together. They would walk and trot together, following simple instructions and practicing their teamwork.

With each passing day, Lewis noticed a change in himself. He became better at listening and following directions, not just with Peiskeo, but also at home. He learned that taking a deep breath when he felt excited or frustrated helped him make better choices.

Lewis's parents noticed the positive changes in him too. They saw how he was becoming more patient and using his energy in constructive ways. They were proud of their little boy for trying so hard and making such great improvements.

By the end of the Ready Steady Go programme, Lewis had become a more focused, patient, and kind-hearted boy. He had learned valuable lessons from Peiskeo and the other horses about managing his energy and behaving in a positive manner.

## **Cain**

Cain, a bright and curious 3-year-old, embarked on a remarkable journey of growth and development through the Ready Steady Go programme. This Equine Facilitated Learning initiative, complemented by various engaging activities, provided Cain with a nurturing environment to overcome his initial challenges and foster positive change.

Cain entered the Ready Steady Go programme with unique challenges stemming from issues within his family home. These challenges had affected his emotional well-being, communication skills, and social interactions. The programme was seen as a beacon of hope to provide the necessary support and a safe space for Cain's development.

During his initial weeks in the programme, Cain exhibited difficulties in expressing himself and connecting with peers. He struggled with sharing and cooperation, a common challenge at his age, amplified by the issues he faced at home.

Over the course of six weeks, attending the Ready Steady Go programme for two hours each week, Cain began to blossom. The nurturing atmosphere, coupled with the diverse activities, allowed him to make significant strides in various areas. Cain's interactions with the gentle equine companions provided him with a unique platform to develop empathy, emotional awareness, and patience. His connection with the horses became a metaphorical mirror, reflecting the need for understanding and calmness, both for himself and his peers.



In addition to equine experiences, the programme integrated singing, playing, and story time, which encouraged Cain to express himself in creative ways. These activities allowed him to explore his emotions and imagination, ultimately enhancing his communication and social skills.

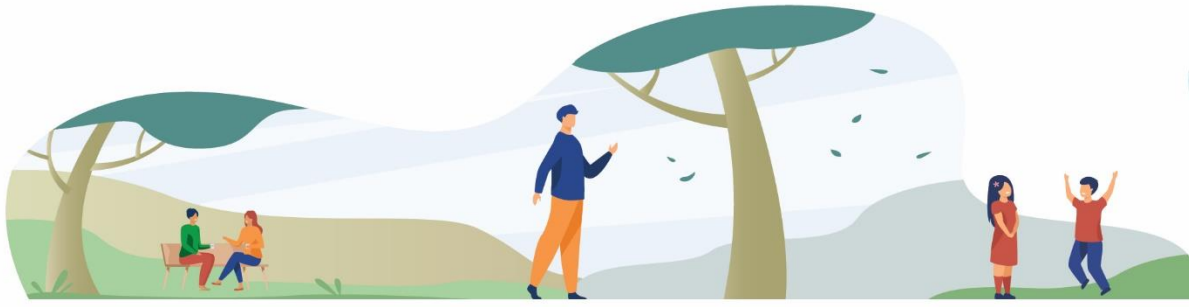
As the weeks passed, the transformation within Cain became increasingly evident. He learned to communicate his needs and feelings more effectively. The nurturing environment of the programme fostered emotional growth, enabling him to connect with peers in a more positive and cooperative manner. The Ready Steady Go programme also offered support for Cain's family. By addressing some of the underlying issues at home, it provided a holistic approach to his well-being, contributing to his overall progress.

Cain's journey in the Ready Steady Go programme exemplifies the profound impact of early intervention and holistic support in a nurturing environment. Over six weeks, he transformed from a young boy struggling with communication and social interactions into a more confident and expressive individual. This programme, through equine facilitated learning and creative activities, has aided Cain in overcoming his initial challenges. Cain has gone on to repeat the programme a second time because of the enormous value it gave to him and his family.

