



InTouch

Spring 2020

The magazine for families and supporters of United Response

“Without the help of United Response, I’d never have got a job.”

Shining a spotlight on our supported employment service in York



ALSO INSIDE

Making friends and fighting off loneliness

All about our Positive Behaviour Coaches

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Sunday 16th August 2020

Why not get a team together to cycle 100 traffic-free miles through London and Surrey? You'll be raising funds to support young people and adults with a range of disabilities and mental health needs.



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NEWS

This issue, we check out how a service in Bristol has set up an inclusive football team for people with learning disabilities. And there's more sporting fun in Devon with a Boccia Tournament!



Editorial

employment services in Cornwall, Manchester and York are thriving – read how on P8.

It's high time our policymakers turned their attention to the things that really matter to us all and on to the next pithy political punchline – so how about we now 'fix social care'?

A focus on domestic policy is now an absolute must for the first stable and majority Government in many years. Our Prime Minister has set out a bold vision for the future of a post-EU United Kingdom, not least long-term plans for the NHS and a welcome commitment to tackling social care reform. But what we need now more than ever is the political will to see all of this through. 2020 feels like a watershed year for our nation and the many millions who depend on sustainably-funded public services every day of their lives.

And speaking of whom, we're delighted to bring you the latest edition of our popular In Touch magazine – which as ever showcases the incredible value our support workers bring to the lives of people we support right across England and Wales.

Two of our main features this issue shine a light on how we at United Response are working to bridge employment gaps and also tackle isolation among people with learning disabilities or autism.

Did you know that only 6% of people with learning disabilities and just a quarter of those with long-term mental health needs are in paid work? It doesn't have to be that way and fortunately our specialist supported

“ A focus on domestic policy is now an absolute must for the first stable and majority Government in many years. ”

And let me leave you with another statistic. Latest research suggests that nine million people feel lonely some or all of the time. If you have a disability, however, you're four times more likely to feel this way than the rest of the population. At United Response we're committed to combatting loneliness wherever and however we can – read how our dedicated community hub in south west London is doing just that on P14.

I hope you enjoy the issue and have a fantastic start to the new year.

Tim Cooper
Chief Executive

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Joe, Assistant Coach

Football team builds new friendships

A United Response service from Bristol has found a popular way of bringing footie-fans together by creating their very own football team for people with learning disabilities.

money before games. The team meets every Wednesday and spends half an hour practicing skills such as dribbling, shooting and tackling, before playing a friendly game to show off what they've learnt.

"We've got male and female players in the team and a real mixture of abilities," says Dan. "One of the things we're most proud about is how far the more able players have come along in terms of working as a team and recognising one another's level of ability. They used to be straight in for tackles and all about scoring goals, but now they give the less able members of the team the space and time to have a go with the ball."

Aside from teaching people the core skills they need to become better at the game, the club has also sparked

new friendships for many of the players, including Joe.

"Before we set up this team, we were trying to think of ways to help increase Joe's friendship circle," says Dan. "Now, he's made some really good friends. They high five each other when they arrive, say goodbye when they leave and if someone's missing one week, they care enough to ask why. He was able to invite them all to his birthday last year, sends and receives Christmas cards and we're trying to arrange some Saturday get-togethers between him and one of the other players he gets on particularly well with. And it's all happened naturally, over the love of the game, which is how the best friendships start."

The highlight for the team was a group visit to watch Bristol City play

The team was set up by support worker Natasha Paphitis, herself a trained football coach, with help from a Small Sparks grant last year.

"Tash supports Joe and they're both footie-mad. Joe is a big Manchester United fan," explains service manager Dan Roach. "She wanted to find a way for him to expand on his passion whilst also giving him the chance to increase his social circle and so the idea came about."

Joe is Assistant Coach to Tash, helping pump up the balls and take

Boccia tournament fun!

People we support from our ROC Wellbeing services took part in their annual accessible Boccia Tournament in December, ending the year with some festive rivalry!

Boccia is a precision ball sport that can be played by people with physical disabilities.

ROC Active Torbay were thrilled to be crowned 2019 Champions!

"This event brings all the services together for some fun and games before the Christmas break," says Lily Palmer, Sports Enabler for ROC Active Torbay. "We always add a few new

activities so the people we support get to improve their skills as well as try something new. It is always a great atmosphere!"

