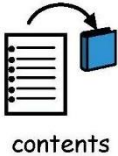




# **Social Impact Report**

## **2023-2024**

# Social Impact Report 2023-24



- Introduction.....3
  - Introduction to the year .....3
  - Social impact in Thera.....4
- Good foundations .....6
  - Housing.....6
  - Money .....9
  - Health .....10
  - Learning.....12
- Good wellbeing and living the life you choose .....13
  - People are doing what they want: .....13
  - People are developing connections:.....16
  - People are doing something that is meaningful to them and making a contribution: .....19
- Impactful leadership by people with a learning disability .....22
  - People are leaders in Thera, influencing the company and Group .....22
  - People are leaders and have influence beyond Thera.....22
  - .....24
- More welcoming communities with more opportunities .....24



introduction

## Introduction

### Introduction to the year

2023-24 saw many successes with continued growth and development in specialist companies such as Dosh and Unity Works, new projects such as The Camden Society's Being Heard coffee mornings and opportunities for our leaders with lived experience of a learning disability to have a wider influence.

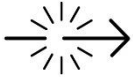
Thera Trust appointed 4 new Group Executive Directors in December 2023 and February 2024, joining Matthew who has brought his lived experience of learning disability to Thera's executive team for 18 years.

As a social care provider, we saw challenges due to the economic and social care climate, requiring us to embed a transformation plan to ensure financial resilience whilst maintaining quality of support.

This report provides an overview of our social impact against our new social impact framework. For full details on Thera's activities over the year, as well as financial performance, please refer to Thera Trust's Annual Report and Accounts, [available on our website](#).

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the people we support, our staff members, volunteers and others who have contributed to this report and the impact we have across Thera Group.

Thera's Group Executive team



impact

### Social impact in Thera

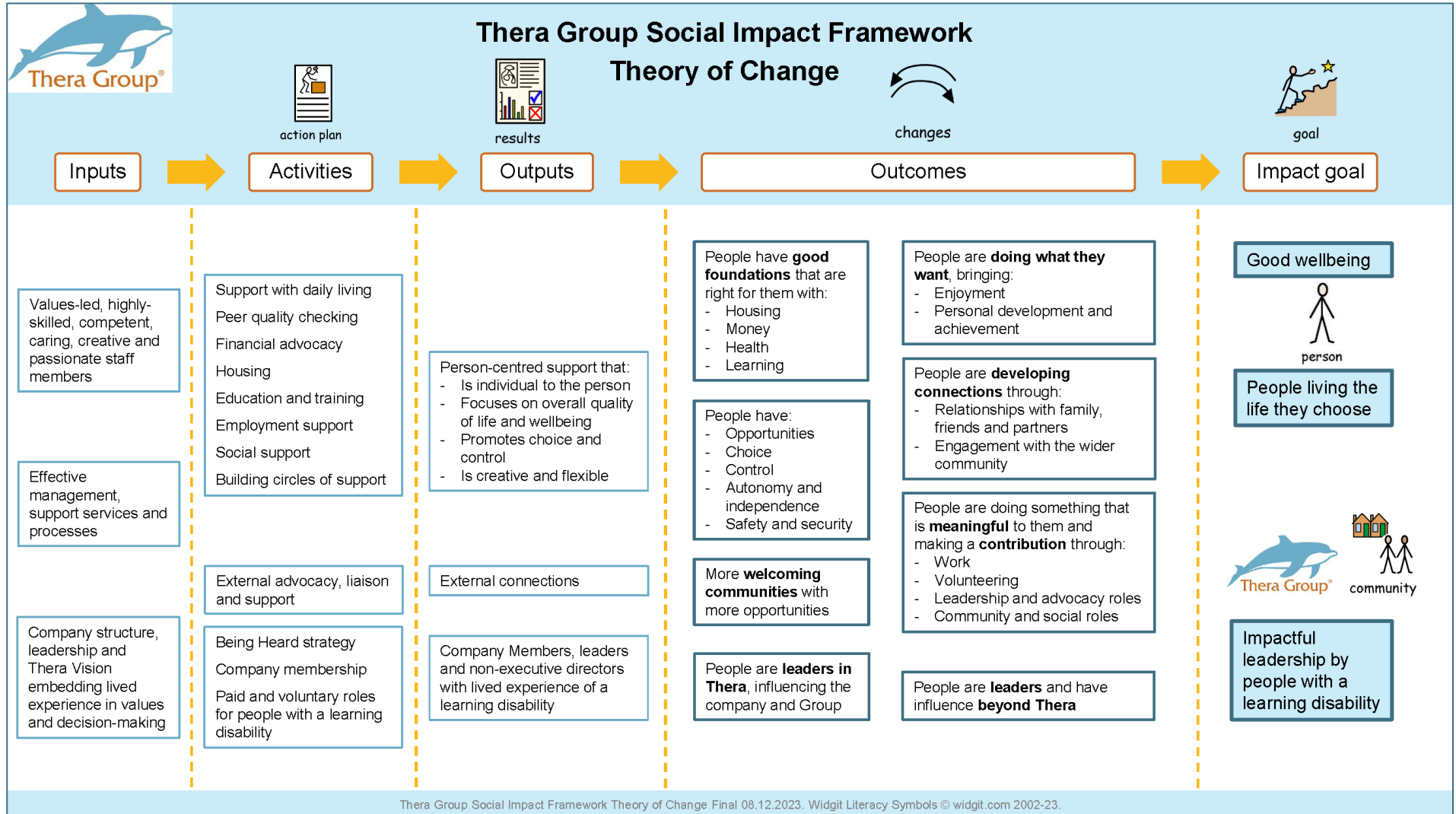
As reported previously, we have co-designed a new social impact framework which is now gradually being rolled out across Thera Group, with the measures being developed to evidence our impact in these areas.