**Ashleigh Bird**

**Lead Facilitator**





## Circles Equine - Taking the Reins

### Midlands

Taking the Reins is an Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL) project, based in Warwickshire, offering EFL sessions to disabled and disadvantaged children and young people from across the UK. Individuals accessing Taking the Reins were supported to strengthen their relationship building skills, improve self-determination and develop emotional regulation. The project is supported by the Pets at Home Community Foundation.

### Highlights

**Improved self-esteem:** Social interactions and forming friendships were difficult for a lot of the young people who attended Taking the Reins, and this had a negative impact on their self-esteem and self-image. Through working with and building relationships with horses or ponies, this helped to change their perception of themselves and showed them that they can make friends and, more importantly, that they deserve friendship as much as anyone else.

**Social and team building skills:** Sharing of resources such as brushes, lead ropes and other equipment helped to build positive relationships within the group and promote social skills that children could develop and use in other areas of their lives.



As the sessions mostly take place within small groups, activities with the ponies in the arena provided opportunities for team working, with the children exploring different ways of working together to achieve an agreed upon aim.



Recognising a healthy relationship: Children participated in practical pony activities to begin to learn about how to make a friendship with a pony and to recognise what a positive relationship is.

The abstract concept of boundaries was practically and visibly demonstrated through working with the ponies. This helped the participants to begin to understand what is meant by boundaries before learning about how to put them in place within their relationships.

## Challenges

Adaptation and Customisation: Throughout the previous financial year, Taking the Reins encountered challenges in adapting and customising the programme to suit diverse participant needs. Designing sessions that effectively catered to varying age groups, abilities, and individual learning styles proved demanding. Difficulties in creating flexible and adaptive curriculum modules hindered the programme's capacity to offer tailored experiences, impacting the overall effectiveness of Equine Facilitated Learning sessions for each participant.

We revised the programme's curriculum by introducing more adaptable and customisable session plans. This involved creating a modular curriculum that allows for flexibility, enabling facilitators to tailor sessions to individual participant needs.



We also incorporated feedback from participants or their guardians to understand their specific requirements better. This feedback guided modifications to the curriculum, ensuring it met diverse needs more effectively.

Attendance Consistency and Scheduling Conflicts: Taking the Reins had encountered challenges in maintaining consistent participant attendance due to scheduling conflicts or other commitments. Participants faced difficulties attending sessions regularly due to personal schedules, transportation issues, or conflicting responsibilities. This inconsistent attendance had impacted the continuity of learning and the effectiveness of the programme, requiring strategies to address scheduling conflicts and encourage regular participation for optimal benefits.

Implementing a more flexible scheduling system helped accommodate participants' varied availability. This involved offering sessions at different times or days of the week to cater to diverse schedules.

## **Development**

Introducing a new horse to the herd provided significant developmental opportunities for Taking the Reins, in several ways:

The addition of a new horse a Welsh Cob named Ebony, broadened the resources available for the programme. It increased the options for matching participants with horses, considering varied temperaments, sizes, and personalities. This expanded pool of equines enhanced the programme's ability to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of participants.

With the new addition to the herd, Taking the Reins gained increased capacity and flexibility in conducting sessions. This allowed for the rotation or allocation of horses according to participant needs or session requirements. The added flexibility facilitated a more dynamic and adaptable approach during sessions and Ebony soon became a much-loved member of the team.

## **Differences Post Covid**

**Increased Demand for Mental Health Support:** Post-COVID, there has been a noticeable surge in demand for mental health support. The pandemic's impact on mental well-being has led to increased stress, anxiety, and isolation among individuals. Our Equine Facilitated Learning programme saw a rise in participants seeking therapeutic interventions to cope with these mental health challenges.

**Emphasis on Outdoor Activities and Nature-based Therapies:** As lockdowns eased, there was a growing appreciation for outdoor activities and nature-based therapies. Our Equine Facilitated Learning programme was seen as beneficial due to the outdoor setting, providing a safer space for participants to engage while adhering to distancing guidelines.

