



InTouch

SPRING 2023

The magazine for families and supporters of United Response

Living her *best* life

How one woman we support is embracing life



ALSO INSIDE

Coronation Easy Read special guide

Our accessible voting campaign launches in Parliament

My Vote
My Voice



We want to see more people with learning disabilities and autism registering and using their legal right to vote.

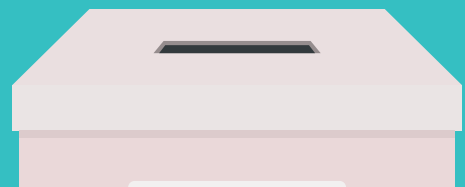
There are 1.5 million people with learning disabilities and 700,000 autistic people in the UK. But fewer than two-thirds of the public know they have the same right to vote as everyone else.*

*United Response 2019

Join the movement.

**Complete our survey. Share our easy read guides.
Make voting accessible today.**

**www.myvotemyvoice.org.uk
#MyVoteMyVoice**





Editorial

CONTENTS

4 SOUTH NEWS
How wellbeing sessions are helping people we support in Richmond, plus the latest ventures from ROC Creative and more!

6 NORTH NEWS
A dream internship and news from Bradford and Merseyside.

8 EDUCATION AND TRAINING
From URTEC to paid video editor

10 FEATURE
How one woman we support is living her best life.

12 EASY NEWS
Get planning for King Charles' Coronation this Spring.

16 FUNDRAISING
Could you support the work of United Response?

18 50TH ANNIVERSARY
Get involved and help us share the stories from half a century.

19 JUBILEE UPDATE

20 MY VOTE MY VOICE

22 PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT
New tools to help plan a better life

At United Response we talk a lot about support and what it means. To us, as you'll see in this issue, support is about creative opportunities, employment and growth. Support is also about cruises, gardening, pursuing passions – and making the most of all the little everyday moments that make life worthwhile.

That's why we wanted to share the story of Joan (page 10). Joan is a lady we support who previously lived in an institution and now fills her days with shopping trips, beauty treatments and cruise holidays.

We want to ensure every person with a learning disability can live their best life like Joan. That's why we've developed a new person-centred planning tool which support workers and relatives can use to make sure the person they support lives the great life they deserve (page 22).

We believe that support is about growth, education and opportunities. We were delighted to speak to our employee Kate (page 8), a talented video editor and university student, who started her journey at our York training service (URTEC). Kate's story shows how, with the right support, there

are no limits to what someone can achieve.

Good support is also about amplifying people's voices. In February we launched My Vote, My Voice, a national campaign we are running with Mencap, Dimensions and Ambitious About Autism (page 20). Our campaign, focused on the next general election, is about making voting and politics accessible for all.

Finally, and most importantly, support is about fun! Our news stories (page 4 – 7) showcase all the great things we get up to everyday. From performance exams and creative films, to clubbercise, setting up a new café, and even meeting Alex Ferguson – we have been busy!

Many of these big projects, great days out, and opportunities, are funded by our fundraising team. Head to page 16 to get to know them, what they do, and the fun ways you can get involved.

None of this would be possible without you. Thank you for the support you show us at United Response.

Tim Cooper
Chief Executive

Your feedback matters

United Response encourages feedback on everything we do, and we are always trying to improve the way we do things. If you have a comment, concern or complaint, you can tell us in the following ways:

- a one-to-one meeting/phone call with a staff member of your choice
- contact the Chief Executive of United Response
- contact your local Social Services, Health Authority, Local Government Ombudsman
- contact the Care Quality Commission
- contact the Supporting People Administrative Authority

Remember: you can also call our Head Office (0208 016 5678) or Chief Executive Hotline (0208 016 5673).

South News

Wellbeing worksho

Nora works at our Teddington community centre, The Enterprise. Her wellbeing workshops are a big hit with people we support, and she's now taking them out to other local community groups.

People we support have praised Nora's wellbeing workshops for giving them a safe, supportive space and the tools to talk about how they're feeling:

"I used to get very anxious but now I feel calm and confident," said Josh.

"I would highly recommend them to anyone who is feeling down. It will help you to feel inspired and invigorated. I feel very valued and supported in the sessions," agreed Emma. Lead Senior Support Worker Chloe said: "The sessions have made a huge impact on the lives of people we support. They've given them so much confidence, which was vital coming out of the pandemic, learning how to go back into the community with so many changes and restrictions."

