

Talkback

DEVELOPING A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES

Annual Report

2020-2021

Welcome

Equip to Learn

Personal Development and Skills

Employability

Your Voice








Foreword From the Chair of Trustees

Welcome to the review of our year; one like no other in the experience of Talkback and all involved with it. While there is no doubt that the pandemic has affected everyone in the country, the impact for people with learning disabilities and autism has been significant. Many of the usual services closed and people were unable to access alternatives; clear and understandable information about the pandemic was not readily available.

As you will see from this review of our year, at Talkback we wanted to ensure that we could continue to support everyone known to us, in whatever way we could. We offered a range of new group activity sessions online, introduced virtual social groups, developed Talkback TV, and had weekly telephone calls with people who were unable to use technology or did not have access to it. We also gathered comments about the impact of the pandemic and encouraged people to contribute thoughts, photos, artwork and poems for the Your Voice wall. This report and our website provides information about what we did and, more importantly, talks about the impact for some of our members.

None of this could be achieved without:

-  the staff of Talkback, who have adapted to new ways of working and have shown their creativity and passion to make things better for people we support
-  our members, who have told us what would make a difference to their lives and have enthusiastically joined in with a different sort of Talkback experience
-  parents and carers, who have supported throughout, from encouraging participation to setting up the appropriate technology
-  funders - our usual ones and new funders that have met new needs, whether that be protective equipment for staff and members or new tablets to be supplied to people with no access to technology
-  the leadership and direction offered by Jay and his team.

I hope that you enjoy this small glimpse into the ways we have tried to make 2020 a year to remember - for positive reasons and not just for the pandemic.

Janice Campbell, Chair of Trustees.

Welcome From the Leadership Team

In a year where it's been so difficult to remain positive, celebrating the achievements we have made is more important than ever. At Talkback, against a backdrop of 'you're on mute' and 'can you turn your camera on', as well as 'uncertain times' and 'new normal', we've continued to grow and evolve and have some great successes to share.

At the core of these successes are our amazing staff. They have put their own concerns aside and focused on delivering creative and high-quality virtual sessions, supporting our members who have adapted and coped admirably in the face of adversity.

Our virtual sessions have developed into a wide array of fun and accessible activities. These include dance, cheerleading, talent shows, drama, art, disco nights, meditation and exciting partner-led sports sessions.

We've continued support in colleges through virtual, one-to-one provision, as well as running our community groups online. Where students have been digitally excluded, we've made phone calls and sent emails to ensure everyone is reached and have even provided computers to some individuals.

Whilst it's hard to picture returning to what we once knew as normal, the 'new normal' we have created has seen some positive additions to the service we provide. The popular Talkback TV YouTube resources now enable members to access activities around the clock, when they may not otherwise have had support.

We would like to thank our Trustees existing and the ones who moved on last year, all of whom have made significant impact and give us their time and expertise freely. They make such a difference.

As you read this report, we hope you do so with the level of pride we feel. Despite everything that the year has brought, we achieved so much together.

Thank you all.

Chris, Claire, Jay, Neil and Yasmin.



**“I like being in the Creative Media group,
I really enjoy the work we do.”**

Equip to Learn

At Talkback, we are deliberately different. Instead of placing our members into one service and leaving them to it, we work hard to ensure they are always moving forward; always growing. We are on a journey together.

This often begins in education. We provide one-to-one support in colleges, as well as community group sessions that develop social and life skills. We cover a wide range of skills: from managing health, to creative media, to driving theory and much more in between.

We are incredibly grateful to the college staff and tutors at Bucks College Group and BCA who work with us for the benefit of each individual.

We are also thankful for the Commissioners and SEND team at Bucks Council who have gone through a huge amount of change but continue to work tirelessly for the right outcomes.

Despite the significant challenges that the pandemic has brought, Equip to Learn has delivered a performance to be proud of, embracing a virtual delivery programme that has kept our students engaged and supported. Here are just some of our highlights.

In College



of students wanting to engage were delivered our curriculum virtually between March and July



personal interactions we made with students, supporting them through a difficult period

students completed the academic year in July

69

new students joined

73

47

students are now supported via Equip

14

students were provided with in-class support at Bucks College



For those students who are still shielding or suffering from anxiety, we deliver everything virtually

In the Community

We've successfully moved to the Micklefield Community Centre, with its access to green space.