## **Partnerships**

Partnerships with Volunteers:

**Recruitment and Training:** Our Equine Facilitated Learning programme has successfully recruited dedicated volunteers who share a passion for Equine Therapeutic Learning and the well-being of young people. These volunteers offer their time and expertise to support the programme's activities.

Our partnerships with volunteers have allowed us to tap into a diverse range of skills and experiences. Volunteers may have backgrounds in horsemanship, counselling, education, or other relevant fields, enhancing the depth and breadth of Circles Network's offerings.

Engaging volunteers from the local community fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose. It also promotes a positive image, reinforcing our commitment to inclusivity and collaboration.

Partnership with Pets at Home:

Community Engagement and Outreach: Partnerships with Pets at Home has enhanced community engagement. Collaborative events, joint campaigns, and shared initiatives has increased public awareness about Equine Facilitated Learning, attracting more participants and volunteers to the programme. This expanded outreach positively impacts the programme's visibility and participation rates.

Cost Savings: By receiving support from Pets at Home through being able to raise money at their store, we reduce the financial cost for our horses.

## **Stories of Change**

*Victoria, a 14-year-old with a passion for horses and a zest for learning, embarked on a transformative journey through the Taking the Reins programme. Over a six-week period, with one hour of dedicated learning each week, Victoria's experience with horses and therapeutic engagement marked a significant milestone in her personal growth and development.*

*Victoria's journey was distinctive, as her enthusiasm for horses was the driving force behind her participation in Taking the Reins. This had the potential to be harnessed to bring about positive changes in her life.*

*At the outset, Victoria arrived at the programme with high expectations and a keen interest in equine interaction. She hoped to develop her equestrian skills and build connections with the magnificent animals that had always captured her heart.*

*The Taking the Reins programme provided Victoria with the opportunity to understand the nature of horses and build deep connections. These interactions taught her valuable life skills, including empathy, patience, and effective communication.*

*As the weeks progressed, Victoria's emotional growth became increasingly evident. She began to develop a deeper sense of empathy, not only towards the horses but also in her interactions with peers. Her increased patience and understanding made her a more considerate and compassionate individual.*

*Victoria's involvement in the programme was not limited to equine interaction; she also took part in therapeutic exercises. These activities*

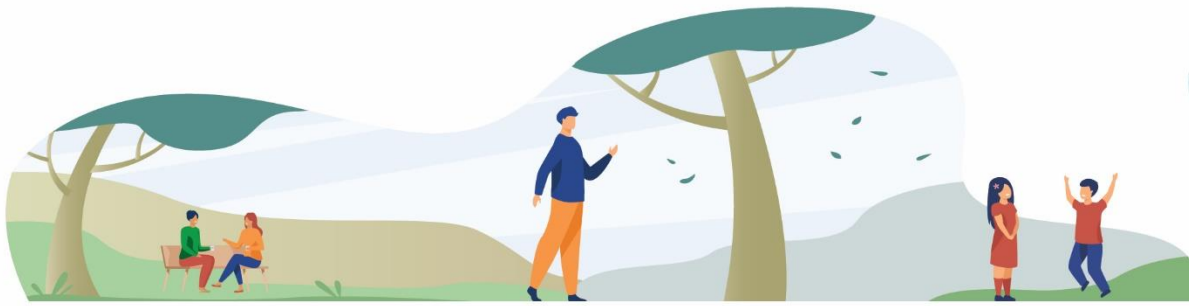
*promoted self-reflection and personal development, fostering a sense of self-awareness and emotional well-being.*

*While the Taking the Reins programme lasted only six weeks, its impact on Victoria extended beyond its duration. The life skills and personal growth she achieved during this short time have set her on a path of continuous self-improvement, as she continues to explore her passion for horses and personal development.*

*Victoria's journey through the Taking the Reins Equine Facilitated Learning programme demonstrates the power of combining personal passion with therapeutic experiences. In just six weeks of one-hour sessions, she acquired valuable life skills, honed her emotional intelligence, and deepened her connection with horses and people alike.*

**Ashleigh Bird**

**Lead Facilitator**



## Circles Equine - Taking the Lead

### Midlands

At Circles Network, we believe in the power of Equine-Facilitated Learning to bring about profound and positive change in the lives of young people. Our project offers a distinctive and holistic approach to personal development, catering to individuals facing diverse challenges, such as autism, anxiety, disability, behavioural challenges, or a desire for personal growth.