ROC Active is run by United Response and gives people with learning and physical disabilities the chance to stay fit and healthy through specialised gym sessions and sports, including volleyball, badminton and swimming.



last year, complete with front row seats and a photo opportunity with the players.

Coach Tash is now thinking of ways to get the team moving onwards and upwards:

“We’re in talks with Weston College to arrange some friendlies and hope to affiliate to a league,” she said. “It’s so rewarding seeing the players be part of a team, playing a sport they love.”

“If someone’s missing, the others care enough to ask why.”

And no one loves it more than Joe!

“This team means the world to him – he’s only ever missed a session when he’s been too poorly to come,” says Dan. “We have players who travel a couple of junctions on the motorway just to come and play for an hour. It’s been a real success story.”



In this new feature, we get to know a bit more about two people we support. This issue, we’re finding out about Katie Knowles and Jade Caring, who live in London.

My favourite place to go:

KK: Chessington World of Adventures because it is fun.

JC: Algarve, Portugal, because this was my 18th birthday location.

The thing I most hate:

KK: Spinach, because I don’t like the taste of it.

JC: Spiders, because webbed ones really scare me.

Favourite celebrity:

KK: Little Mix, because they are a good band.

JC: Gary Barlow, because he is multi-talented and a really good role model.



Most annoying celebrity:

KK: Jeremy Kyle because I find him irritating.

JC: - Jordan/Katie Price because her attitude and viewpoints really get on my nerves.

Best TV show:

KK: Great British Bake Off.

JC: The Inbetweeners, because I find it very funny. Jay is my favourite character.

Person or thing that makes me most happy:

KK: Going to Battersea dog/cat home.

JC: My cats, because they remind me of my nan.

What I’d change about the world:

KK: Having a different UK PM.

JC: No more wars and conflict.

What makes me sad:

KK: People being rude to me.

JC: Thinking about my late granny.

What matters most to me:

KK: Having an active and fun life.

JC: Travelling the world. I recently went to Mexico.

What makes good support:

KK: Being treated the way you want to be treated.

JC: Fulfilling all the required needs.

What makes bad support:

KK: Staff mistreating people.

JC: Not being listened to.

Thing I’m most proud about:

KK: Having a lovely family.

JC: Being able to travel the world.

Thing I want to get better at:

KK: Knowing the time.

JC: Getting out and about more.

“If I could change the world I’d get a new Prime Minister for the UK.”

Thing I’d most like people to know about people with learning disabilities:

KK: That we can live busy, fun lives if we get the right support from organisations like United Response.

JC: They can be like everybody else with the right support.

My perfect support worker is:

KK: Alice Walsh because she is a great support worker. She supports me when I’m down and always makes me happy.

JC: Sarah Knight because she supported me through a hard time.



New CQC guidance to reduce risk of closed cultures

In 2019, BBC's Panorama special exposed the culture of abuse and human rights breaches of people with a learning disability at Whorlton Hall. It reinforced how important it is for everyone involved in the care of people with learning disabilities or autism to identify closed cultures, where abuse and human rights breaches may be taking place.

The CQC has now released updated guidance for their inspectors to help them spot signs of closed cultures which is freely available to members of the public who want to understand more about the risk factors.

If you would like to understand more about this, you can access the guidelines at www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20191101_closedcultures_supportinginformation_summary.pdf

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
- to the Chief Executive of United Response
- to your local Social Services, Health Authority, Local Government Ombudsman
- to the Care Quality Commission
- to the Supporting People Administrative Authority

And remember, you can always call our Head Office on 020 8246 5200 or our Chief Executive Hotline on 020 8254 3135.

Got the cold weather blues? Booking a holiday just got easier!

The HFT has a comprehensive holiday guide designed to help families and carers of people with disabilities find specialist holidays. It covers the UK and abroad and is crammed with advice on tour operators, what funding and grants are available to help, disability-welcoming insurers and accessible places to stay.

You can download the guide for free at: www.hft.org.uk/our-services/family-carer-support-service/fcss-updates/holiday-information-guide

Or for those who would prefer a copy by post, email familycarersupport@hft.org.uk or call 0808 801 0448.



Our commitment to safeguarding and support for people raising concerns and whistleblowing

The Trustees of United Response and its Directors are committed to making sure the people we support are safe and are free from abuse of any kind. We believe that everyone we support, their families, our staff and anyone who comes into contact with the work we do should be treated fairly and with respect.