The new framework focuses on outcomes for people across a number of key areas:

- Choice and control for people in all areas of their lives
- Laying good foundations around housing, money, learning and health
- Promoting wellbeing, in line with the PERMA(H) model and 5 ways to wellbeing – this includes promoting enjoyment, achievement, relationships, community engagement and meaningful contribution.
- Promoting leadership by people with a learning disability in their lives, their Thera companies, their local communities and society more broadly

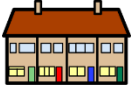
This first year reporting against this new framework is therefore in a trial phase and we look forward to developing it in future years.

Social Impact Framework – Theory of Change



## Good foundations

People have **good foundations** that are right for them



housing

### Housing

Having the right housing ensures that people with a learning disability have a stable home with the access and support they need, as well as promoting their wellbeing with a comfortable home environment. It gives them opportunities to connect with their local community, access local jobs and leisure activities, stay connected with family and friends and build new relationships. Most importantly, having control over where you live is a cornerstone of having control over your life and your support.

Although no further properties were purchased or completed development by Forward Housing in this year, they have begun work with a number of people who are looking to move in 2024 and 2025. All Thera Group's care and support companies support people to live in their own homes and find the best housing for them wherever possible.

A pilot survey of people supported by Thera South West in February 2024<sup>1</sup> showed:

- 88% of respondents are happy with the house they live in
- 84% are happy with who they live with
- 88% say their house is the way they like it and works for them

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<sup>1</sup> 32 responses received from 131 potential people supported (24% response rate). Online survey conducted by The Quality Company for Thera South West in February 2024.

## Thera Group | Social Impact Report 2023-24

Thera (Scotland) have been developing relationships in the West Lothian area with commissioners and social workers to discuss people with a learning disability and/or autism who are in inappropriate accommodation and would like to move into their own homes in their local communities, some for the first time. In collaboration with Forward Housing, planning to support people in the area began in the last quarter of the year.

Thera Trust was also successful in gaining funding to set up an [IMPACT \(Improving Adult Care Together\)](#) facilitator project to better understand the impact of the right local housing on people with a learning disability. This project will run for a year from November 2024.



story

### Tom and Mila

Tom and Mila are a young couple with lots of interests, from football and creating videos for Tom, to dancing, getting dressed up and socialising for Mila. They are both close to their families.

Tom was previously living in supported living in at a local college whilst Mila was living at her family home. Tom and Mila met back when they were babies and their paths crossed throughout their lives. In 2019 they began dating and in 2020 they went to their college prom together. Due to their living situation, they only saw each other once a week which neither of them liked, so in 2023 Mila and Tom decided that they wanted to live independently together.

Thera East Midlands were contacted to see if they could support them both in their new home.

## Thera Group | Social Impact Report 2023-24

We already knew of a possible house that was available – the couple viewed the property and decided that this is where they would like their adventure to begin.