The programme begins with a warm introduction to our equine partners, where participants learn about horse behaviour, care, and communication. This foundational knowledge sets the stage for a journey of self-discovery and empowerment.

### Highlights

**Increased Participation and Outreach:** One of the standout achievements from the past financial year was the significant increase in the number of young people and families who benefited from our Equine-Facilitated Learning programme. Through targeted outreach efforts and partnerships with local schools and community organisations, we were able to reach a broader audience. This expansion of participation not only helped more young people access the transformative benefits of Equine Therapeutic Learning but also strengthened our position as a valuable resource in the community. Our commitment to inclusivity ensured that children from diverse backgrounds and with varying needs could access our programme, promoting a sense of belonging and acceptance for all.



**Strong Community Support and Partnerships:** Over the past year, we experienced a surge in community support and forged valuable partnerships. Local businesses, community organisations, and individuals rallied behind our

Equine-Facilitated Learning project, offering financial donations, in-kind support, and volunteer assistance. These collaborative efforts allowed us to expand our offerings, improve facilities, and provide funded places to disadvantaged youth. The support from our community underscored the value of the project in promoting well-being and inclusivity, and it enabled us to reach even more young people in need.

**Positive Participant Outcomes:** The past year brought about remarkable success stories from our Equine-Facilitated Learning programme. Many young people who participated in our programme experienced transformative personal growth. We documented numerous instances of increased self-esteem, reduced anxiety, and improved interpersonal skills shown by participants. Parents and caregivers reported significant positive changes in the lives of their children, affirming the programme's impact on their overall well-being. These heartwarming success stories served as powerful motivators for our dedicated team of facilitators, reinforcing our commitment to making a difference in the lives of young people.



## **Challenges**

The Taking the Lead project faced a significant challenge when our team was left without a dedicated Equine Manager. Initially, this situation might have seemed daunting, as having a manager provides essential leadership, direction, and coordination for any project. However, what unfolded was a clear resilience and adaptability within our team, as we not only coped with the absence of an Equine Manager but also thrived in this new dynamic.

Ultimately, we overcame the challenge of operating without an Equine Manager with directing reporting to the CEO and by embracing a collaborative and empowered approach. The absence of a manager pushed us to grow, adapt, and become more self-reliant. We leveraged each team member's strengths and skills, leading to a more dynamic and resilient Taking the Lead project.

Attracting new children and young people to the project, whilst we faced a period without additional funding was also a challenge. This was helped by collaborating with our own academy to input hugely on both the Horses4Courses syllabus and the HAF programme.

## **Development**

Developing Saturday Club was an exciting endeavour, and our efforts to attract new participants Succeeded well. Here's a glimpse into our journey in developing this club and the success we've achieved so far:

#### Effective Outreach and Marketing:

Our decision to design a poster to promote the Saturday Club was a useful move. Posters served as a visually engaging way to communicate information and generate new interest. The poster showcased the beauty of our equine partners, the serene environment, and the positive experiences participants could expect.

The multiple inquiries received were a promising sign that our outreach efforts were effective. It suggests that our message resonated with potential participants, who were eager to learn more about the club. This positive response to our compelling marketing materials communicated the value of the Equine Facilitated Learning experience.

#### Ensuring a Positive Experience:

As we welcomed new participants into the Saturday Club, it was crucial to prioritise their experience. Ensured that we had a well-structured curriculum, experienced facilitators, and a safe and welcoming environment. A successful first experience can lead to ongoing engagement and positive word-of-mouth, further fuelling the growth of our Equine Facilitated Learning programme.

