

The Talkback **Annual Impact Report** Our work in 2023



Talkback

DEVELOPING A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES

Our commitments

to all our members

1

To provide a supported and safe place to allow you to prepare for the challenges of life.

2

To help you to explore and develop your unique skills and to build self-esteem and confidence.

3

To help you engage with services and employers so you can integrate into local communities and achieve your aspirations.

4

To ensure that each and every one of you has exactly the same opportunities as everyone else.

Talkback 2023 Annual Impact Report

How quickly a year flies by. Just like that, we find ourselves saying goodbye to 2023, a transformative and eventful year both within and outside of Talkback. From the rise of Artificial Intelligence to the continued cost-of-living crisis, and armed conflict seeing significant loss of life, the world is a very different place now than it was at the end of 2022.

Within Talkback we have seen new members and staff join us, new projects and initiatives introduced, new audiences reached, and it has not come without new struggles too. The climate we are operating in has become more challenging than ever before, local authorities are grappling with a 'funding black hole' which will result in cost-cutting measures that impact the people we support and Talkback directly- the vulnerable are always the easiest to target.

Yet while things around us continue to shift rapidly, we have innovated to forge our own path and one thing always remains the same at Talkback; our unwavering commitment to provide a world of possibilities for autistic people and those with a learning disability.

An overview of **Our services**

We continue to provide a transition pathway for all who join us, through our key service areas of education, engagement, and employability. All of which work together to enable individuals to thrive in their lives.

Education

This encompasses our Young People's service (Equip), Adult's Service (Personal Development and Skills) and The Accessible Workshop. These all deliver life skills and personal development to increase confidence, self-esteem and a range of personal skills.

We support young people as they move from school to college and explore work opportunities, helping them prepare for the challenges of adulthood. We help adults live as independently as they want to and enjoy a full, healthy life with positive relationships and acceptance in the community. Our projects allow people to learn new life skills, to take part in sport, drama and music, and to learn to manage their wellbeing and mental health.

In 2024 we will launch the Talkback Central Academy for those who do not want to go to, or struggle at, college. This aims to stop so many young people becoming 'Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET)'. This number has risen from approximately 400 to over 1,000 in the last two years because of lack of investment in the right areas by the Council.

Engagement

Our Your Voice Programme enables our members to share their voices and experiences to help change attitudes, improve services, and influence future policies. We also help people advocate and campaign for their legal rights.

At heart, we are an advocacy charity. We want people to have a voice, have independent living skills and to be heard. We know the huge emotional drain on parents and join with them to create the same opportunities for our members as everyone else.

Employability

We support people to develop a range of skills that make them employable, be that in a volunteer, work experience, or paid employment role.

To make this happen we deliver through our employability programme: work skills, work experience, job clubs, supported internships, supported employment and volunteer opportunities.

Our year in review

In a world where we hear so many negative news stories day in and day out, it's more important than ever to celebrate the successes and take joy in all the things that our members achieve. Every step we take as individuals and as an organisation, is a step towards our vision of a society where autistic people and those with learning disabilities can thrive and be treated equally, becoming a reality.

So, let's look at the incredible things that we have achieved together over the past year, month by month.

Think Autism Conference

As 2022 drew to a close, Talkback hosted the inspirational Think Autism Conference in Milton Keynes – a collaborative initiative set up by our Simon with the Central North-West London (CNWL) NHS Trust, who oversee Mental Health Services in MK. Through poignant narratives shared by autistic members, the conference reached over 150 NHS Health Professionals, fostering awareness of the struggles faced by individuals seeking an autism diagnosis.



Getting back to nature

We received funding to run our new Back to Nature course, a creative idea from our staff member Sophie, which has now seen the delivery of 12 sessions held in MK across 2023.

Working together with local organisations, including Milton Keynes College, The Parks Trust and Q: Alliance, we have provided access to local parks, raised awareness of local wildlife and shown the benefits of time in nature for our members' mental health management.

Our member Richard has become a Parks Trust Ambassador, providing feedback on how parks can be made more accessible.

Nurturing partnerships and work triumphs

Working with the National Trust

The new year unfolded with a celebration of our longstanding work experience partnership with the National Trust at Cliveden. Four Talkback members volunteered, contributing to important gardening tasks and developing their own confidence and work skills. Pictured below is Alex, one of our incredible members, at Cliveden.



“ We are hugely proud of the Talkback members and the progress they have made developing skills for future employment.

Erin Laybourne, National Trust

The Accessible Workshop welcomes its first intern

Marcus, a young autistic individual who has been through both our Equip and PDS programmes, is now paid to work one day a week in our Wycombe Workshop.

A talented and methodical young man, he is a perfect example of what can be achieved when someone embraces the opportunities we provide.



The duck house

The year started off in a great way for The Accessible Workshop group who continue to impress the local community with their skill and unwavering commitment to producing work of the very highest quality.