Previous workshops have included; remembering Queen Elizabeth II, a motivational talk from local soldier Major Tom Oakley and a discussion about diversity and inclusion from former professional footballer Marcus Gayle.

Working alongside other local charities and service providers, Nora has delivered workshops out in the



Welcome from Mike

We are so proud to share these stories which showcase the range of opportunities we provide at United Response, the brilliant achievements of our staff and the indisputable talents of the people we support. Our wide-ranging support is designed to make sure everyone has the chance to live the fulfilling life they deserve.

Mike Crowhurst,
Director - South

Celebrating the life of Charlie Chaplin

After months of virtual drama lessons, ROC Creative students came back together to create a film tribute to Charlie Chaplin.

"After Covid, we wanted something that would draw people back in. That's where Charlie Chaplin came in." explained Anita, one of ROC Creative's drama teachers.

The film was made using skills and talents from across ROC Creative. Closely inspired by Chaplin's own comedic performance style, the film takes us through his life story. The playful piece is loaded with heart, sadness, and moments that are bound to get you belly laughs.

The brilliant experience gave students a new passion for Chaplin's work, with many going on to purchase Charlie Chaplin books and box sets.

As one student said, "Charlie Chaplin is an icon, a legend and a superstar."

The film will be shared later on in the year at a special ROC Creative Exhibition.

Follow us on social media to find out more @unitedresponse



ops in Richmond



community at Whitton Community Centre and YMCA White House in Hampton.

Nora calls teaching her 'life's passion'. She previously taught English and Creative Writing for survivors of domestic abuse and human trafficking:

"That's where my passion for wellbeing started to come in. I noticed the healing power of writing, reflection and safe spaces."

Cottage Café Torquay opens

Our Devon team were proud to open The Cottage Café in November... they even had a visit from Kevin Foster, MP for Torbay!

The café offers work experience, internships and volunteer roles for those who are interested in catering. Employees learn customer service and food preparation skills, with some going on to do barista training.



Placements can be arranged through our education service ROC College or the local Job Centre.

Follow them on Instagram @CottageCafeTorquay or search for 'The Cottage Café Torquay' on Facebook.

Community spirit in Kent

Generous financial support from local organisations means services in Kent can provide supplies, events and volunteering opportunities to more people than ever before.

The Community Network hosts coffee mornings and a singing group, plus their own radio station with music and chat shows presented by people we support.

They're also a designated Warm Space and run a 'People's Larder' scheme, providing food and toiletries for those in need.

Local funders, including Channel Rotary and Sherwood Almshouses, recently donated money to help support these projects. Co-ordinator Rachael Stickells said:

"It's great that we're being recognised for what we've been doing for the community during the cost-of-living

crisis. This will help us to offer even more for people we support and local residents."

Also based in Cheriton, our charity shop The Donation Station offers volunteering opportunities for anyone looking to gain work experience in a retail environment.

Some of our previous volunteers have now gone on to get paid jobs and we couldn't be prouder of them!



Welcome from Julia



This Spring we're sharing stories about a person we support meeting Sir Alex Ferguson, a brilliant theatrical achievement and a fabulous cooking and clubbing session. Facilitating these moments of joy is the best thing about working for United Response. Thank you to everyone who helped make it happen.

Julia Casserly, Director - North

North News

Perks of the job

Footie fan Ben couldn't believe his luck when he got to meet sporting legends Eric Cantona and Sir Alex Ferguson at work!

College student and Man City supporter Ben was on the hunt for work experience in anything football-related.

With support from his Job Coach Julie, he's now on a supported internship two days a week at the National Football Museum, showing visitors around and talking about the football memorabilia.

"It's been going really well," said Ben. "Everyone is so nice and welcoming, so it's a lovely environment to work in."

Ben's manager Christian said: "Ben's been a real asset to us, particularly in terms of his level of engagement with visitors. He's such a bubbly, outgoing person and we've been so impressed with his enthusiasm. He's a really good fit for the role."

New for 2023 is 'From Moss Side to Marseille', a collection of fine art portraits from Manchester artist



▲ Above: Ben's lucky encounter with football legend Sir Alex Ferguson

Michael Browne, commissioned by former Man Utd player Eric Cantona. Inspired by Renaissance art, it showcases famous sportspeople from history who fought for social or political causes.