United Response will meet this commitment, in particular by ensuring that:

- We listen to the people we support and their family members and follow up on what we are told.
- We have considered, sensitive and up to date policies and procedures to help our staff safeguard the interests of those we support and that such policies, procedures and training are followed at all times.
- We will review any events that could suggest any possible failures to safeguard the interests of those we support and take steps to improve the way we support people.
- We have in place considered, safe and up to date practices to recruit and train our staff and that such practices are followed at all times.

- We communicate with staff on a regular basis to explain what abuse is and what staff should do if they feel that someone maybe being abused or harmed.

We communicate with staff on a regular basis to encourage people to raise concerns and that we will explain how we will protect anyone who 'Whistleblows'. United Response aims to be open and transparent in relation to any instances or suggestions that it has or may have failed to safeguard the interests of those we support and we will apply lessons learned.

Our Director of Quality and Practice, Sarah Battershall, will lead these critical aspects of our work. Those we support, their families, staff and others who come into contact with our work should feel free to contact her at sarah.battershall@unitedresponse.org.uk if they have any concerns or want to share good practice and stories.

People we support, their families, staff and others who come into contact with our work who have any concerns about potential abuse or that we are not meeting our commitments can also contact a local manager, area manager or the Head of Quality & Safeguarding, Michael Brent Michael.brent@unitedresponse.org.uk

Anyone with any concern that United Response is not safeguarding the interests of those it supports, their families, staff or others who come into contact with its work, can also contact Tim Cooper, our CEO at tim.cooper@unitedresponse.org.uk or call our Confidential hotline number 020 8254 3135.

Having learning disabilities, autism or mental health needs can make finding and keeping a job difficult. Only 6% of people with learning disabilities and 25% of people with long-term mental health needs are in paid work. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Bethan, left, supported Becky to become an Academic Support Worker



Spotlight on employment

United Response runs thriving specialist supported employment services throughout Cornwall, York and Greater Manchester. There, our staff pound the streets of their communities, forging links with local businesses, challenging limiting stereotypes and proving through hundreds of success stories why people from these overlooked groups are worth hiring. Here, we find out how staff at our supported employment service in York are doing their bit to level the playing field for people we support.

BECKY'S STORY

45-year-old Becky, who has Asperger's, came to United Response full of ambition, but lacking direction. As a single mum, she needed a job that fitted around her family commitments, but was struggling to find something that she enjoyed.

"Becky is an extremely intelligent woman with a university degree but was so keen to work that she was literally applying to every job she saw," explains Bethan, her job coach. "She'd apply for several jobs a day, but they were often too far away, or required a driving license, or just weren't the kind of thing she'd actually get any enjoyment out of doing. Her self-esteem was low and she didn't really think she was worthy of holding out for a job that she'd actually like, in a place that she'd be happy to be."

Bethan and Becky met regularly to sift through potential job vacancies and finesse her applications. It soon became clear that one of the things preventing her from getting through to interviews was her inability to talk in depth about herself.

"It's very common for people with autism to come across rather direct and to-the-point when talking about themselves, but employers are looking for people who can sell themselves," explains Bethan. "For Becky, this didn't come naturally so I encouraged her to use the person spec as her prompt. Having a clear list of points to refer to made it easier for her to structure the kind of in-depth response employers were looking for."

Soon, Becky started to make more progress with her applications. But

with more success, came more anxiety.

"Interviews are a pretty high-stress situation for anyone, but for someone with autism or Asperger's, it can be a minefield," says Bethan, "One of the biggest causes of anxiety for Becky was the unpredictability of the questions. Some employers will supply questions in advance as part of the reasonable adjustments someone applying under the Disability Discrimination Act can request. But some are less amenable, so I also set up lots of mock interviews between Becky and me so she could practice in a safe environment. This really helped her feel more prepared and confident."

When Becky was invited to interviews, Bethan would go with her



When James, in his thirties, was referred to our supported employment service he was recovering from a sustained period of ill-health. He'd had a few short-lived jobs when younger, but hadn't been in a position to look for anything permanent for a very long time. He was highly motivated and keen to work, but needed a little help to get his foot through the door.