The team were commissioned by Aylesbury Town Council, to create an impressive 4ft floating Duck House, which was placed (looking resplendent!) in the middle of Walton Pond.

Of course, we always remain incredibly proud of our members, but they received an extra special boost when Aylesbury Town Council posted about the impressive project on their Facebook page, sharing with this with their 10,000 followers. What a win!



And that's not the only instance of The Accessible Workshop team making it into the media this year...

We couldn't be prouder of our member Joe, who constructed a wonderful lifeboat in memory of his grandad who supported the RNLI for many years. Talkback received a shoutout from the RNLI themselves on Twitter thanks to Joe's fab work.



I am a hero

The Expressive Arts Group, part of our Personal Development & Skills programme, proudly displayed their work at Bucks Museum for the *I am a Hero Art Exhibition*. This project is about celebrating ordinary people doing extraordinary things. The group gained confidence through sharing their self-portrait art, showcasing a range of photography, clay, printmaking, and drawing.



New roles at Talkback

We introduced the Senior Project Worker (SPW) role at Talkback. The result was six very deserving internal promotions to an invaluable role that supports staff and managers alike, reflecting Talkback's commitment to professional development and internal growth. Well done Tom, Jacqui, Christina, Gemma, June and Paula.

Transitions to work

The Transitions to Work Programme, funded by The Rothchild Foundation, launched its first Job Club at Sunley House job centre in Aylesbury, and also the job centre in High Wycombe. The programme has now helped 23 people move closer to paid employment. In fact, two young people managed to find jobs within four weeks of the completion of the course. Well done to the job coaches, Sophie, Simon, Richard, Ian and Hassnain, led by the energetic Kath.

Welcoming Pippa

Pippa, a new young work experience student, joined us to assist with admin tasks for external training. Expanding Talkback's volunteer opportunities this year has enabled us to support individuals to develop their career prospects.

Social opportunities and staff satisfaction

Friday night fun

This month, thanks to funding from the Amersham Community Board, we launched the monthly Talkback Youth Club in Amersham. This allows autistic young people aged 16-24 to meet, chat and have fun while participating in sports, craft and music activities. Thanks to our staff members Monica, Sharon, Dave, Ian, Sandy, Tisha and Emily for helping out.



“ It's been simply wonderful, and a real privilege, to see how those who have attended the Youth Club have grown in such confidence.

Sharon, Talkback

A happy place

Helen and Caroline conducted Talkback's annual staff survey. Staff highlighted that they are clear on the vision of Talkback, feel supported and that they enjoy working here. Staff did indicate they would like to be paid more and we continue to do what we can within our restraints to reward them fairly for the wonderful work they do.

Opening up a world of opportunities

Travel training, led by staff member June, is designed to enable our members to work towards taking public transport independently, opening up a world of social, leisure and employment opportunities. Our member Rohan, who you can see below, was pleased to be able to travel from Amersham College to Berkhamsted Castle, by catching 2 buses, putting his travel training into practise.



Putting on a show (or two)

The summer spectacular

Congratulations to our Theatre Group, with great support from the team, who pulled out all the stops, to produce a spectacular summer show. *John Smith's Adventures*, which took place at Buckingham Park Community Centre, was written by our very own David.

As always, it was a fantastic event that shows us all the high level of talent possessed by our members, and our team!

The music maker

Member Harry aka DJ H4ZZA, performed his first ever paid DJ set for MK College's summer Prom at Christ the Cornerstone Church. We were thrilled when he told us that he felt confident enough to perform, and he had the partygoers rocking through the night.

At Talkback, we always encourage our members to pursue their hobbies and dreams. In 2024, we are thrilled to be able to say that we will be supporting Harry to apply for funding so he can follow his goal of releasing a professionally recorded album.



“

The evening went by far too quickly. I loved seeing everyone's reactions to my song choices and seeing people sing and dance

DJ H4ZZA

Community safety roadshows

Talkback and Thames Valley Police Milton Keynes ran a community safety roadshow alongside MKC community safety officers. Members listened and networked with PCSO's, Police Officers and community safety officers during a Q&A open event. This is just one example of Talkback's work in the wider community to educate and raise awareness so we can create a more understanding and accessible world for those we support.

The Festival of Sport and Fun

Talkback hosted a first of its kind 'Festival of Sport and Fun' event at Stoke Mandeville Stadium- the vision of our Sports guru, Helen. A range of providers offered accessible sports including badminton, boxing, cycling, netball and more for 140 attendees. People could also take up free follow up sessions with a provider of their choosing. The day was a resounding success in encouraging people to try something new for their physical and mental wellbeing.