Staff and volunteers were invited to the launch, where they got to rub shoulders with famous footballers. Ben even managed to get selfies with Eric and Sir Alex!

Cooking and clubbing

People we support in Bradford have been hitting the dancefloor for 'Clubbercise' on Thursday nights, before cooking up a storm on Friday lunchtimes.

The community classes have helped them to lose weight, get fitter and make new friends whilst learning new recipes they can cook at home.

The cooking group was set up using grant funding, after the local community centre could no longer offer one.

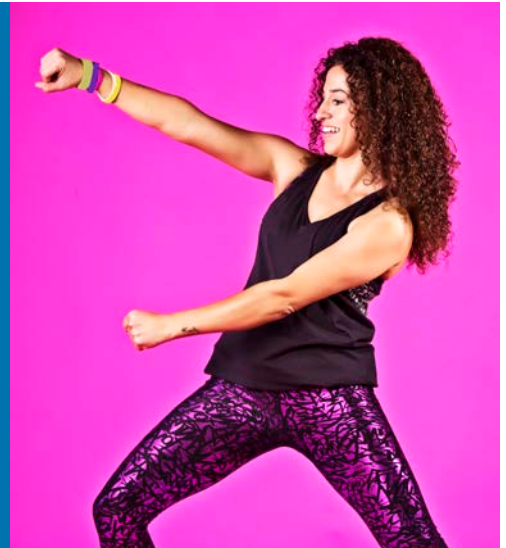
The instructor provides the ingredients for each session, so

class members can just turn up and cook something from scratch. They then have a delicious meal to take home with them at the end of the day. They've made a range of tasty recipes together, from chicken biryani to homemade soups.

Many members of the cooking group also take part in 'Clubbercise' - a fun dance class with glowsticks. Led by local instructor Louisa, the accessible session gets people moving and grooving along to party classics like Reach and Agadoo!

Lead Senior Support Worker Alison said:

"As the classes have gone on, everybody's stamina and co-ordination has improved. There's the music and the dancing - then there's the social aspect, which is important.



People's confidence has also improved"

Geeta loves coming to Clubbercise. She's lost a stone in weight since she's been taking part and her blood sugars are back to a normal range. She's even found the confidence to lead a Bollywood-inspired dance for the rest of the group!

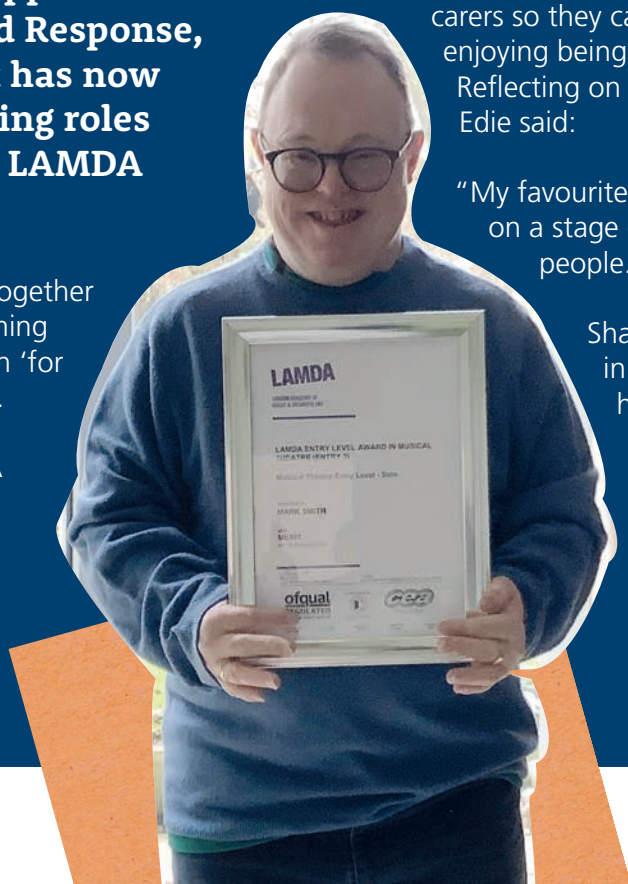
"I go every Thursday. I do my exercises there and I like the music."

Mark takes centre stage

With a bit of support from Edie and United Response, once-shy Mark has now had several acting roles and achieved a LAMDA qualification.

Mark studies at Ella Together - an inclusive performing arts school in Runcorn 'for people aged 4 to 74'. He recently achieved a Merit in his LAMDA exam in Musical Theatre (Solo).

