

# Impact Report

2025-26



**For me personally, it is fair to say that starting at the Matthew Project has saved my life. It has given me hope, belief, knowledge and skills that I know I will keep for life and an amazing community where I know I have friends for life.**

RSP Member

### Martin's Story: The Volunteer



"I had a nervous breakdown. I was being sick frequently and suffering terrible paranoia. I was living in a terrible bedsit, which didn't help, so my drinking increased further. It was at this point that I attempted suicide. I didn't want to kill myself, I just wanted somebody to help me."

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### Martin's Story Today

I am now a volunteer at the Matthew Project. I have found a great community where I know I have friends for life. I have found hope, belief, knowledge and skills that I know I will keep for life.

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# A Message from our CEO

**Every day, I am inspired by the courage and resilience of the people we support. Behind every statistic in this report is a person rebuilding their life, overcoming challenges, and creating a more hopeful future.**

Over the past year, The Matthew Project supported **2,168 young people and adults** across Norfolk. Through providing support for children and young people struggling with their own or a family member's drug or alcohol use, recovery services and criminal justice support, veteran-specific provision, and programmes to help young people improve their wellbeing and move towards education, employment and training, we have continued to place people at the centre of everything we do.

This year, hundreds of adults made positive changes through Next Steps, with **81% improving their ability to manage addictive behaviours**, while **1,281 young people** received support to build resilience, confidence, and brighter futures.

We also launched our Service User Voice Strategy, achieved **Cyber Essentials Certification**, improved accessibility at our Recovery Centre, and continued to create employment opportunities for people with lived experience.



We were also pleased to receive external recognition for our communications and engagement work, with our website named Network Norfolk's Best Norfolk Christian Organisation Website and a member of our team receiving the Best Christian Communicator Award.

Our people remain at the heart of our success. We are committed to creating a supportive and inclusive workplace, investing in staff wellbeing and development. I am immensely proud that **100% of staff agreed that The Matthew Project is supportive of them**, and we achieved an average rating of **4.71 out of 5** for recommending The Matthew Project as a great place to work.

I am also grateful to our staff, volunteers, trustees, funders, and supporters. **Forty-three volunteers contributed 5,364 hours** of their time, and our community raised more than **£60,000 through the Big Give Christmas Challenge**, helping us reach even more people across Norfolk.

As you read this report, I hope you are encouraged by the stories of recovery, growth and hope within it. Together, we are helping people build healthier, more connected, and more fulfilling lives.

**Rachel Chapman, CEO**

# Welcome our new Chair of Trustees

In September, we welcomed Richard Gilbert as our new Chair of Trustees. A retired GP and long-time Norwich resident, Richard has been a trustee since 2022 and is a member of St Stephen's Church. Throughout his medical career, he witnessed first-hand the devastating impact of substance misuse and poor mental health on individuals, families, and communities. Richard shares:

"It is a privilege to serve as Chair of The Matthew Project and to support the dedicated staff and volunteers whose compassion, expertise and commitment change lives every day.

This report highlights the remarkable impact our services have across Norfolk, helping people overcome significant challenges, build resilience, and create positive futures.

I am proud to be part of an organisation that places people, hope and recovery at the heart of everything it does, and I look forward to building on our strong foundations as we continue to support even more individuals and families in the years ahead."



# About Us

**The Matthew Project has supported young people and adults across Norfolk for over 40 years, helping people overcome the impacts of drugs, alcohol, trauma, and mental health challenges.**

Our work spans prevention, intervention, recovery, and personal development. Through **Next Steps**, Norfolk's community recovery hub, we provide recovery programmes, therapeutic support, skills development, and peer-led activities. We also support people involved in the criminal justice system and veterans affected by substance misuse and poor mental health.

For young people, **Unity** supports those affected by their own drug or alcohol use, while **YouCan** works with those impacted by substance use within their family. Through **On Track**, we help young people aged 13–24 move closer to education, training, employment, and volunteering.

Across all our services, we empower people to build resilience, develop confidence, and create positive futures.



This year, as an organisation, we reviewed and refreshed our values so that they remain at the heart of everything we do.



### Care

We create a culture of safety and wellbeing through warm and professional relationships.



### Hope

We work to inspire brighter futures believing that lives can be transformed.



### Empathy

We actively listen, understand and accept people, helping them achieve their goals.



# Adult Services

Recovery is about more than overcoming addiction. It is about rebuilding confidence, strengthening relationships, and creating opportunities for a healthier future. Our Adult Services support people to make positive and lasting changes through recovery-focused programmes, criminal justice support, and dedicated services for veterans.