"James was a very employable person," explains Ramsay Taylor, manager at our York Supported Employment service, "What he lacked was experience, and a realistic understanding of what having a job involved. We needed to find a way of managing his expectations so that he wouldn't be setting himself up for failure, without squashing any of his ambition, which was great to see."

One of the ways our supported employment services prepare people with no or limited experience of work is to arrange workplace visits. These are organised with local, amenable employers and give people the opportunity to talk to staff about what they do, watch, learn and get to grips with the kinds of tasks that different roles require. James was keen to work in a frontline catering position,

so Ramsay organised visits to Burger King, Costa Coffee and MacDonald's.

"What these workplace visits did was show James that even an entry-level job wasn't going to be easy," says Ramsay, "He would still need to learn how to do things, and juggle a lot of different skills: serving customers, handling money, multitasking. By coaching him through this with practical sessions, we were able to make sure he knew what to expect. And that makes success a lot more likely."

Some of the workplace visits included 'working interviews'. These are a more accessible way for employers to get to know how a potential employee might perform and for applicants to demonstrate their skills. For someone like James, this was invaluable.

"It was feedback from these working interviews that highlighted something James needed to work on – his enthusiasm!" explains Ramsay, "For whilst he definitely wanted the jobs, his manner didn't always show it. We explained that if he wanted to thrive in these kinds of industries, he needed to work on his tone and get-up-and-go."

James listened and was thrilled when he finally got the break he'd

been waiting for, working in a nearby MacDonald's. He now works there two days per week and his confidence has shot sky high, giving him the motivation he needed to get his own flat.

"Without the help of United Response I would never have got a job," says James, "Working has given me more get-up-and-go, more structure. I meet more people and can afford to buy Christmas and birthday presents for my family. I want other people like me to know that they can find the right support for them – the whole service was so personal."

“ Without the help of United Response I would never have got a job. ”

"James and Becky both came to us with very different needs," says Ramsay, "We supported them in different ways – some emotional, some practical – but they got their jobs by being motivated and working hard. We're just thrilled that all of the employers we work with have got to see what valuable and committed employees the people we support can make."

for moral support and to rephrase any tricky questions.

After four interviews, Becky finally found a job that matched her skillset and her interests perfectly: she was hired as an Academic Support Worker at the University of York. She now works ten hours over two days, taking notes for students with disabilities during lectures and seminars.

Her travel to and from work is covered by Access to Work funding, which she was supported to apply

for, and Bethan continues to work closely with Becky and her line manager.

"Becky's managers have been really receptive to the guidance we've given them about making reasonable adjustments," says Bethan, "They are careful about how they plan her shifts as they know how important routine is to her. They don't change them at short-notice and give her days off inbetween so she doesn't get overtired."

For Becky, having the benefit of a job coach every step of the way has been nothing but a positive experience.

"Working with a United Response job coach has been really helpful." she says, "It has taken the pressure out of interviews, which I previously found extremely nerve wracking. Bethan has helped me with my self-esteem and feeling worthy. Before, I accepted any type of work because of my Asperger's. Now, I love my new job – it's the type of work I've always dreamed of doing."

Thanks to our fundraising superheroes!

We'd like to say a huge thank you to everyone who supported us in 2019. Thank you for helping us give people the support they need to live equal and fulfilled lives.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to every single person who has donated money, given their time, left a gift in their will, or run, walked or cycled to raise money for United Response.

The Winter Wonderwheels

In December, our Teddington Enterprise community hub brought together a team of superheroes to take on the Winter Wonderwheels midwinter run around Dorney Lake.

Enterprise team leader Matt recruited Jago and Bobby to join him on a 5K run, while Batman (A.K.A. Enterprise staff member Ross) reached out to his mortal enemy the Joker (Rob), to challenge him to the 10K race.

With the teams in place, the training began. Batman and the Joker clearly hadn't been fighting crime or making trouble for a while – they were both left doubled over after their practice 5K runs!

On 1 December our team of five intrepid superheroes assembled at Dorney Lake. They were keen

£350 raised!

to start running as it was a very cold morning! The teams started together, but Batman and the Joker quickly raced off ahead, keen to outdo one another.

One 5K circuit of the lake later, Matt, Jago and Bobby went to warm up with a well-deserved hot chocolate. Meanwhile, Batman and the Joker went round the lake twice, with the Joker pulling ahead and finishing first – much to Batman's disappointment!