Mila and Tom began recruiting their new support team, with the help of their Community Support Leader (CSL) and chose 4 support workers. Whilst all of the formalities were being completed, staff would meet Mila and Tom at their new house and use this time to get to know each other, the area and what it was they both wanted from their new home.

Tom and Mila are loving their new lives together and are wanting to get married in the future. Mila shared that “moving in together means we can have a real loving relationship and our own family can be independent. We love being a cute couple and seeing each other every day,”. She feels more secure now she sees Tom every day and the impact has been vast, as they can now have a great relationship and be part of their local community.





money

### Money

Having access to money when you need it, enables you to live well at home, as well as get out and do the things you enjoy. This is why all Thera companies provide person-centred support with money to people in different ways, and why Dosh Financial Advocacy was set up specifically to support people to have more control and independence with their money.

At the end of 2023-24, Dosh supported over 1500 people with a learning disability to manage their money, building relationships with each person to help them use their money to lead their lives in the way they want. When beginning to support people, Dosh Financial Advocates often find incorrect benefit claims, bill payments and other financial assessments and work closely with the individual and their circle of support to get these right, so that the person has the money they need and are entitled to.

Dosh's annual review survey of people supported for 2023-24<sup>2</sup> showed that:

- 86% of people were happy with Dosh's support
- 91% say that Dosh sends them their money and pays their bills on time
- 81% feel they are well supported to make decisions about their money

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<sup>2</sup> Survey conducted by post in October 2023 with 480 responses received or 1432 people supported at the end of Sept 2023 (34% response rate).



health

### Health

People with a learning disability are known to experience much worse health outcomes compared to the general population, with the [LeDeR \(Learning from lives and deaths\) report](#) finding higher rates of avoidable deaths (42% in 2022) and lower life expectancy (62.9 years in 2022 report).<sup>3</sup> Thera's care and support teams advocate for the people they support every day and work alongside health professionals to support people to get access to the treatment they need and to maintain good health.

Having launched the '[Know Your Body](#)' cancer resources in 2022-23 alongside Coppafeel! and Orchid, Ansar Projects achieved 'Highly Commended/Runners Up' in the Breaking Down Barriers category at the Learning Disability and Autism Awards in 2023-24. Feedback recognised Ansar's passion for ensuring people with a learning disability and autism have the same access to health information and are able to understand and speak up about their own bodies.

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<sup>3</sup> White, A; Sheehan, R; Ding, J; Roberts, C; Magill, N; Keagan-Bull, R; Carter, B; Chauhan, U; Tuffrey-Wijne, I; Strydom, A; (2023). 'Learning from Lives and Deaths - People with a learning disability and autistic people (LeDeR) report for 2022.' LeDeR Autism and learning disability partnership, King's College London.



story

### A story from The Camden Society

Peter\* had a medication review in July and results of blood tests revealed that Peter is no longer borderline diabetic, and his cholesterol levels have dropped significantly, so much so that he is no longer required to take any medication for this.

At a previous review, Peter's General Practitioner had said that he needed to lose a lot of weight. His support worker, who used to be a chef in a 5-star hotel in Kenya, used his knowledge of cooking and presenting meals to introduce Peter to some new foods including kimchi, kale and pumpkin seeds, which he now regularly enjoys. This has helped him to maintain food and drink swaps rather than 'dieting' as such. Peter no longer drinks Coke or keeps snacks that are high in sugar content in his room.

Peter also started walking and using his bike more over the summer months which has contributed to his success. Peter told his Community Support Leader that he is very proud of himself. He now takes no medication and enjoys a healthier lifestyle.

\*Name has been changed at the person's request



### Learning

Having chances to learn, whether formally or informally, is key in promoting people's wellbeing and creating new experiences and opportunities. All Thera Group companies support people to learn in different ways, from using person-centred active support approaches in care and support companies to help people build their daily living skills, to using the [money plan game in Dosh](#) to help people better understand their budget and learn about money.

Unity Works is a company that specialises in employment and training for people with a learning disability and/or autism. They support trainees to gain skills and qualifications, as well as running adult community learning courses for a range of employment and broader wellbeing and life skills.

At the end of March 2024, Unity Works had 85 trainees attending 121.5 sessions per week. They saw 3 trainees achieve a level 1 NVQ and 3 more start on those courses.