20

community group sessions are now delivered every single week

In the World of Work

21

students take part in work experience placements every single week

Our partnerships with Sainsbury's, Green Dragon Eco Farm, Missenden Abbey and Road Farm continue to grow.

Our Walled Garden Group have been given their own private area to work on, helping them expand their skills and turn their fingers even greener.



Talkback

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**“I like being in the fresh air working on the farm.
My favourite is Pets Corner and the Wildlife Zone.”**

Personal Development and Skills

The Next Stage on the Journey

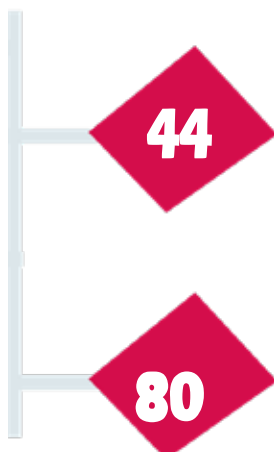
When our members leave college and progress into the adult world it's often a difficult time. We help them make this transition by working with them to develop real world skills, including travel training and employability. We are committed to ensuring that every single member develops new interests, new friends, increased confidence and has a lot of fun in the process.

When we were forced to close our buildings and services in March, we acted quickly to provide alternative provisions for our members. Maintaining social engagement became our top priority. During the first national lockdown we achieved the following:

phone calls to members



213 group virtual sessions were held, with a total of 1,695 attendances



1:1 sessions were delivered

reviews were held with members to understand what they needed during lockdown

Embracing the Virtual World

Throughout this challenging year, we have run our virtual programme for 5 days a week, offering 3 sessions every day. These included keep fit, dance, art, drama, mindfulness, and our ever-popular Friday fun sessions.



We created our YouTube channel, Talkback TV, which enables our members to access a wide range of useful and fun content, whenever they need it. We're proud of this sustainable resource. Take a look at it here.

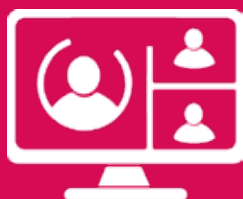
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We've also added a wide range of downloadable content to our website for members to engage with.

When we came out of the first lockdown we had already sourced additional Covid secure buildings. We were thrilled to welcome our members back to our face-to-face services. But we didn't forget those who were shielding and continued to provide significant virtual resources. From August to December, our numbers are impressive.

345



virtual sessions were delivered

hours of dance and movement activities

142



members danced and moved

hours of art and mindfulness sessions

53

128

65

members participated



“I went to my GP. He said my cholesterol was not good. Talkback helped me with my diet and exercise.” Gareth, Member



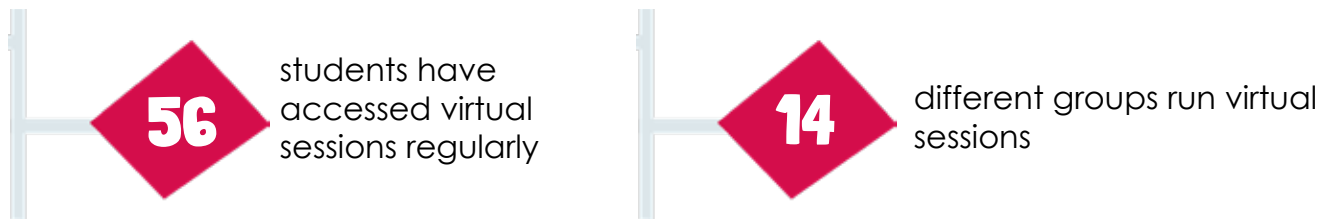
Sports Academy

Our Sports Academy, established in 2019, has provided our members an opportunity to participate in a wide range of accessible sports and physical activity, always focused on their health and wellbeing. We've worked with some great partners including Wycombe Badminton Centre and Halton Tennis Club. We've also enabled some of our members to become coaches too.

It's a statement of the obvious but it has been more of a challenge than ever this year to stay active, but our Sports Academy has been the driving force behind the hugely successful virtual dance and 'wake up shake up' sessions, as well as some great sports videos on Talkback TV.

We've extended our virtual offer to include sessions led by community partners, including Fight Klub (boxing), Cheerleading and Bollywood Dancing. Our focus is on having fun, increasing activity levels, boosting physical health and promoting the importance of mental wellbeing. We hope to encourage members to gain the confidence and skills to continue to practise these sports and activities in their own time.