Across all services, community remains at the heart of our approach. We provide therapeutic interventions, practical guidance, peer support, and opportunities for personal development, helping individuals improve their wellbeing, develop resilience, and create positive futures for themselves and those around them.



**887** adults supported.

**81%** improved their ability to manage addictive behaviour.

**75%** of veterans improved their mental health and wellbeing.

**383** people supported through our Criminal Justice service.



# Recovery Support Programme

**Next Steps is Norfolk's first community recovery hub, providing a safe environment where people can sustain long-term recovery. At its heart is the Recovery Support Programme (RSP), combining therapeutic support, recovery-focused interventions, and practical skill development. Members can continue their journey through employability, personal development, community activities, and peer support.**

Community is central to recovery. Over the past year, we served **5,918 meals** through our café, creating a welcoming space for connection. We also saw **20 RSP graduates** become volunteers, supporting others beginning their recovery journey.

Members shape the service through feedback, co-production, and governance participation, ensuring it remains responsive and person-centred.

During the year, 391 people accessed support through Next Steps:

**85%**

improved their mental health and wellbeing.

**81%**

improved their social connections.

**81%**

improved their ability to manage addictive behaviour.

**"Today a year ago, I walked through the door of the Matthew project, completely broken and dysfunctional. I was a tangled mess, through the year I have been guided supported and cared for.**