In addition, the Adult Community Learning (ACL) program has made significant strides in delivering accessible education in the community. with 47 unique learners to March 2024, surpassing the initial target of 35 for the academic year. Achieving a commendable 95% achievement rate, 96% retention rate, and 93% attendance rate, Unity Works' Individual Learner Plans for the Spring Term have received positive feedback from learners, highlighting the impactful teaching methodologies employed.



### Good wellbeing and living the life you choose

#### People are doing what they want:

- Enjoyment
- Personal development and achievement

It seems simple enough, but for many people with a learning disability, just getting to choose what you do, and having the option to do the things you enjoy, is often easier said than done. Our care and support companies support people every day to access and enjoy a whole range of activities and do the things they enjoy. Our specialist companies also support creating these options for people, for example through Dosh ensuring people have the money they need to do what they enjoy.

In May 2023, Thera (Scotland) held a Being Heard event in Inverness with the people they support, staff and members of the Board, followed by a summer event and picnic in the July with various activities. People enjoyed spending time together and sharing their passions. Thera (Scotland) also conducted some surveys with people asking them what impact being supported by Thera had had on their lives. One person shared that being supported by Thera (Scotland) has a positive impact on their health, doing things they enjoyed and being part of Thera (Scotland) as a Company Member.

Thera South West's feedback survey in February 2024 found that:

- 100% of respondents get support to plan for and do the things that matter to them

## Thera Group | Social Impact Report 2023-24

- 97% say they have choice to do the things they want when they have support.

Below, Sian tells her story of being supported by Thera North in her own words.



story

### My journey to wellbeing

I would like to tell you a little bit about myself. I came over to Thera from respite when I was 19 years old, at that time in my life I felt lost, I felt like I didn't know who I was, I had no confidence I couldn't speak to anyone, the easiest thing to do was to shut myself away, that way I didn't have to speak to anyone or deal with anything at that time that was my coping mechanism.



I felt like I had isolated myself to a point I had no drive for anything. I couldn't call to book something like a doctor's appointment that seems so simple, but I would have needed staff to do this for me as I would have felt way out of my comfort zone. I didn't feel comfortable in myself, but I felt for the sake of my health with support from staff I joined Slimming World. This was a big step for me, but I knew it was something I needed to do.

My support team grew bigger and I trusted them more and more, they knew what I was capable of, every step they were behind me even if it was a supportive word or a 'hi' from behind my closed door.

## Thera Group | Social Impact Report 2023-24

Now this present day I don't recognise the person that I once was, I am happy, I'm confident I feel a whole different me.

I'm so much more in control of my life. I know I can do this. I have managed this because of the team I have around me. My health has never been better. I have lost five stone, I order my own medication and book my own doctors appointments. Who would have thought it. My biggest achievement, with support I have arranged, booked and paid for my very first holiday to Disneyland Paris. I did this.

I'm happy and so proud of myself. I would like to say thank you to my support staff team for all the support I have and encouragement I have received, here's to the next chapter.'

Read the story at: [Sian's Story - How She Found Herself With Thera North](#)



### People are developing connections:

- Relationships with family, friends and partners
- Engagement with the wider community

Enabling people to develop connections with loved ones and wider communities is something all Thera Group companies support and is a particular specialism of the Gig Buddies project and Equal Futures. Both work in Scotland to enable those that often don't qualify for much, if any, formal social care support to have opportunities to get out socially, build relationships and create circles of support.

Equal Futures continued to deliver befriending support and social events, including starting to offer these online, with 30 people with a learning disability or autism and 19 families benefiting in 2023-24. The team also returned to their roots with a much greater emphasis on circles of support, establishing 5 new circles in the year. In total, Equal Futures supported 30 individuals with autism or a learning disability and 46 family members.

Gig Buddies had another very active year with 113 active members at the end of December 2023. Their feedback survey showed<sup>4</sup>:

- 93% of respondents have made friends through Gig Buddies
- 87% feel their social life has improved since they joined Gig Buddies

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<sup>4</sup> Survey conducted online by Gig Buddies in December 2023. 55 responses received from 113 members (49% response rate)



**GIG BUDDIES** **2023**  
with Thera Trust **IN NUMBERS**

What a year! We introduced more members to volunteers, making sure more people can get our regularly, we gave away more tickets to gigs than ever before, and held more socials than we ever have. Thanks to all the venues, organisations and artists that made the year what it was. This is our 2023 in numbers...