We'd like to thank our long-term partner Leap for their help in putting many of these activities in place. We remain incredibly grateful for their time and expertise in everything they do for us and our members.



Outcome Achieved by Gareth

"I went to my GP. He said my cholesterol was not good. Talkback helped me with my diet and exercise." Gareth, Member

During lockdown, we provided Gareth with a laptop to enable him to join our virtual programme, where he attended dance and fitness sessions which helped him to reach his goals. The regularity of the virtual programme, plus weekly Teams calls to review progress, has helped Gareth maintain a clear structure to his week.

Keeping Care Home Residents Active

Thanks to funding through Heart of Bucks and Leap, we have recently started the distribution of 'Activity Packs' into care homes so that residents have access to equipment to use for virtual sports sessions.



Employability



The next step in a person's journey is often to enter the world of work. Obtaining paid employment remains a challenge for those with a learning disability or autism, but we continue to work hand in hand with our members to break down the barriers that exist.

Through our job clubs, we teach employability skills and build confidence to take into the world of work. Employment not only gives the potential of achieving financial independence, but can vastly increase individuals' self-esteem and self-worth, as well as increasing their social circle.

We work hard to support our members and have the benefit of working with partner organisations. We are part of the Bucks & Milton Keynes Workability Forum, a consortium of organisations throughout Buckinghamshire, as well as the Bucks Supported Employment Forum. We are also members of BASE, The British Association of Supported Employment, and we have formed

strong links with DWP personnel. These partnerships provide us with a pool of employers and small businesses who are signed up to the Disability Confident Scheme.

And we never rest on our laurels. Work is currently underway to develop and roll out Work Experience/Internships with several key employers within Buckinghamshire.

We remain incredibly grateful to the organisations that support us in helping members into employment. Here are just a few of them.

Sainsbury's



Building Better Opportunities

BBO Support into Employment helps people with a learning disability or autism in Milton Keynes and Aylesbury to find work. This project brings together funding from the Big Lottery Fund and the European Social Fund (ESF) to help tackle the poverty and social exclusion faced by the most disadvantaged people in England.



members participate in the BBO programme

members have secured paid employment

8

members have partaken in voluntary/work experience placements

19

members have regularly attended our job club

17

As well as the skills training and confidence-building provided through our Job Clubs, Talkback works with a diverse range of employers, who offer practical work experience opportunities in preparation for the world of work. Employment gives our participants financial independence, enhanced self-esteem, and a sense of purpose. It develops and expands social circles, to make people feel that they are an integral part of their community.

We want people with a learning disability or autism to be valued and respected in the workplace, and we continue to campaign tirelessly for this on behalf of our members.



A man with short dark hair and glasses is focused on pruning a tree. He is wearing a green polo shirt with a 'Volunteer' name tag and blue Aquamax work gloves. He is using red-handled pruning shears. On his left wrist, he wears a silver watch and a grey 'buddi' device. The background shows a garden with a brick building and a person in the distance.

Talkback

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“Talkback have really helped me throughout the years.”

“I really appreciate all their hard work, especially when I struggled remembering all the instructions.”

Your Voice

We've had an excellent year in Your Voice. The creation of our 'Your Voice Wall', which captures and expresses members' experiences of this unprecedented year, is one of our biggest achievements.

The Your Voice Wall has provided members the chance to showcase their creativity and unique perspective. It contains artwork, photography, poetry, short stories and reflections relating to how they have experienced this challenging year. We'd like to thank Simon Clay of Sly design who brought our vision for this website to life.

You can see the finished wall at www.yourvoicewall.co.uk

Advocacy work

Another branch of the Talkback journey is the provision of professional advocacy services, supporting our members to speak up for themselves. This involves liaising with professionals in councils, the Charity sector and the commercial world to ensure that, within each of these sectors, gaps are filled to provide for those with a learning disability or autism.

In Milton Keynes

"The weekly Talkback calls were a lifesaver for me"
Heather, Member, Milton Keynes.

We've helped our members, like Heather, navigate a challenging year; they've told us as much. Heather lost 5 stone (healthily) during this year which has hugely improved her health and wellbeing.