Penny's great north challenge

Penny ran the Great North Run in September and raised over £1,400 for our Boot Shop in Easingwold, York. The Boot Shop helps people with disabilities to learn new skills and develop their own business ideas.

The money Penny raised will help

create a much needed outside area for people to socialise and relax in, learn new skills, hone their talents, and work on projects together.

Many of the people we support at the Boot Shop have been inspired by Penny's achievement, and the



To Penny, Matt, Jago, Bobby, Ross and the rest of our superstar fundraisers and much for helping us put people with disabilities in charge of their own lives.



Everyday giving

You don't have to be a marathon runner, long distance cyclist or mountain trekker to raise funds to support our work!

There are lots of ways to help people with disabilities while going about your normal day to day activities. You could support us by shopping online, or even just through your everyday internet searches!

For more information either call our fundraising manager, Darren on 07585 882 300 or visit www.unitedresponse.org.uk/everyday-ways-to-give



The challenge of a lifetime

If you'd like to challenge yourself whilst raising funds to help people with disabilities and mental health needs visit our website at: www.unitedresponse.org.uk/Events or call our fundraising manager, Darren, on 07585 882 300.

You can find out more about the Snowdon Triple Challenge (involving walking, kayaking and cycling), trekking to Machu Picchu, the Lake District 5 Peaks Challenge and many more.

They were all running for a good cause – and together they've raised hundreds of pounds for the Enterprise, a vital community space for adults with disabilities from across Richmond and Kingston.

And this isn't the end! They'll be back in the summer

with a team of heroes of all abilities for another accessible Superhero Series challenge.

We would like to thank all the heroes that donated to and supported the Richmond and Kingston Enterprise team's epic fun run at Winter Wonderwheels!

money will also go towards helping them start a health and wellness activity group.

Penny said: "What's important to me, is that the funds raised will help this amazing charity achieve some of their ambitious plans for the people they support. We are absolutely stunned by the generosity

of local people, family and friends. We are bowled over and extremely grateful to the residents and businesses of Hambleton who have given so freely. Thank you!"

£1,400 raised!

supporters from last year: thank you so



Practice Development

John Ockenden, from our Practice Development Team, explains Positive Behaviour Support

For many people we support, life sometimes gets so hard to cope with that, in a state of anxiety, confusion or frustration, they behave in ways that others find difficult. We call this challenging behaviour, or behaviour that challenges, as a way of saying that it's not the person's fault, it's their circumstances that need to change.

But it's not easy to remember that when actually supporting a person whose behaviour is challenging. Without meaning to, we tend to see the behaviour as a problem that needs to be fixed, and we feel strong emotions that get in the way of understanding what's really going on. As a result, the behaviour tends to get more challenging and damaging for the person and all who want the best for them.

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) is a way of working that helps anybody supporting a person whose behaviour can be challenging to be more objective in identifying reasons for the behaviour occurring. Then PBS helps us plan changes to the person's support and their circumstances so the behaviour is less likely to happen, or have the same impact, in the future. PBS works, and is the approach now required by Government and regulators.

We've been training staff in PBS for over 10 years and have now employed a National Coordinator, Marie Cresswell, as part of our Practice Development Team. Marie is managing a network of leads and coaches (you can see more details in the feature on the right) who help staff get better at using it.

But PBS is not limited to staff and other professionals. The Challenging Behaviour Foundation is a family-run organisation providing PBS training and advice. They have lots of resources on their website (www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk) available for anybody to use to improve support for people whose behaviour is challenging.

“ I had never heard of Positive Behavioural Support ... [but] ... found this was the best way to support my daughter, taking into account who she is, how she experiences life and what she might want in her life. ”

Kate, quoted in The CBF's (2019) Family Carer Information Pack

Our staff often support people who display behaviours that challenge and we've been training them in Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) for many years with some success; but we've realised that they need more than that.

One of the improvements we've made in the last couple of years is to introduce PBS Coaches into our workforce. These are experienced staff who take a local lead in improving PBS, usually providing advice and guidance to their colleagues as part of their existing job, but sometimes being given dedicated time to concentrate on it.

They help with analysing situations and working out how to support a person better. And they're called coaches because they show their colleagues better ways to work, then observing and giving them feedback on their support. Sometimes they help by cutting through professional language; very often they look at written plans and work out ways to make them better or easier to understand.