Mark lives with Edie as part of our Shared Lives



service, where people we support move in with carers so they can live independently, whilst also enjoying being part of a family home.

Reflecting on the time they've spent together, Edie said:

"My favourite memory was when Mark got up on a stage on his own, singing in front of 400 people. It was just amazing, it really was."

Shared Lives is currently only available in the Merseyside area but we are hoping to expand to other locations in the future. For more information, including how to become a Shared Lives carer, please visit our website:

www.unitedresponse.org.uk/shared-lives

◀ **Left:** Mark proudly shows off his LAMDA certificate

“She can work wonders”

One person’s journey from URTEC to professional video editing superstar

A story of how coding lessons at our York training and community services (URTEC) led to employment and University studies for Kate.

Kate is a talented video editor, video game developer and coder. Her story shows how, with the right support, there are no limits to what someone can achieve.

Kate joined United Response in 2017, where she began taking courses at our URTEC Media Centre. The classes introduced Kate to coding and top video editing software Premiere Pro, key skills she would need later on in life.

Kate’s talents were quickly recognised and she went on to get paid employment with United Response in 2018. Now, Kate is always busy producing video content for our Quality & Practice team and supporting URTEC projects. You can see many of the

videos she’s made on our YouTube channel, and we use them across our communications.

Kate has taken on many tasks: making green-screen magic, stop-motion animation, remastering old footage, complex editing and more. Kate’s skills and innovation are always in use. Just recently she transformed a video lecture, choosing to animate slides to keep viewers entertained.

Kate was recently awarded a UR Star award to recognise her outstanding contribution to United Response. Speaking about Kate, Bev Murphy, Head of Practice, said:

“She’s so skilled at video editing, she can work wonders. She’s

meticulous and always on it. She is awesome, she really is.”

As if she wasn’t already busy enough, Kate recently started a university degree in video game development. On the course, Kate is learning all about video game history, operating systems and programming.

Speaking about United Response, Kate said:

“United Response has definitely helped me become more motivated and point me in the direction of what I want to do with my life. United Response is about acceptance and bringing people together.”





United Response has definitely helped point me in the direction of what I want to do with my life.



Introducing STOMP

Over the last year, Kate has been kept very busy working on United Response's STOMP awareness video.

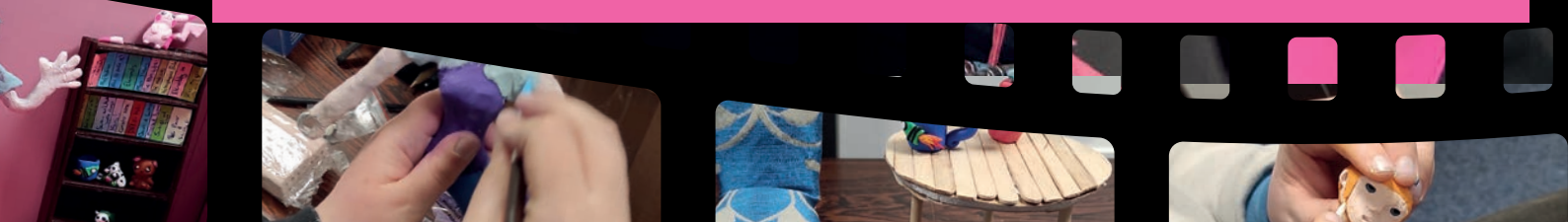
STOMP is a national campaign, which stands for "stopping over medication of people with a learning disability, autism or both with psychotropic medicines." Speaking about the campaign, and why it matters, Kate explained:

"Medication can be good to some extent, but there are more ways of helping people. For example, in

the video we show someone going to the park and experiencing anxiety. If that happens you need to explore why it's happening and if there's anything you can change, like going to the park at a different time."

The animation, which is now available on our YouTube channel, ends with an interview with Kate about her experiences. Kate led the video making process, helping design sets and characters and producing the animation.

You can watch the STOMP video at www.unitedresponse.org.uk/stomp



Living her best



▲ Above: Katie with Joan, who she's been supporting for five years

Having previously lived in an institution, Joan has now been supported by our Bradford team since 2011. Her niece Jo tells us why she 'can't fault' her Bradford support team, who make sure she fills her days with shopping trips, beauty treatments and cruise holidays.