**Healing takes time and that's what the Matthew project gave me the most, time, care, and love, respect."**

Jason RSP member

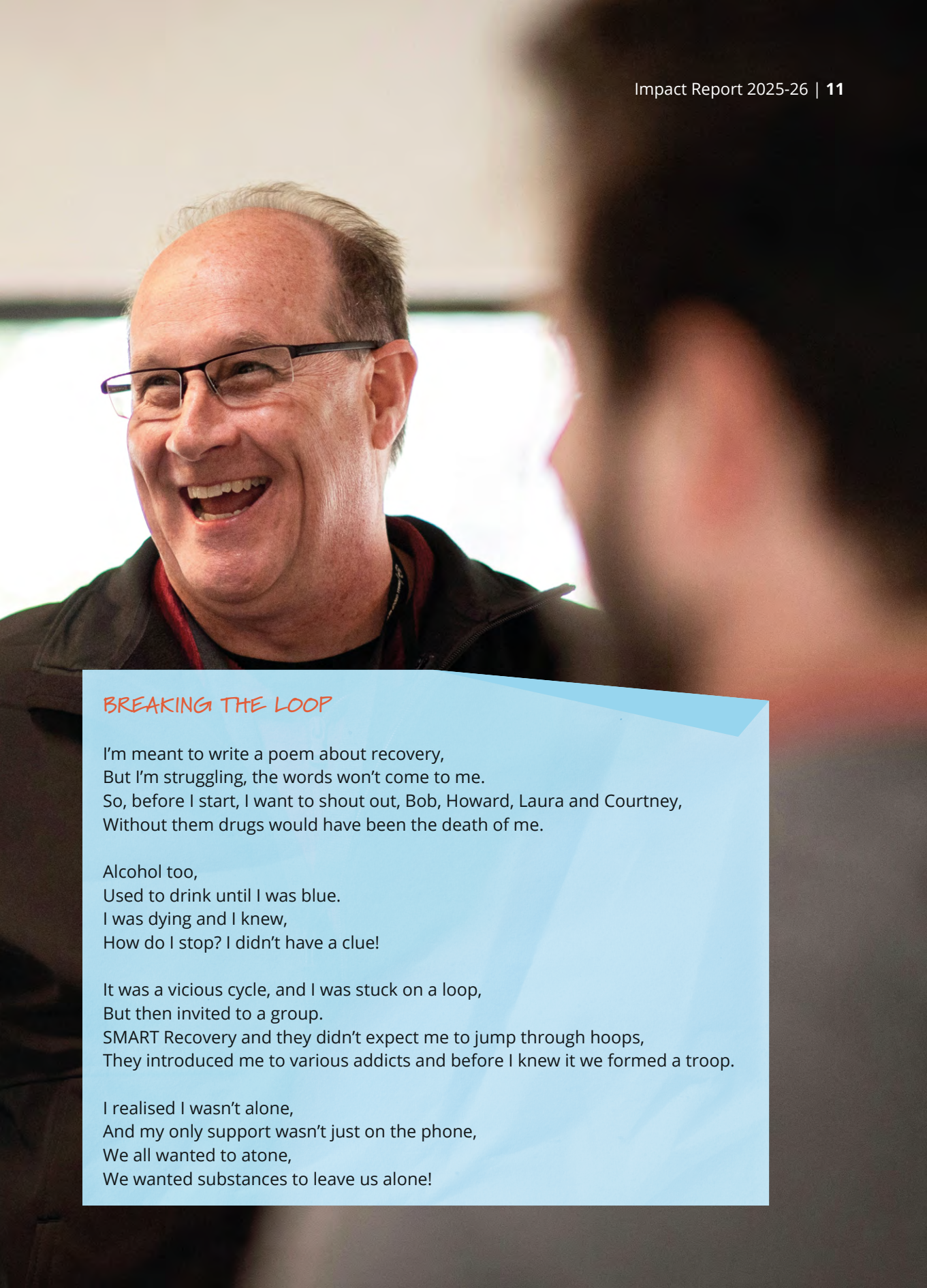
# Criminal Justice Service



**Our Criminal Justice service supported 383 individuals across prison and community settings, including 146 people in custody at HMP Norwich, HMP Bure, and HMP Wayland.**

A total of **223 individuals** received intensive one-to-one support through **915 sessions**, while **125 people** accessed shorter interventions. The service helps people navigate the transition from custody to community, promoting stability and sustained recovery. In addition, **100 individuals** accessed support through the Recovery Centre.

**SMART Recovery** remained a key part of delivery, with **255 individuals** participating in **182 meetings**. These peer-led sessions help people develop recovery skills, build supportive networks, and maintain positive change.

A photograph of a middle-aged man with glasses, smiling broadly and looking towards the right. He is wearing a dark jacket over a red shirt. The background is blurred, showing another person's profile in the foreground on the right.

### BREAKING THE LOOP

I'm meant to write a poem about recovery,  
But I'm struggling, the words won't come to me.  
So, before I start, I want to shout out, Bob, Howard, Laura and Courtney,  
Without them drugs would have been the death of me.

Alcohol too,  
Used to drink until I was blue.  
I was dying and I knew,  
How do I stop? I didn't have a clue!

It was a vicious cycle, and I was stuck on a loop,  
But then invited to a group.  
SMART Recovery and they didn't expect me to jump through hoops,  
They introduced me to various addicts and before I knew it we formed a troop.

I realised I wasn't alone,  
And my only support wasn't just on the phone,  
We all wanted to atone,  
We wanted substances to leave us alone!



# Next Steps for Veterans

**This year, Outside The Wire was integrated into Next Steps for Veterans, creating a stronger, more connected pathway of support. During the year, 113 veterans accessed support, including 44 receiving one-to-one support alongside peer-led group activities.**

Peer support remained central to delivery, helping veterans reduce isolation, build confidence, and improve wellbeing.

Positive outcomes included:

**85%**

improved their  
use of time.

**75%**

improved their  
mental health  
and wellbeing.

**78%**

improved their  
ability to manage  
strong feelings.



## DAVID'S STORY

**“Recovery began with simple conversations and trust. It’s about rebuilding purpose, connection, hope, and finding the strength to begin again.”**

David has spent much of his life serving others. In his younger years, he served in an infantry regiment overseas before many years working as civil servant in central government.

