

# The Talkback **Annual Impact Report** 2022



**Talkback**

DEVELOPING A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES



## A dedication



**We would like to dedicate this annual report to our good friend and colleague Etienne Ostercamp who, devastatingly, passed away at the beginning of 2022.**

Etienne worked with us for four years and brought so much joy, fun and knowledge to Talkback. Just knowing him was a privilege.

He is deeply missed.

# Welcome to our 2022 Annual Impact Report

Before we show you about the amazing year our members and our people have had, we wanted to share what being part of Talkback means to our members. They are the most important people to us. They are at the forefront of everything we do. Here's what they have to say

“

Talkback has helped me to become more confident this year.

“

I have enjoyed travel training and cooking. I feel more confident.

“

I have made some new friends.

“

My social life has improved and my organisational skills too, I feel more confident.

“

This gives me something to do, a distraction, a break from life. (this individual recently lost his mum)

“

I'm happy here.

We are continuously inspired by our members, who display resilience, bravery, patience and hard work every day. These are individuals who don't require sympathy, but simply want to be given the same opportunities in life as any other member of society.

In this day and age, many assume that this is a given for everyone, but systemic discrimination is still a reality for many autistic individuals and people with a learning disability.

At Talkback, we empower our members to speak their truth so they can advocate for themselves and enact change in their lives and the wider community.

## Our thanks

We would also like to take the opportunity to thank our Trustees, who give us their time and expertise to support our development. Our staff and volunteers who are just outstanding in making everything we do possible. And our Marketing Agency, Fivespoons, who day in and day out help us develop and communicate our message. They are a key part of the team.







# Foreword

**In 2022, we bounced back from the pandemic with renewed purpose and focus, stronger than ever after learning important lessons and establishing new ways of working. We have continued to deliver some virtual services in addition to our in-person sessions, as they have proved a useful and exciting way to reach more people.**

Though lockdowns are (fingers crossed) behind us, we faced new challenges with the cost-of-living crisis. Despite this, all of our groups have welcomed more members than ever before and we have introduced new programmes, as well as building on existing ones. We've approached new funders and successfully secured grants that have allowed us to expand our services.

Developing 'a world of possibilities' for our members and giving them the tools to thrive, remains at the core of our work. Whilst continuing to deliver our Education and Life Skills Programme, Personal Development, Employability and Professional Services, we have worked harder than ever to raise awareness around autism and learning disability in the wider community. This has included educating organisations with our Autism Insights Training; assisting Buckinghamshire Council to create their new all-ages Autism Strategy; working with Central North-West London (CNWL) NHS Trust and Milton Keynes Council to develop a Think Autism programme within Mental Health Services in MK; and producing educational online safety video resources which have been shared nationally.

Yet we know this only scratches the surface of the work that needs to be done to truly change perspectives and remove the barriers faced by the people we support. This year, our '20 years of neglect' campaign highlighted the empty promises made by those in charge, the lack of progress made to improve the situation for autistic individuals and people with a learning disability. At Talkback we refuse to sit around and wait for change to happen. We work tirelessly and creatively to find new solutions to old problems and revolutionise the system.

We focus on the 'journey' that Talkback members take with us, as they move through college, join community groups, progress to volunteer work, onto employment and our adult services. However, the most important journey is not only through our different programmes, but along each individual's route of development. These are the key outcomes that allow individuals to thrive in their lives.

So, this year we have structured our annual report around the outcome areas that our projects and services deliver.

Education and  
Independent  
Living Skills

Health and  
Wellbeing

Employability

Community  
Involvement

# Education and Independent Living Skills

**Many of our services centre around supporting our members in their education and developing skills that allow them to become increasingly independent.**

The issue we are addressing here is that mainstream education isn't adapted suitably for autistic individuals and people with a learning disability. Talkback's starting point is always with the individual and their needs, and we adapt our delivery to make things work for them.

“

In my time at Talkback, I've learnt how to do things safely, from making friends, to traveling independently. I've learnt how to public speak and discovered this is one of my specialties.

Our Young People Services (Equip) provides one-to-one support in colleges to ensure individuals get the most out of their education. We also deliver a wide range of group sessions outside of college that support our members to develop skills that go beyond the curriculum and increase independence. This year these included managing health and wellbeing, cooking, travel training, money matters, creative media, and driving theory. Members can choose to partake in groups that interest them. We are incredibly grateful to the college staff and tutors at Bucks College Group and BCA, who work together with us to achieve the best results for each individual.