Before joining United Response, Joan lived in Westwood Hospital – an institutional setting for people with learning disabilities. Her niece, Jo, remembers visiting Joan when she was a child:

“It must have been so hard for anybody living in that environment, day in day out, doing the same monotonous things,” said Jo.

Now Joan lives in one of our Supported Living bungalows with two other ladies, Pauline and Joanne.

Joan and her housemates like watching dancing on the telly together and going to the theatre. Joan also loves cooking with her support workers - making her favourite dinner of pie and mash!

Jo told us how Joan has chosen all the furnishings for her bedroom, including new wardrobes:

“The staff discuss it with her, showing her options so she’s able to choose which design she wants.”

“As a lady who has probably only had that sort of decision-making in the last 20 years, it’s amazing that she’s got that now.”

Supporting someone to live their best life

Lead Senior Support Worker Katie has supported Joan for five years now. She says she loves supporting people to do things that they enjoy:



life

"We go shopping in garden centres so Joan can buy things for the garden. She's just happy and always willing to give. She likes to buy gifts for people too – usually something for her sister."

Joan loves visiting her sister Ann and often brings her presents.

"She likes going to the salon and getting her hair and nails done. She likes singing and dancing," said Katie.

"We've been on two cruises and about eight different trips to Blackpool. She loves Blackpool – anything to do with dancing!"

Katie explained how empathy is really important in her job:

"You're not just supporting them to have their basic needs, you're supporting them to live their lives to the fullest. You're doing everything to make their lives what they should be."

"Being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes means you give them the dignity they deserve."

Joan was recently supported to go on a Caribbean cruise for some winter sunshine, rest and relaxation. She even treated herself to a massage!



Joan loves her support workers. The staff that work with Joan see her as extended family.



A family affair

A Lead Commissioner from Gateshead Council noticed the great support Joan was getting from Katie and Mariam and his friends assumed they were all related!

He wrote a letter, praising Katie and Mariam for their 'warm, empathetic, patient and dignified approach,' saying they provided 'some of the best person-centred care [he had] ever seen.'

Jo said: "Joan loves her support workers. The staff that work with Joan see her as extended family. I don't ask for that but it's what I see them doing."

Jo, her husband and daughters Jessie and Beckie love visiting Joan's house because she's 'a bundle of fun.' They even bring the dogs so Joan can have a cuddle!

Jo feels really proud to have such a strong relationship with her aunt:

"To be able to look at pictures of us as a family, she loves those pictures, she loves those memories."

She thanks Denzel, Katie, Beatrice, Jane, Kelly and the rest of our Bradford team for being so attentive, sending regular updates and helping them keep in contact:

"I cannot fault them. They're just the best and they couldn't be doing a better job for Joan."



**easy
news**



King Charles' Coronation


**United
Response**
support that changes with you

The United Kingdom has a new king, King Charles III. Although he became king in September 2022, he has not yet had his **coronation**. A coronation is a special Royal celebration event where a new King or Queen has the crown placed on their head.

For a long time, Charles was Prince of Wales. His mother was Queen Elizabeth the Second and she died in 2022. Because he was her oldest son, Charles became the king when she died.

King Charles is the king of the United Kingdom. England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are the four countries in the United Kingdom. King Charles is also head of the Commonwealth, which includes Canada, Australia and many other countries.

King Charles' Coronation will take place on Saturday the 6 May 2023.





The Coronation will be in Westminster Abbey. During the Coronation, the Archbishop of Canterbury will put St. Edward's crown on King Charles' head. St. Edward's crown was made in 1661 and is solid gold.



Many important people will be invited to the Coronation. The Coronation will also be on television.



On Sunday 7 May, the day after the Coronation, there will be a concert at Windsor Castle. The concert will also be on television so that everyone who wants to can watch it.



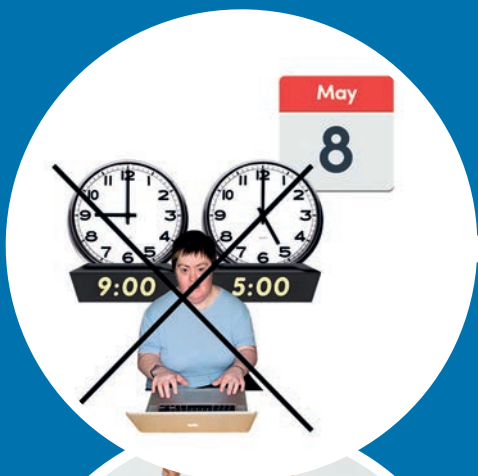
On Sunday we will all get the chance to take part in a Coronation Big Lunch. King Charles hopes that lots of people will have street parties with their neighbours to celebrate his Coronation.