Using a range of communication channels, we've provided over 500 different interactions that have kept people engaged and able to cope with the challenges of 2020. Here are some of our other highlights.

Our social club in Milton Keynes has been virtual all year and we have engaged with over 20 people every week. We can't wait to open again fully and build on the amazing successes the team have achieved over the years; and to see all our members back.

Cameo

Our Come and Meet Each Other drop-in sessions (CAMEO) were initially replaced with phone calls at the start of lockdown. In early June we trialled Zoom sessions, with much success.



Keep Engagement Going

45



community engagement sessions have been held in 2020, exploring people's experiences of Covid, and developing coping mechanisms

Improving our Youth Forum

We've worked hand-in-hand with Milton Keynes College to breathe new life into our Youth Forum and plan to relaunch this in early 2021.

Always Learning

We have worked hard to develop new and innovative Autism Training and this is ready to launch in early 2021.

Winning New Work

In September we were commissioned by Milton Keynes Council to deliver a Covid related project on their behalf. The Council were keen to understand the effects of the pandemic on those with learning disabilities and autism, as well as carers and those staff in supported living provisions.

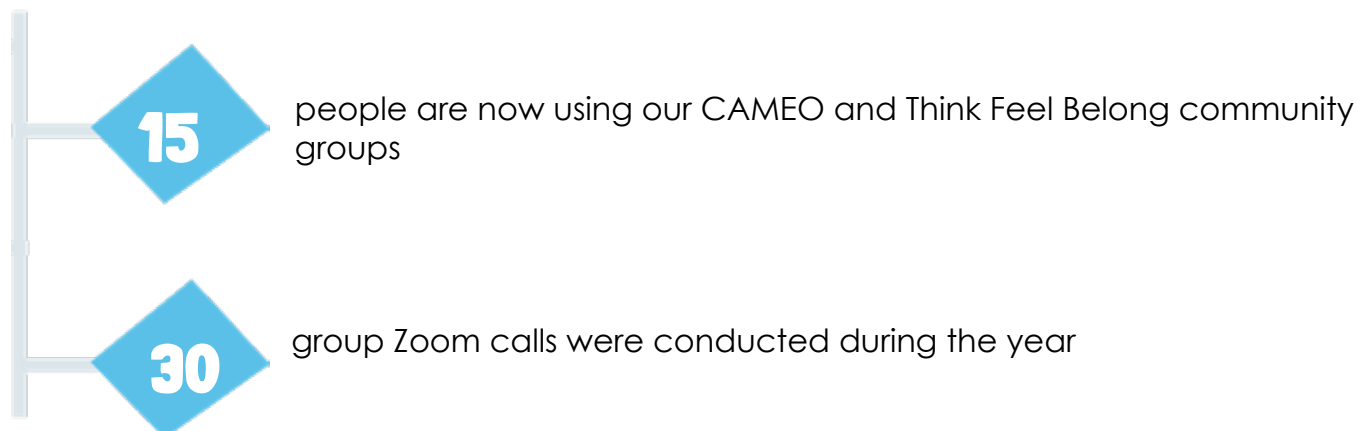
100+

interviews were conducted by our team over the final 3 months of 2020 to understand how Covid had affected people with a learning disability or autism

We decided to build on this work, outside of our contractual obligations, by interviewing both a learning disability nurse from the Milton Keynes University Hospital and a local service provider. This gave a wider perspective on how the pandemic has affected those with learning disabilities.