### **Differences Post Covid**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt in various facets of society, including Equine Facilitated Learning programmes like ours. Here's how we noticed a change in participant numbers and the specific issues we addressed among our participants considering the pandemic:

#### Change in Participant Numbers:

**Initial Decrease:** At the onset of the pandemic, many Equine Facilitated Learning programmes, including ours, experienced a significant decrease in participant numbers. Lockdowns, restrictions on gatherings, and concerns about safety led to the suspension of in-person sessions.

**Gradual Recovery:** As the situation evolved and safety measures were implemented, we began to see a gradual recovery in participant numbers. People were eager to find therapeutic and outdoor activities that allowed for social distancing, and equine therapeutic learning provided a unique solution.



**Increased Awareness:** The pandemic also brought increased awareness of mental health issues, and many individuals sought out our programme as a means of coping with heightened stress, anxiety, and isolation during the pandemic.

#### **Specific Challenges Among Participants:**

**Anxiety and Stress:** One of the most common issues we encountered among our participants during the pandemic was the heightened anxiety and stress. The uncertainty and disruption caused by COVID-19 have taken a toll on mental well-being. Taking the Lead has proven effective in providing a sense of calm and stability.

**Social Isolation:** The restrictions on social gatherings and activities led to increased social isolation for many individuals. Taking the Lead not only offered opportunities for outdoor interactions but also fosters connections with the horses, promoting a sense of companionship and belonging.



### **Partnerships**

Developing partnerships with our volunteers, Pets at Home, and the Co-op was a testament to our Taking the Lead programme's commitment to community engagement and sustainability. These partnerships not only enhanced the resources available but also contributed to our long-term success.

#### **Partnerships with Volunteers:**

**Recruitment and Training:** Our Taking the Lead programme has successfully recruited dedicated volunteers who share a passion for Equine Therapeutic Learning and the well-being of our participants. These volunteers offer their time and expertise to support the programme's activities.

#### **Partnership with the Co-op and Pets at Home:**

**Fundraising and Support:** Both the Co-op and Pets at Home, through their generous involvement extended beyond financial support. They offered fundraising opportunities, such as community fundraising initiatives, to help generate resources for our Taking the Lead programme.

### **Stories of Change**

*Lauren is a 15-year-old girl, who started her journey with us in March 2022. She had been facing some difficulties in her life and felt disconnected from herself and others. Seeking a positive change, Lauren's parents enrolled her in Taking the Lead.*

*Lauren arrived at Circles Network and was greeted by our beautiful horses. Each horse has its own personality and wisdom.*

*Lauren's journey began with meeting her equine partner, Sol. From the start, Lauren felt a special bond with Sol. It was as if they understood each other without words. Under the guidance of experienced facilitators, Lauren embarked on a journey of learning and growth. She discovered the importance of communication, trust, and leadership through her interactions with Sol. The horses have a remarkable ability to reflect emotions and intentions, teaching valuable lessons about herself.*

*As time went on, Lauren's relationship with Sol deepened. She learned to regulate her emotions and communicate effectively. With patience and persistence, Lauren became more confident in leading Sol, and Sol responded with trust and cooperation.*

*The lessons Lauren learned at Taking the Lead extended beyond Circles Network. She gained a greater sense of self-awareness and found herself relating to others with more empathy and understanding. The newfound confidence and emotional intelligence helped her mend relationships and navigate challenges in her daily life.*

*Inspired by her experience, Lauren decided to share her love for horses and the lessons she had learned. She began volunteering with us, offering support and encouragement to disabled children. Through her kindness and understanding, Lauren showed them the power of the connection between humans and horses.*

*Through the year, Lauren looked back on her time at Taking the Lead with gratitude. The Taking the Lead programme had given her the tools she needed to face life's obstacles with resilience and compassion. Through her*

*own journey, Lauren became a source of inspiration for others, encouraging*