PBS coaches also know what's happening in their locality, and can be quick in identifying where their advice might be needed. And they are trainers which means we can increase what's available and provide PBS training to all staff soon. Additionally these coaches meet annually and share their experiences to learn from other.

To become a PBS coach, staff go through a rigorous selection and training programme (run by the British Institute for Learning Disabilities), and they are part of a new network of PBS



PBS Coaches: providing better support

specialists across the organisation, all designed to improve the ways we support people so they are less likely to display behaviours that challenge in the future.



Here's an example of what they do. Anna Mulligan, pictured left, is a PBS coach working in York. She was called in when Brendon's staff team began to struggle: he was hurting himself,

running away and damaging his house and nobody was sure what to do. This sort of behaviour had led to previous placements breaking down. As part of her work Anna talked with Brendon: he explained that he felt people always let him down and that he couldn't trust anyone; by closely observing how staff supported Brendon, Anna could see that without meaning to they would accidentally disappoint him or talk about something that didn't in fact happen. They didn't

realise he thought they were making a promise. As a result Brendon did little, and felt betrayed and angry.

It wasn't easy for Brendon's staff to see what was actually happening, but because of Anna's role she had a better perspective and could tell them what needed to change. She showed them how to support Brendon, suggesting activities and then making sure that they actually happened. She observed them working with Brendon and pointed out when they had casually mentioned things that he interpreted as a promise. Over time Brendon got more active and started to trust the support workers; he started to meet and enjoy the company of many new people; and behaved in challenging ways much less frequently. Other people noticed too. His clinical psychologist said she was amazed at the difference in Brendon following Anna's work.

Brendon's cousin said: "I used to try to spend time with Brendon when we were getting to be adults

“ Brendon's clinical psychologist was amazed at the difference following Anna's work ”

together, but he was always so moody and often would refuse to come out. Nowadays he's like a different man and seems to do much more - which is really pleasing, because it's good for him"

Brendon is much more active, and he knows what to expect in his day, doing at least three specific activities each day. His levels of behaviour have dropped from happening two or three times a week to almost never, and staff strive for consistency. Without Anna's help as a PBS coach they might never have realised what Brendon really needed. But with consistent and committed support Brendon is going from strength to strength.

James, chatting to Team Manager
Matthew Campbell



Calling time on loneliness

The UK is facing a loneliness epidemic. Latest research suggests that 9 million people feel lonely some or all of the time, and if you have a disability, you're four times more likely to feel lonely than the rest of the population.

At United Response, we believe one of the key ways to combat loneliness amongst people with learning disabilities is to help them build solid connections with the people and places in their community. Which is why in 2017, we set up a community hub in the heart of Teddington to do just that!

Sat just off the busy high street in Teddington, The Enterprise is a bustling hub of activity, hosting everything from karate, circuit training and cookery to gaming, arts and crafts. Warm and always welcoming, it is a space for people with learning disabilities to get together, catch up with friends, learn new skills and work on their confidence.

Matthew Campbell is the Team Leader at the Enterprise and explains why he thinks loneliness is becoming a growing problem for the people with learning disabilities he meets:

"The sad reality is that for many people with learning disabilities, the only people they see are their families or people paid to support them," he explains, "Austerity has only made it harder: lots of people have had their funding reduced, meaning their time with a support worker is more restricted to help inside the home. People with mobility issues can find it particularly hard to get out.

"We created the Enterprise to give people who are anxious about going out and about on their own – be that because of the way they are perceived by members of the public or lack of confidence – a safe space in the heart of the community to be themselves."

Every activity held at the Enterprise is designed to help people work on all three aspects of their wellbeing: physical, mental and social. External teachers come in to hold 12-week art sessions which culminate in an

exhibition which friends and family members are invited to attend. These sessions are inclusive, giving people a way to express themselves in new ways and feel a sense of pride when they see their efforts on display for others to appreciate.

What happens at the Enterprise is heavily influenced by the particular interests of the people coming along, explains Matthew.

"We knew one young man who wasn't confident about leaving the house, so we visited him and asked him what kind of things he'd like to see us do at the Enterprise that might encourage him to come along. He's very into online gaming so we decided to start a games night and see what interest we got.