Community Engagement

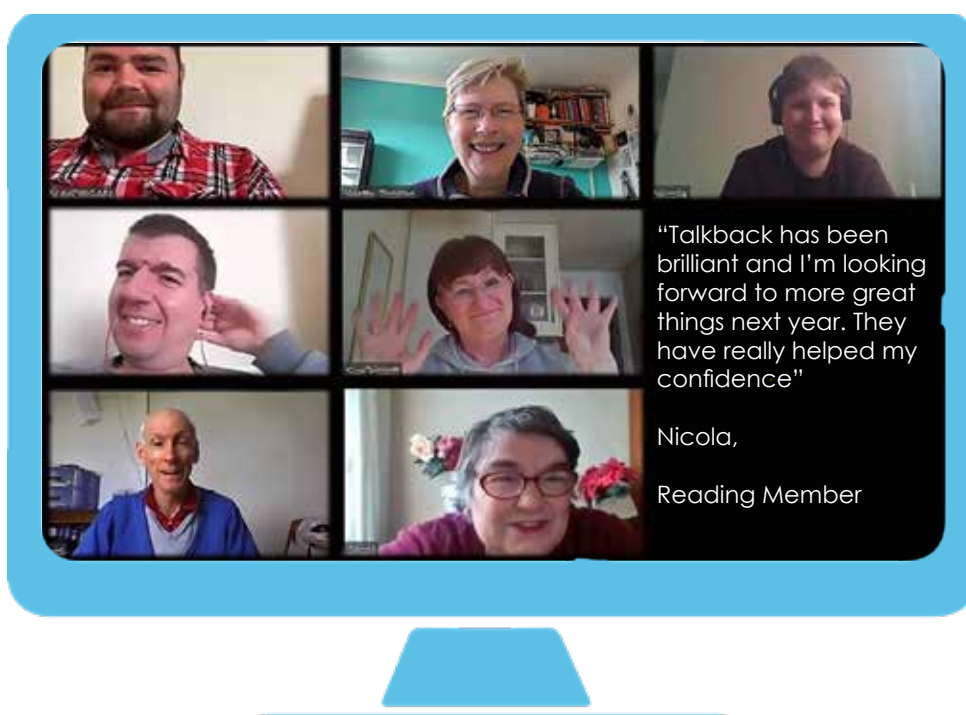
Despite the challenges of 2020, we have doubled the number of people we reach in Reading.



500+  **calls were made to members**

The text '500+' is in large white font inside a blue rounded rectangle. To its right is a white phone icon on a blue background. Further right, the text 'calls were made to members' is in bold black font.

We know our work has helped maintain the wellbeing of our members and prevented their mental health reaching crisis levels during extremely isolating times.



Averting Crisis

advocacy sessions have been completed in our Champion Unit for those in a state of crisis with their mental health

people have benefited from these sessions, by having the chance to talk openly about their experiences in the unit



12

24

Youth Forum

members in school or college took part in our Youth Forum and provided us with insight into the issues they face when transitioning between different learning environments



25

Realising Our Members' Potential

members took part in the first round of a specialised course at Reading College called 'Activate My Potential.' This will allow us to help our members make informed choices on voluntary work placements and other activities in their communities

10

In Buckinghamshire

We have worked closely with the Council and their excellent Community Safety team on two projects of note. We are examining the occurrence of domestic abuse against people with a learning disability, something which is widely unreported on, but we are aware is of huge concern. We are working with other organisations to tackle this.

Secondly, we are developing new video resources around cyber bullying and online safety which will feature members of our drama group. After being unable to put on the Christmas pantomime this year, this provides the opportunity for the drama group to channel their impressive talents.

In addition, we have initiated research into the lack of bereavement support and services available to those with learning disabilities. In 2021 we will start work on developing services that concentrate on this incredibly important area.

We have updated our ways of working and our look and feel to reflect the focus on the world of possibilities. This included updating our website to make the journey clear to everyone. Here are just a few of our other highlights:

Forever Developing

Over the year, we've invested in our people. Training and qualifications that we've provided include:

- City & Guilds Level 3 Award in Education
- OCNLR Level 2 Qualifications in Skills for Learning Support Practitioners
- NCFE Level 2 Qualifications in Challenging Behaviours
- Personal Safety Training
- As well as mandatory training in safeguarding and terrorism prevention

Our IT Infrastructure



New systems and capabilities allowed us to support our members through the pandemic. We have given over 40 tablets and PCs to those who had no way of connecting. The virtual programmes we have delivered throughout 2020 have helped us remain completely engaged with our members, as well as continuing to upskill our employees.

Thank you

In 2020, despite everything we had to deal with, we continued to develop a world of possibilities for all those we engage with.

Thank you to everyone who has played their part in 2020 and we look forward to continuing our journey together; a journey that will help us achieve our vision:

"To help everyone with a learning disability or autism embrace new opportunities, lead the fulfilling lives they want and actively contribute to their local community."

I hope you enjoyed reading this report. If there is more you would like to know, please contact me or any of the leadership team at Talkback directly. We'll make sure we're not on mute and the camera is on.

Thank you for journeying with us and for your support.

With my very best wishes,

Jeremy Hay
CEO
Talkback
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