“ It was great to see members so enthused and I always come away stirred by watching Talkback staff in action. It was also great to see how much staff from participating sports organisations were enjoying themselves

Malcolm, Talkback Chair of Trustees

The Greatest Showman

The Community Project Group held a Greatest Showman themed open day from our Aylesbury building to raise money for drama resources. People were able have a go at mini golf and get their car washed.

Sport (part II)

The PDS Sports Day led by our great sports coaches saw 35 members enjoy a football focused sports day sponsored by Barclays Bank, where they won golden trophies created by The Accessible Workshop team.

Sports, books and car washes (cont)

Little libraries

Members of The Accessible Workshop constructed several **'Little Free libraries'** to be placed in the community. Anyone can borrow and return or replace a book from these. In July, one of these 'little libraries' was officially unveiled at its new home in Walton Court by the Mayor of Aylesbury. Thanks to our staff team of Neil, Alan, Sandra, Janice, David, Jacqui, Tom, Sue and Marcus, ably supported by one of our great volunteers, Stuart, who train and develop the members skills to be able to achieve these amazing results

“ it was a pleasure to meet some of those who have worked so hard building the little library book cabinets. I am looking forward to seeing Aylesbury residents make use of this book exchange project

Councillor Steven Lambert, Mayor of Aylesbury



Evaluating our work

We introduced a new purpose-built online evaluation programme called 'Impact' which enables better tracking of member progress and outcomes, so we can document the journey that they move through with us. We already are seeing a clear proof on developing functional, social, and employability skills. This is a first in Bucks and proves the impact of our work.

My autistic self

In Milton Keynes, we launched a new weekly group that supports adults who have recently receive an autism diagnosis. People are supported to understand their diagnosis and what it means for them. This is part of our aim to make Milton Keynes 'the city that always thinks Autism'.

The programme was been made possible through funding from Milton Keynes Council. It was a success, and we are looking to run similar sessions this year.



Autism insights

We celebrated our successful training programme for the Thames Valley Police. Over the past year, our Autism Insights external training has reached nearly 600 officers. This has been run by Sue our staff member, and Nicola who is our talented autistic trainer. The team have also delivered training to Paramedics at Bucks Uni, local Employers, Sue Ryder Hospice Nurses, Department of Work and Pensions, Sexual Health Providers, Domestic Abuse support workers, leisure centre staff and Rethink college in MK. We've reached more than 850 people with Autism Insights Training in 2023.



The importance of volunteers

Volunteers continue to play a valuable role at Talkback and we currently have eight volunteers working across the organisation supporting our staff. A student from Bucks College Group who is currently doing a Health & Social Care qualification is due to join us as part of her placement. We are so grateful to all our volunteers who give their time and expertise to help our staff and members. We are truly humbled and grateful by their dedication.

Active interns

Our sports programme welcomed its first paid Sports Intern Nathan, an Autistic young person who will be supporting the Active Lifestyles group as well as being part of our employability programme to help him find other sports sessional opportunities.

Supporting men

We received funding from Heart of Bucks to continue running our Man Kind project in supported living homes in Aylesbury and High Wycombe. This will be our 3rd year of running this programme which gives men a safe space to talk about their feelings and manage their mental health.

The Talkback Advice Bureau

The Talkback Advice Bureau website went live. This is an Easy Read resource, with information on transport, support, adult learning, employment and much more. This will support individuals, families and carers to find answers and resources they need.

This website is produced in partnership with Stay OK and funded by our good friends at Red Kite Housing.

Initial usage statistics have been encouraging and we hope people will continue to regularly use it to access information and support they need.



Julia's employment journey

We've been working with Julia for over a year, to get her work ready and support her in a role. She had previously had a couple of voluntary roles, but never a paid job.

At our first meeting, she told us she was particularly interested in working or volunteering in a care home. Well, now she is.

We have worked closely with Chartwell Manor Care Home in Aylesbury, who were so impressed with Julia that they created a bespoke 'General Assistant' position for her. Julia's role predominately focuses on helping to run activities for the residents, as well as assisting with laundry and catering.

“

I went to visit Julia yesterday at the home and she was buzzing with excitement.

Ian, Talkback Job Coach

Lights, camera, action

Members worked on a film project funded by Thames Valley Police raising awareness on cuckooing (where the home of a vulnerable person is taken over). The film will be released in 2024 and highlight Talkback's aim of raising awareness to a wider audience through its YouTube Talkback TV channel. This was led by Gemma and the PDS team, supported by Simon.

Supporting bereavement

The Your Voice project gained funding to run a programme supporting people to understand and talk about bereavement – a sensitive but vital topic. Thanks to the Splash Fund and Heart of Bucks for their support.

A day out

Members of our Job Club in Milton Keynes were delighted to spend a work insights day at Findlay Park Investments in London, where they learnt about different roles and took part in mock interviews. This will help them hugely in their searches for employment. Sophie, who helped lead this, was also promoted to Transitions Coordinator to help young people access College.