**ACROSS 3 AREAS**  
GIG BUDDIES EDINBURGH | GIG BUDDIES WEST LoTHIAN | GIG BUDDIES GL & SGOW

**WE RAN A TOTAL OF: 115 EVENTS! TOTAL ATTENDANCE OF: 851**

**WE NOW HAVE: 210 MEMBERS**  
GIG BUDDIES EDINBURGH 84 | GIG BUDDIES WEST LoTHIAN 56 | GIG BUDDIES GL & SGOW 70

**45 PEOPLE AT 1 BIG CHAT**  
TALKING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF GIG BUDDIES

**WE WENT TO 6 FANTASTIC FESTIVALS**  
CONNECT TRNSMT | KELBURN GARDEN PARTY | Edinburgh International Book Festival | fringe. | EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

**WE GAVE AWAY 226 EDINBURGH FESTIVALS TICKETS**

**WE TRAINED 3 VENUES IN LEARNING DISABILITY AND AUTISM AWARENESS**  
RUTHANNE, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

**WE WERE GIVEN OVER £36000 OF TICKETS**

**16 ARTS PARTNERS THANK YOU**

**13 OF US SPENT 2 NIGHTS CAMPING**

**FRISBEE STUCK IN A TREE**

**65 INCREDIBLE VOLUNTEERS**

**63 GIG BUDDY PAIRINGS**

**“I’M SEEING MY FRIENDS MORE.”**  
KIRSTY

**“THE GIG BUDDIES TEAM WERE EXCEPTIONALLY KNOWLEDGEABLE AND BOUGHT EVERYTHING BACK TO THE INDIVIDUAL.”**  
RUTHANNE, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

**“I’VE MET PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER AND I’VE GOT FRIENDS FOR LIFE.”**  
SARAH

**“IT’S BROUGHT SO MANY FUN TIMES TO MY LIFE. IT’S ONE OF THE BEST THINGS I’VE EVER DONE.”**  
FIONA, VOLUNTEER

**Facebook** Gig Buddies with Thera Trust  
**Instagram** @gigbuddiesthera  
**GIG BUDDIES** with Thera Trust  
**Thera Trust**  
**West Lothian Council**  
**COMMUNITY FUND**

## Thera Group | Social Impact Report 2023-24

In addition, The Camden Society was awarded funding from the National Lottery community fund, to set up monthly Being Heard coffee mornings



for people they support across 6 areas, which have been very successful.

Not only has this brought people together and reduced isolation, but it has also enabled people to rebuild confidence to get out in the community and provide feedback about how they would like their company run.

This project will finish in 2025 and is already creating new social connections and opportunities for people.



meaningful

### People are doing something that is meaningful to them and making a contribution:

- Work
- Volunteering
- Leadership and advocacy roles
- Community and social roles

Thera supports people to make a contribution in a way that is meaningful for them, whether that is paid/voluntary roles or community and social activity.

Thera East Anglia saw an increase in supported employment referrals, with lots of work done in year to support people to gain employment. In 2023-24 the supported employment team successfully supported 2 people to get new voluntary roles and a further 3 people sustained their voluntary roles for a year or more. They also supported one person to get a paid job and another 3 people to maintain their jobs for a year.

Unity Works specialises in employment support, including supporting people to build skills ready for voluntary and paid work. In 2023-24 they also saw increased referrals and trainee placements. They also successfully secured significant funding to extend the reach of Unity Works' employment services, including a major award from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support young people with a learning disability at risk of becoming not in education employment or training.

In a difficult social care and hospitality landscape, Unity Works had to take the difficult decision to close one social enterprise café but

## **Thera Group | Social Impact Report 2023-24**

was able to develop other existing cafés and even open another new one. MailOut social enterprise also expanded to a second site.

Throughout the 2023/24 period, the employment support programmes worked with a total of 274 individuals, providing support with:

- 2,700 job search sessions
- 3,216 interviews

This resulted in:

- 67 individuals successfully secured job placements.
- 136 participants involved in supported volunteering roles.
- 74 individuals received in-work support to help them maintain their employment,
- 80 individuals benefited from travel training, ensuring they could reliably commute to their workplaces.

Sustained employment shows the long-term impact of Unity Works support:

- 41 individuals received support to gain access to work grants in their employment, ensuring they had the necessary resources and accommodations.
- 26 individuals sustained their employment for at least 6 months



story

### Kelly's Story

Kelly joined DFN Project Search at Lewisham and Greenwich Queen Elizabeth Hospital in September 2022 to gain new skills. She identified her strengths in communication, teamwork, and IT.