To celebrate the Coronation, Monday 8 May will be a Bank Holiday. Lots of people will have the day off work.

King Charles hopes that people will use their Bank Holiday to help other people. This will be called the Big Help Out.

If you liked this Easy News story, sign up to our Easy News emails and get the latest issue sent to your inbox:
www.unitedresponse.org.uk/newsletter

You can also sign up to get a copy of our next Easygoing News. This is our new publication that focuses only on the happier news stories and comes out 2 times per year.



Every penny

For 50 years, United Response has been well backed with government funding.

This has enabled us to develop and shape the fantastic support services that we are so proud to deliver in 320 locations across England and Wales.

It's well documented that there is increasing pressure in the social care sector and United Response is feeling the squeeze like all other providers, as costs continue to rise faster than funding does.

But regardless of the economic or political climate of the day, our charity status has always been at the heart of our outlook. We have never been 'just' a service provider and we never want to limit our ambition for people to their basic support package.

From farms and allotments to cooking, music, sport and social clubs, we witness so often that investment in the 'extra' really can open doors, increase confidence and change lives. Therefore, there will always be a need for us to turn to donations and grants to make sure we can continue to deliver those 'X-factor' moments.

So, we would love for you to partner with us to raise funds in innovative, creative and, most importantly, fun ways - all with the goal of securing the future of those we care most about.

Gemma Taylor-Mahon,
Head of Fundraising



"Could you attend or organise a fundraising event to celebrate our 50th birthday with us?"

Aisha Akbar,
Fundraising Officer



"Could you walk, run, cycle or take on another type of sponsorship challenge on our behalf?"

Seed funds for new projects

Small Sparks

United Response has a much-valued, 10+ year relationship with the Clothworkers' Foundation. Each year, the foundation generously provides us with a £35,000 grant.

Services and communities within United Response are then invited to submit project proposals for funding, with the focus on

'sparking' something new that has the potential to grow into independence.

For example, Potter's Den, frequently mentioned in this magazine, has gone from strength to strength since its initial 'seed funding' from Small Sparks in 2010. Each year, around 30 other projects receive grants, providing new opportunities for the people we support to benefit from, such as wellbeing, learning new skills, community connection and the environment.



counts

**Suzanne Featherstone,
Community Fundraiser in
Cornwall**



"Are you a member of a group or society who might make us their chosen charity?"

**Rob Johnstone,
Grant Fundraiser**



"Could you leave a gift to us in your will?"

**Maxine Spry,
Grant Fundraiser**



"Could a commercial organisation you know support us as their charity of the year?"

Active with a purpose

CEO challenge

In November 2022, United Response's CEO Tim Cooper and his wife Ruth completed a 70-kilometre trek through the desert and mountains of Jordan to raise funds for some community and wellbeing projects.

On returning, Tim said "This was an amazing trip which we really enjoyed – but even more amazing was the fantastic generosity of individuals and corporate supporters who contributed to the £5,800 raised to support three United Response projects."

Tim highly recommends working with "Charity Challenge", the organisation who organises trips such as these, with participants able to choose their beneficiary. So please take a look and let us know if you would like to support United Response in this way too.

www.charitychallenge.com



Have an idea or opportunity? Please let us know at fundraising@unitedresponse.org.uk

Help us celebrate United Response's

50th anniversary!

This October we will begin a two-year grant-funded project celebrating 50 years of United Response. To mark this milestone, we are looking for people we support and families to interview and tell their life stories. We also want to collect and archive important documents, photographs, videos and anything which can help us tell the story of those we support and life at United Response over the last fifty years.

The Interviews

What was life like for people with a learning disability 50 years ago? How has life changed over the last 50 years?

We will be speaking to people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, who have been supported by United Response at any stage or time of their life. Importantly we want to gather a wide range of views, experiences and stories to ensure our important history is told and not forgotten.

The interviewers

We will offer paid opportunities for the people we support to embark on training to interview their peers, family members and staff. Participants will



Timely tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



Thanks to National Lottery funding, many of the people we support and frontline staff were able to celebrate our Queen's life during the Platinum Jubilee celebrations and in the months that followed.