Our Adult Development Services centre around fostering vital life skills. Leaving college and progressing to the adult world can be challenging. We help people make this transition by providing a pathway and working with them to develop real world skills.

Equally, some individuals will join us and start their Talkback journey later in their adult lives. They too will be able to develop skills to enhance their quality of life and pursue volunteer or employment opportunities if they want to.



# Education and Independent Living Skills

Drama is a key part of what we offer at Talkback. There are not many bigger shows of confidence, self-belief and expression than to get up on stage and perform a play. Our members have impressed us no-end this year with their acting talents.

Despite being the hottest day of the year, our talented members performed 'Talkbackalot' to the Accessible Workshop Group. Sadly, due to the heat, we had to cancel the performance to a wider audience.

The Christmas Panto is one of the traditions that both our staff and members hold dear at Talkback. This year 'Cinderfella', was happily performed to an audience of over 100 at Buckingham Park and enjoyed by all. Oh yes it was.





# Health and Wellbeing



**It doesn't matter how many important skills our members learn, if they have good health and mental wellbeing, they will be able to thrive in their lives.**

This year we've empowered individuals to take their health and wellbeing into their own hands.

“

I have found growth in myself and have developed confidence.

Our Come and Meet Each Other (or CAMEO as our members call them) sessions in Reading and Milton Keynes have given people the opportunity to meet others and participate in groups in their local community. Some individuals have gone on to find work, others have moved into a new home, or have ended relationships that were causing them stress.

We have helped people to recognise their health issues, attend their annual health checks and develop self-care habits. This wraps up our current work in Reading, but we know that the impact Talkback had on these individuals will be long-lasting.



# Health and Wellbeing

Sport is another key element to what we offer at Talkback. We provide our members with opportunities to participate in a wide range of accessible sports and physical activity. The aim is always to improve health and wellbeing. And, of course, to have fun.

We hosted a Commonwealth Games celebration week from the 1st – 5th August. 44 of our members enjoyed sports related activities and participated in our Sports Days at Holmer Green Sports Club. These involved parents, carers, trustees, funders, and partners, joining together for a fun day of inclusive sports.

12 members played cricket at Frieth CC, supported by a coach from Bucks Cricket Board. Netball, tennis, soft tennis, and cricket programmes have run throughout the year, which have developed members' coordination and team skills and engaged 68 people in activity.

A group of members who've become interested in badminton through Talkback have arranged amongst themselves to play badminton outside of session time, which is really great to hear.



# Talkback in numbers

## Education and Independent Living Skills

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15

**Community Groups**  
have run this year

52

**Students**  
Have accessed groups

97

**Adult Service Members**  
At the end of the year

## Employability

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24

**Students from Young People's Services**  
Accessed work experience placements

18

**Work Placements**  
Available for members across each week

28

**Members have worked**  
At The Accessible Workshop



## Community Engagement

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**85**

**Attendees at the**  
Talkback Advice Bureau

**25**

**Organisations using**  
Our free cyber training resources

**484**

**Trees planted in the Sensory Garden**  
In Milton Keynes

**4**

**Incredible members**  
Spoke at the Milton Keynes conference

## Health and Wellbeing

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**44**

**Members took part in**  
Our Commonwealth Games Sports Day

**12**

**Members played cricket**  
At Frieth Cricket Club

**14**

**Members learned to play**  
Badminton

**16**

**Members learned to play**  
Netball

# Employability

**For people of working age, having a job and contributing to society means so much more than just earning a wage. Employment gives a sense of purpose and opens up social opportunities.**

Whether this is in the form of a volunteering placement, work experience or paid employment, it's an important step in any adult's journey.

“

Having a job makes me feel more confident and it's good to mix with other people. Work gives me meaning.

For the past year, Talkback has worked in partnership with the National Trust at Cliveden. Four members have volunteered weekly, helping with important gardening tasks.

“

We have watched each individual grow with confidence and develop their skills for future employment.

**Cliveden Employment Coordinator**

Participants in our Supported Employment programme have embarked on paid work placements at Restore Hope, Harrison Catering, Bryant Dental and the Chiltern Lifestyles Centre. Many have been offered permanent paid positions off the back of these placements, which is a huge testimony to the hard work, dedication and skill they have displayed.

Other employers we have worked with this year include: Florence Nightingale Hospice Charity, SCOPE, The Ark Cafe, Wycombe Food Hub, Wycombe Museum, The Co Op, The National Trust and Sainsbury's. We are grateful for all their support.