In her rotations, Kelly completed admin tasks, improved her phone skills with support, and assisted the recruitment team. Her dedication made her an asset in each department.

Kelly secured paid employment as an MP for the People's Parliament in Greenwich, advocating for people with a learning disability, and continues to pursue administrative roles. She feels she is "making a real difference" and describes her DFN journey as "amazing".

"The DFN Supported Internship Programme helped me develop independence and confidence, use my IT skills, and try new things with the support of NHS mentors. This has been a great opportunity, and I am very happy." - Kelly



leadership

### Impactful leadership by people with a learning disability

**People are leaders in Thera, influencing the company and Group**

**People are leaders and have influence beyond Thera**

It is a core part of Thera's Vision that people with a learning disability can be leaders in society – and this can look like many different things, including leadership roles and actions within and beyond Thera. In terms of senior roles in Thera Group companies, at the end of 23-24, we had:

- 13 paid senior level roles for people bringing their lived experience of a learning disability,
- 88% of Thera Group boards included someone with lived experience of a learning disability
- 8 companies had active Company Membership schemes, involving 64 people with a learning disability as supported company members speaking up about their company

This leadership included 8 Service Quality Directors who use their lived and professional experience to lead their care and support companies alongside the Managing Director. In 2023-24 we welcomed Catherine Carter in Thera North and Sam Avery in Thera South West, who quickly had an impact in their respective companies.

Graham Skidmore, Service Quality Director in Thera East and Elena Frewin, Service Quality Director in Thera East Midlands both re-

## **Thera Group | Social Impact Report 2023-24**

launched Being Heard events in their companies in this year, enabling them to engage with more people they support. They have run a variety of interactive workshops, activities and information sessions, including on community activities and their Thera company.

Elena has also expanded her influence beyond Thera this year through creating links with national learning disability charities and becoming involved in their online conferences. As part of this work, a presentation was delivered at a national forum being held by the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG).

In September 2023, at the request of the head teacher at Gartocharn primary school, Jordan Smith, Service Quality Director for Thera (Scotland) delivered a presentation around the topic of inclusion and having lived experience of a learning disability.

Our leaders are not just Service Quality Directors, however; Thera East Anglia recruited Andrew, a person they support, to talk through his experiences of Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), which is an incredibly impactful way to support staff training and organisational learning.

The Ansar Champions of Excellence (ACE) team continued to develop and enable people supported by Ansar to have a strong voice on the issues that matter to them. Several people attended a bespoke Academy Day put on by Electricity North West, learning about how electricity gets into their homes and how we can all be more energy efficient. This work will continue with the support of Electricity North West as Ansar develops people to become Energy Ambassadors.

We are very sorry to share that Catherine Carter, SQD in Thera North, passed away in November 2024. She spent her life fighting for equality and advocating for people's empowerment and we thank her for bringing that passion to Thera. We know that her legacy in this role and across her life will live on.



### More welcoming communities with more opportunities

Thera companies are looking at how they can not just support individuals but influence the wider communities they work in to overcome barriers and create more opportunities for people with a learning disability. In this year this has included:

- Dosh Financial Advocacy training 27 support staff members in how to support people well with their money
- Gig Buddies partnering with 23 organisations and venues
- Unity Works working with 34 employers in their employer engagement programme

Through the launch of 'Our Futures 2024-27 – We Can Do It' the people Thera North supports have identified 4 key areas that they would like to see develop in the coming three years. This co-produced Business Plan will see us create groups involving staff and people we support that are focused on Employment and Volunteering, Assistive Technology, Health Inequalities and being a Leader in Society and enable more people to influence their local communities.



## Thera Group | Social Impact Report 2023-24

Members of those groups have already developed links with local Health Watch and Health Equality groups across the north and have begun challenging health professionals to address the health inequalities (such as diagnostic overshadowing) faced by people with a learning disability.

Unity Works' Mail Out social enterprise is now planning expansion into a second site following an extremely busy period over Christmas 2023 and the New Year. Mill Lane, Unity Works' garden centre in West Hampstead, enriches the community with their range of products and gifts, supported by 15 people with a learning disability and/or autism who are working there and training in horticulture and customer service. Throughout the year, Mill Lane has actively engaged with the community through a series of workshops including a successful Summer Open Day, wreath-making and Mother's Day workshops.



For any query on the content of the report, please contact  
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Thera Trust registered charity number - 1090163

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