Activities focussed on nostalgia, shared memories and pastimes. With the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the forthcoming coronation of His Majesty The King, this project was a timely tribute.

In Darlington, the team organised an Alice in Wonderland themed Jubilee Celebration. Linking the Queen's Jubilee and the Queen of Hearts, the team invited everyone to dress up for the celebrations. On the day, nearly £200 was raised with neighbours and people we support at other services joining in:

"A local lady told us the welcome she received from the people we support and staff was an absolute miracle. The day was a breath of fresh air, like coming home. Nobody wanted to leave the party!"

In Folkestone, our Donation Station and the Community Network hosted a Jubilee Jamboree, with



music, games, tombola, a treasure hunt, food and drinks. Over 200 people attended the event!

"It was an exceptional day and a wonderful way to celebrate the Queen's historic reign," said Helen Lawrence, Donation Station Service Manager, "The people we support were involved with the planning of the day and the activities to celebrate the Queen."

In North Tyneside, we held a 12-week art course to celebrate the Jubilee which culminated in an exhibition. Service Manager, Carolyn Palmer said:

"I was amazed how many people from the community joined us in the celebrations! Over 450 people! Our project was also picked up by the local radio. A fabulous project all round."

In Richmond, Greater London the team at the Enterprise Hub invited members of the community to join them and the people we support to celebrate the Jubilee. Service Manager, Matthew Campbell said:

"We were delighted with the way the community came together to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. It was a really special day with lots of memories made."



Look out for an update on how we celebrate the Coronation of Charles III online and on our social media.

gain valuable research skills as they strive to ensure disability heritage and history is managed, understood and celebrated across England.

This is great for CVs as we will provide participants with expert oral history interview techniques, improved soft and written skills, experience of data management and exhibition curation, and important

evidence of a project they have steered, shaped and delivered from start to finish.

The exhibitions

The touring exhibitions will visit Cornwall, London, Nottingham, Kent, Leeds and Manchester and share the untold life stories with wider audiences. The exhibitions

will be interactive, using the audio recordings to recreate scenes from the interviews. This will make the oral histories inclusive and accessible.

If you want to get involved, please contact the fundraising team on:

fundraising@unitedresponse.org.uk

My Vote My Voice

launches at Parliament

Members of Parliament, charity representatives, people with learning disabilities and autistic people joined together to discuss accessible voting at the My Vote My Voice parliamentary launch.

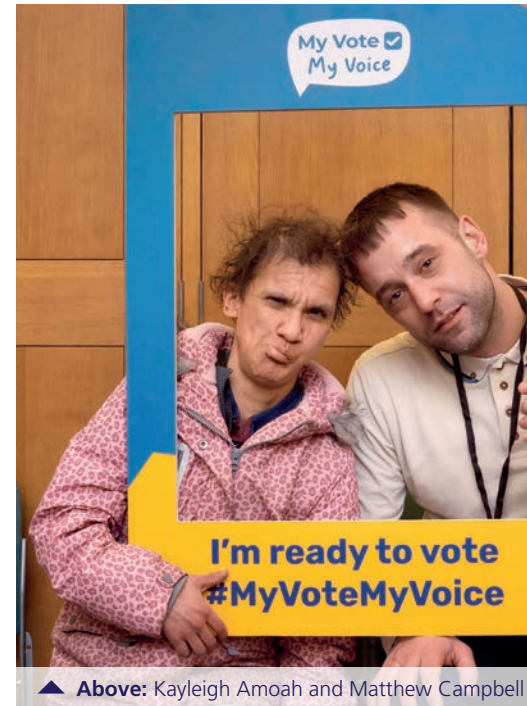
The My Vote My Voice campaign (MVMV), run by United Response, Dimensions, Mencap and Ambitious about Autism, aims to get more autistic and learning-disabled people interested in politics, to register to vote, and ultimately to vote at the next general election.

Alex Norris MP, Shadow Minister for Levelling Up, Housing, Communities and Local Government, hosted the reception for cross-party MPs at Portcullis House in Westminster.

MPs including Lee Rowley, Derek Thomas, Lisa Nandy and Vicky Foxcroft attended the event to hear lived experiences of voting with a disability. Each person's unique experience had a shared call for the need for improved accessibility to stop people being excluded, not just from casting their vote but politics as a whole.