## Focus on



## THE ACCESSIBLE WORKSHOP

The Accessible Workshop is our social enterprise initiative that enables adults with learning disabilities or autism to build real-world work skills and gain an understanding of how their skills and talents can be used to create positive social change. And we've had an incredible year. Our highlights include:

- Launching our new website, complete with an online shop
- Creating custom planters for Chris Evans of Virgin Radio. Chris said a personal thank you to Talkback on his breakfast show and on his Instagram.
- Opening our new High Wycombe Workshop.
- Launching The Accessible Workshop Intern Programme.



# Community Engagement

**Our commitment to members goes beyond delivering services. We want to create a more accessible world; one that is built with their needs in mind, allowing them to thrive outside of Talkback.**

To make this a reality, we must engage with our community, service providers, local and national organisations and beyond. We need to raise awareness of the experience of autistic individuals and people with learning disabilities and empower them to campaign for change.

“

I want to tell my story to a wider audience, to change the outlook with the public to increase their understanding of us – people only fear what they don't understand.



## The Talkback Advice Bureau

At the end of 2021, Talkback opened our Talkback Advice Bureau (TAB) drop-in service at The Front Room Café in High Wycombe. The TAB has provided support and advice to 19 individuals, helping them with issues from finding new social activities to dealing with paperwork and debt issues.

These were sometimes seemingly small issues, but being able to talk these through in a safe space made a world of difference to those we supported. This service has given many people the knowledge and skills to live more independently. We also began the creation of our Talkback Advice Bureau website, collating all the information autistic individuals and people with learning disabilities and their parents or carers might need.



# Community Engagement

## Community Cyber Safety Videos

On the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2022, Talkback premiered three short films promoting online safety at Cineworld High Wycombe.

Directed and filmed by Tom at Ultimate Films, the films feature the amazing acting skills of Talkback members and the stories are told from their unique perspective. Members and staff also worked on set, music, scripts, staging and props.

The films and training books have been shared nationally as a free resource



## Autism Insights Training

We have delivered our Autism Insights training to 500 people in organisations including Sue Ryder Hospice Care, DWP, MK Samaritans, Thames Valley Police, local GPs, Domestic Abuse teams in HW and Prospect Park Hospital.

Talkback employee, Nicola, sharing her lived experience of autism, has been an integral part of this training and her delivery and honesty has changed perceptions.

## Talkback co-design new sensory garden at the Campbell Centre, Milton Keynes

484 plants and trees were planted in a new sensory garden at the Campbell Centre, CNWL's inpatient mental health unit in MK. The garden was co-designed by Talkback members, to make it accessible and enjoyable for people who have sensitive sense perceptions.

# Community Engagement

## 20 years of neglect

This year we ran a campaign to examine whether the government and local authorities have met their objective to 'provide equality of opportunity so as many young people as possible can participate in education, training or employment.'

Education is a fundamental human right. Sadly, 20 years later, autistic young adults and those with learning disabilities are still struggling to access the transport needed to even get to their place of education or training due to local authority cuts.

We reached over 4,000 people with our campaign across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Linked In, raising awareness.

## Milton Keynes Central and North West London Conference

Talkback hosted two 'Think Autism' conferences with Central and North West London NHS Trust (CNWL) for over 150 mental health staff across Milton Keynes, to encourage them to change their processes and ways of working.

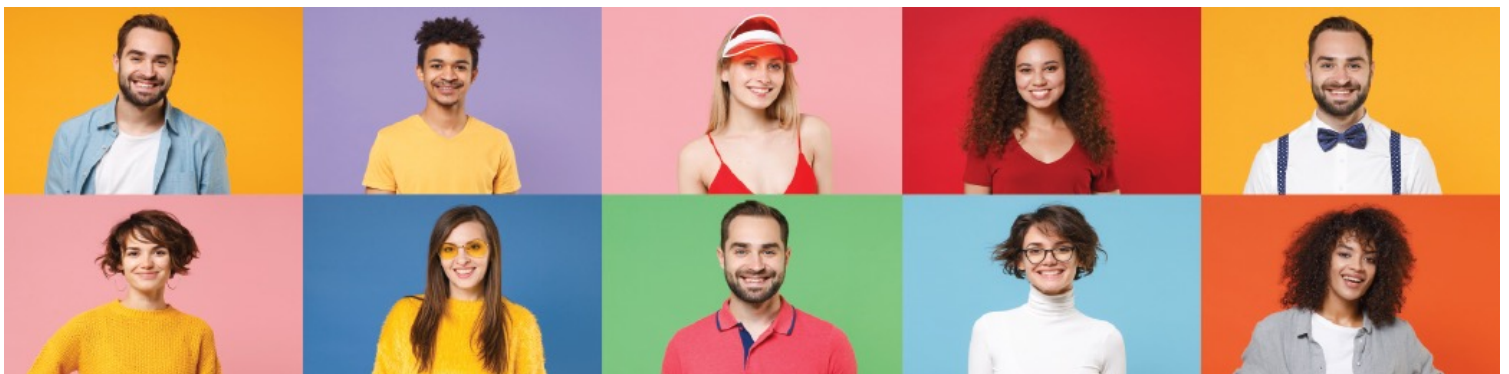
Four of our amazing members spoke about their experiences.