Feeling the pulse

Caroline introduced our new pulse surveys for staff; monthly, anonymous surveys to help us to take the 'pulse' of the organisation and collect valuable feedback from employees. The feedback will be used to improve our organisation and our staff's experience in the workplace.

Lights, camera, action

It wouldn't feel like Christmas without a Talkback panto. This year members of our Performing Arts Academy performed a unique take on A Christmas Carol, directed and written by the wonderful David. The cast were super stars and wonderfully supported by the backstage work from members and staff including Jodi, Helen, Alex and Jenny. A special mention to Sandra too, who coordinated the dance number.



“ What a great event. At times I found it incredibly moving. It reminded me why we do, what we do, and it inspired me to do more. I am so proud of everyone involved.

Jay, Talkback CEO

Work experience success

One of our members finished a successful work experience placement at Fairhive Homes. He gained valuable IT skills and impressed the team so much that they've offered him a longer work placement next year which may lead to a paid role.

Staying safe in winter

Thames Valley Police and Talkback worked together to deliver a 'Winter Safety Awareness' session to our members highlighting the dangers of darker nights, higher burglary rates and anti-social behaviour increases.

Our year in numbers

23

The number of NEET and unfunded young autistic people who have attended our job clubs.

4

The number of members who have undertaken work experience placements this year.

1

Our first supported internship was completed.

73

The number of students that have participated in work experience placements this year.

9

The number of people who are in work and having regular support.

10

The number of employers we currently work with.

47

The number of autistic individuals who now attend our social and relationships groups in Milton Keynes.

4

The number of new work experience employer placements this academic year.

7

The number of students we offer high quality classroom support to at Bucks College.

96

People attend our personal development and skills sessions every week.

60

The number of students attending our weekly community groups.

41

Students returned to our young people's service Equip to start the college year.

As always

We have a lot of people to thank

As you can tell, Talkback have had another busy, brilliant year with so many positives to celebrate. We have provided opportunities for our members to try new sports, learn skills for employment and to raise awareness and advocate for a more accessible world. All of this works towards removing the barriers faced by autistic people and individuals with a learning disability. We enable them to access new opportunities; lead the fulfilling and healthy lives they want to; secure employment, both paid and voluntary; and be accepted as part of the community for what they uniquely bring.

Our aim is that every person who joins the Talkback journey will become better equipped to lead the life they want by helping them transition from each stage to the next.

I would like to thank all our staff and volunteers for the incredible work they do day in day out to help make a better world for the people we support. Also, to our Trustees, who give their time and expertise to support our development. I have mentioned some of the staff by name in this report. But there are so many more. Each of them is equally important and brings unique skills and so much passion and care. They are inspirational. I'd also like to thank the Marketing Agency we work with, 'Fivespoons' who go above and beyond to help us develop and communicate our message.

I would also like to thank the parents and carers who often go unnoticed but are true heroes. They have to fight too hard to get the funding and support they need and for basic legal rights. Somehow, they keep going and we thank them for all they do.

Special thanks goes to my leadership team of Claire, Gill, Helen, Neil and Yasmin (and Chris who has just retired). They have the joy of tolerating me and also running all the great work we do. We don't always agree but we always think about the members life journey as paramount. I thank them for all they do.

We look forward to 2024 being another brilliant year and our members fulfilling more of their dreams.

Jay, CEO (Chief Entertainment Officer), Talkback

And finally

A few more thanks

We have worked with many local providers over the past year who have helped us continually provide new opportunities to our members. We thank each and every one of them for all they do. In particular, we've had a big year in sport, so we'd like to thank the following organisations:

- Phil Hill, Bucks Disability Co-ordinator and tennis coach.
- Wycombe Badminton Centre,
- Bucks Cricket Board,
- Tracey Vincent, Net Positive (netball),
- Mason Foundation (Community Mile),
- Mel Ogle from Fight Klub,
- Wheels for All,
- Aylesbury United Football Club,
- Lynnette Moodey Qi Gong and meditation specialist.
- Wheelpower,
- DASH Club,
- Holmer Green Sports Club.

And finally (we promise) we'd like to thank the generous people who provide the funding we need to provide our members with so many opportunities and allow us to do the vital work that we do, each and every day:

- Heart of Bucks
- Splash Foundation
- Screwfix Foundation
- Amersham Community Board
- Nineveh Trust
- Barclays Community Football Fund
- Leap
- Police & Crime Commissioner
- Rothschild Foundation
- MK Council
- Bucks Council
- Bucks College Group
- BCA

We want to be seen

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

A dedication

Adam Jones, who sadly died this year, was an example to us all. He had an incurable illness but gave every day his best. We dedicate this report to him and other friends who have died. Adam's dad John said that Talkback has been 'an absolutely fantastic experience for Adam'. It was a privilege to be a small part of his wonderful life.

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