The campaign is working in partnership to produce politically-neutral, Easy Read summaries of headline news items, including what the main parties have said about each topic. There will be guides to registering to vote, and 'voting passports' for use in polling stations.

Speaking at the event, Alex Norris MP explained why accessible voting is important to him: "I am proud to support My Vote My Voice in our shared commitment for accessible voting. Listening to people with lived experiences I am shocked and saddened to hear of cases where people with learning disabilities have



▲ Above: Kayleigh Amoah and Matthew Campbell

been unable to cast their vote."

Ali Gunn, Public Affairs and Policy Lead at United Response and Chair of the My Vote My Voice campaign, said: "As a society, we have a responsibility to ensure that every citizen has equal access to the voting process. To do this we are asking MPs to not make their constituents with learning disabilities a second thought but follow up on their support and provide Easy Read manifestos and hold accessible hustings."

Our very own Alex Hughes and Kayleigh Amoah, who attend our Enterprise service in Richmond, also spoke at the event. Alex explained that we need to achieve voter equality so that everyone can have their voice heard: "progress needs to be made to include people with disabilities so they can vote with honour, respect and dignity."

Kayleigh added: "nobody has any right telling us not to vote. We've all got a right because of our disability."



◀ Left: Lee Rowley MP gives a speech in support of MVMV

Voice



from the Enterprise

“

Progress needs to be made to include people with disabilities so they can vote with honour, respect and dignity.

Alex Hughes,
supported by
United Response

”



▲ Above: The MVMV team raring to go outside of Parliament

My Vote
My Voice

//
**I pledge to
champion
equal voting
rights in my
constituency**
//



▲ Above: Alex Norris MP pledges his support

If you or a family member are interested in voting but need extra resources or would like to get in touch, please go to www.myvotemyvoice.org.uk

Planning for a better life

Sometimes it takes a new start for us to pause and consider what we really want. We might move house and think: “Right, here I’m going to really have my kitchen properly organised so it’s not that jumble we had in the old place”. Or we might start a new relationship and promise ourselves: “This time it’s going to be different: we will have no secrets from each other”. Maybe we sign up to a new Zumba class and decide we’re definitely going every week, not skipping sessions like last time.



By John Ockenden, Practice Development Co-ordinator



We often need a break in things: a jolt that helps us to take a step back and evaluate what we really want, rather than just carrying on as before. And of course, we’ve had a mass jolt just recently. All at once - and for everyone - everything changed, because of the pandemic. For many it was awful and sadly some we loved were swept away. But for those of us coming out of the other end, now is a great time to make changes that help us live our best possible life, using everything we learnt over the pandemic.

Bonita* is a good example of this. She’s a woman we support in the Midlands and during lockdown,

like you, she stayed at home for months on end. When things started to get back to normal, it was an opportunity for Bonita to re-evaluate. She felt she couldn’t just restart everything – she needed to consider what she really wanted to do and who she really wanted to spend time with.

Towards the end of the pandemic, we produced a Covid-special pack called “Planning My New Normal” for staff to use with people they support, like Bonita, and their families. We took familiar person-centred thinking tools and fitted them into a sequence that would help people to take stock and make new plans.



Spend more time with my brother



Join a painting class

FUTURE



“

Bonita's life is now a better fit...she doesn't feel rushed like she sometimes used to, but she does get support to keep up her fortnightly Zoom calls with her brother.

”

Using our tools, Bonita spent some time thinking about what she really wanted. She sat with staff and her Mum, and talked about what she wanted to go back to, and what she never wanted to do again. She talked about what she'd actually quite liked about lockdown, and what she'd hated. Together, they discussed the things that really mattered to her. Then they all planned what they were going to do about it.

As a result, Bonita's life is now a better fit: for example, she doesn't

feel rushed like she sometimes used to, but she does get support to keep up her fortnightly Zoom calls with her brother (which didn't happen before); Bonita's staff are more aware of how they can unintentionally distress her, and work harder to keep support consistent.

Lots of people like Bonita benefitted from planning their new normal in this way, so we adapted the pack, making it a fixture in our toolkit (not just a Covid special).

*Bonita is an anonymous composite of real stories

You can find the Person Centred Planning and Reviewing Guide and toolkit on our website: www.unitedresponse.org.uk/pcp. We want everyone we support to be able to use the approach, with their family, their friends and the staff who support them, to take stock and make new plans for a better life.

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