We began holding just one session a month, but it quickly became so popular that we had to move it to

once a week. It attracts people from 20 – 40 years old and has given him the chance to mix with people outside of United Response who love gaming, just like him. That's a huge, first step towards a real friendship and that's one of our ultimate goals for all the people we support here."

Two people who have seen their friendship blossom since coming to the Enterprise are Ian and Mandy. Already friends, they used to sometimes meet up in coffee shops but were left feeling uncomfortable because of the way people looked at them. Since joining the Enterprise, they get to meet up twice a week in a place they feel at ease.

"If it wasn't for the Enterprise I'd be bored with nothing to do," says Mandy, "Having a place to go makes me feel less lonely."

It's a sentiment echoed by James, who has been coming to the Enterprise for just over two years.

"I like coming here to meet new people," he explains, "Everyone here is approachable. If I don't have

anyone to speak to I can get lonely – I have a strong sense of stranger danger so am careful about who I talk to."

As well as bringing people with learning disabilities together through fun activities and drop in sessions within the Enterprise, there is also another agenda – to encourage people to feel more socially confident to explore and engage in the wider community outside.

“Friendship is one of the ultimate goals we have for the people we support here.”

Around once a week, Matthew organises day trips. Past outings have included visits to tourist attractions or exhibitions around London, beach jaunts to Brighton and Littlehampton, as well as trips to the cinema, bowling and leisure centres. They also work closely with local SEN schools, going in regularly throughout the year to talk about what they do and give people a

glimpse of what's on offer when they leave education, hopefully nipping in the bud any risk of isolation after moving to adult services.

One of Matthew's key ambitions is to make the Enterprise a social hub that's accessed by everyone in the community, and not just people with learning disabilities. But he knows that realising this would involve a big culture change in the way members of the public view people with learning disabilities.

"When people think about people with learning disabilities they are often focused on what makes them different from themselves," says Matthew, "So I'm trying to find ways to make them focus on what makes them the same. We started the ball rolling by offering to hire out our space when we're not using it. Two local ladies, Ann and Catherine, who run *Handmade Workshops*, a community arts and crafts initiative, use the Enterprise space for free, on the understanding that they allocate a certain number of spaces in their sessions for people with disabilities.

"And it worked – I watched them all mingling together at the Christmas do and all barriers were down. They were just a group of people who all liked crafts just getting along. And that's how it should be."



From left: Mandy and Ian; enjoying karate; one of the contributors to the art exhibition



If someone you know would be interested in going to the Enterprise, get in touch at matthew.campbell@unitedresponse.org.uk

EXHIBITION

The Autism Show

12th-13th June, Excel Centre, London

19th-20th June, NEC Birmingham

26th-27th June, EventCity, Manchester

Pick and choose from over 100 hours of talks, clinics and workshops, plus hundreds of specialist products and services at these national events run by the National Autistic Society.

For information on ticket prices and availability, email info@autismshow.co.uk



FESTIVAL

Festability

20th June 2020, Quex Park, Kent

Does your relative love music but find festivals a bit too overwhelming? Then why not give Festability a try? Organised by parents of children and adults with disabilities, it offers people a chance to experience the thrill of live music in a safe and disability-conscious environment. As well as the usual fun activities found at mainstream festivals, Festability also includes quiet, chill out zones with sensory lights and sounds, a Changing Places suite, qualified staff to assist on the day and a karaoke tent.

Tickets cost £15, or £55 for a family ticket (must include two children)

For more info and up-to-date news about the festival, go to:
<https://festability.co.uk>

THEATRE

A Little Space

12th-16th May

The Place, London

Gecko and Mind the Gap present their latest production, exploring what it means to have a little space. Is it a chance to be ourselves with no one watching, or an unpredictable space where voices are funnelled away, fears leak through storyboards and songs light up the room?

Gecko is an award-winning physical theatre company and creates theatre designed to inspire, move and entertain.

Mind the Gap is one of Europe's leading learning disability theatre companies.

To book tickets, go to:
www.geckotheatre.com/a-little-space

FILM

Autism and Cinema: an exploration of neurodiversity

2nd-29th April

The Barbican, London

This season brings together a diverse selection of films, from documentary to animation, to genre-twisting fiction and experimental film-making from within the autistic community, and asks how the language of cinema can be challenged and changed by autistic perspectives.

All screenings will be relaxed.

For film listings, go to
www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2020/series/autism-and-cinema-an-exploration-of-neurodiversity