“

I felt on top of the world because I finally discovered my voice and I'm helping to change the way that autistic people are understood in mental health settings. I felt like I mattered on that one day.

## Bucks Autism Strategy

We helped Buckinghamshire Council with a co-production project to inform their all-ages Autism Strategy. To gather feedback on local services, Talkback undertook consultations with 423 individuals with lived experience of autism, and 9 organisations representing over 1000 other voices. This gave our members the chance to share their voice and be instrumental to the future of services for autistic individuals.





# Realising Internal Potential

## We're committed to investing in our staff teams and we make the same promises to our staff as we do to our members.

And that's to always listen to them, never assume anything and forever explore better ways to help fulfil their potential. They are an outstanding bunch of people. Notable courses and achievements included:

- 79 non-mandatory training courses were completed, including Level 2, Level 3, and professional courses.
- 30 staff members attended our internal Autism training sessions.
- 12 managers embarked on a coaching programme, to develop their skills and personal targets.
- Three sports workshops and two training days were delivered for project workers, member coaches and sports coaches.

### Recruitment

We increased the effectiveness of our recruitment campaigns, using social media, radio advertising, recruitment fairs, educational publications, and linking with Bucks New University. Our new Volunteer Coordinator joined us and has recruited 8 volunteers who now work across the organisation supporting our staff.



### A five star service

We are proud to announce that Talkback has received an 'excellent' 5-star rating in a recent assessment from Buckinghamshire Council. This is testament to the dedication of Talkback staff and management, who go the extra mile to create a caring and supportive environment.

“

When my son became involved with Talkback, I saw his confidence grow and observed him learning new skills. Being encouraged to take on challenges, without any pressure, added a new dimension to his world.



**Thomas Chettle of Bucks County Council embarked on a fundraising challenge by hiking the Yorkshire 3 Peaks, raising over £7,500 for Talkback.**

We'd like to thank Thomas and his team for their efforts in raising this money, which has been spent on The Accessible Workshop. You can see Thomas and the team from the workshop above.

**We'd also like to thank the following organisations for their funding support in 2022:**

- Leap
- Co op
- The National Lottery
- Police and Crime Commissioner
- They Hedley Foundation
- Red Kite
- Ocado
- Dan Maskell
- Shanly Foundation
- Heart of Bucks
- Paradigm Housing
- Arnold Clark
- MK Council and Bucks Council



# Looking to the future

**This year, Talkback members have so many achievements that show the world what autistic individuals and people with a learning disability can do.**

With support, understanding and small adjustments, they can achieve exactly the same things as anyone else, and more. This is why our aim at Talkback is very simple and is reflected in the manifesto written by our members, which you can see on the next page of this report. They merely want to be seen and treated as people. But unfortunately, removing the barriers to them accessing the opportunities they deserve, remains a challenge.

Local authorities are grappling with a £2.4bn “funding black hole” for special educational needs, with councils warning the impact on young people could be “catastrophic”. This means that the work Talkback does over the next 5 years will be more important than ever before. We must innovate to create new solutions to old problems and fill the gaps that the statutory services are unwilling to.

We know that by working with other key players and alongside those we support, we can make the world a place where autistic individuals and people with a learning disability can thrive.

Thank you for reading our Annual Report and for your part in our journey.



# The Talkback Manifesto

We want to be seen as people

who are valued, just like everyone else

who enjoy the same things as everyone else;  
sport, drama, shopping, and having fun

who don't deserve labels or stigma or discrimination

who can make their own decisions and  
have a right to be heard

who want to have relationships and find love

who have skills and abilities to positively change  
things around us

who want all the opportunities life can bring

who have so much to offer

"We want to be seen as people"



# Talkback

**DEVELOPING A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES**

## Contact us

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