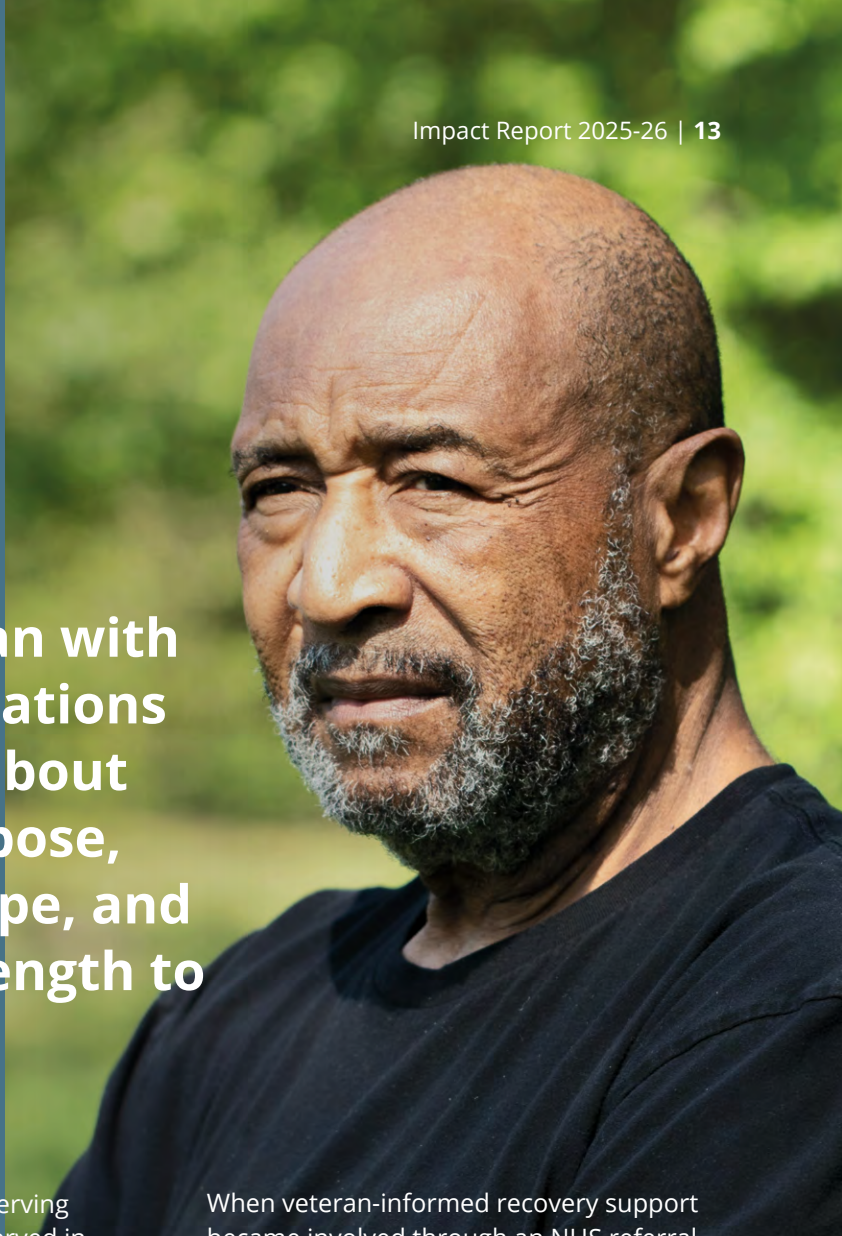
Retirement brought unexpected challenges. Declining health, major surgery, and reduced mobility slowly took away the routine and independence that had shaped his life for decades. As isolation grew, alcohol gradually became part of his daily routine.

Everything changed after a serious alcohol-related fall left David in hospital with a head injury.

When veteran-informed recovery support became involved through an NHS referral, David had little memory of the early stages of his admission and was surprised he had stayed alcohol-free while in hospital.

Through regular home visits, David worked with his recovery worker to understand the triggers behind his drinking. Rather than focusing on perfection, the support centred on realistic change.

Today, David continues moving forward. His confidence and mood have improved, his alcohol use has reduced significantly, and both he and his wife feel more hopeful about the future.



# Young People's Team

**Our young people's services help children and young people across Norfolk overcome challenges, build resilience, and create positive futures.**

**Unity** supports those affected by their own drug or alcohol use, **YouCan** works with young people impacted by family substance misuse, and **On Track** helps those facing barriers to education, employment, and training.

Together, these services provide tailored support, positive activities, and practical guidance, ensuring young people receive the help they need to thrive.

**1281**  
young people supported.

**91%**  
of **On Track** participants have improved their confidence and self-esteem.

**100%**  
of **On Track** participants felt they got the help they needed.





## SALLY'S STORY

**“At 17, I was heavily into smoking cannabis, alongside other substances, but I realised cannabis was a catalyst for my anxiety.**

My life became a cycle: smoke, eat, sleep, repeat. It massively impacted my mental health. I felt like a deer in headlights, always looking around, trapped in my own head, paranoid about the people around me.

One of the biggest challenges was moving away from the friendship group that fuelled my smoking. I realised I felt lonely even when I was with them. I also recognised something important, they could take cannabis or leave it, but I couldn't. I knew I was addicted.

At my lowest point, I sent an email to The Matthew Project asking for help. That message changed everything. With support, I was finally able to talk openly about the things that were troubling me.

Slowly, I began to realise what I wanted from life and started setting new goals for myself. I also met new people, creative, inspiring friends who accepted me for who I am. For the first time in a long time, I felt genuinely cared for.

I felt uplifted. I discovered a passion for photography and started feeling productive again. I realised cannabis had been holding me back from becoming the person I wanted to be.

I would encourage anyone struggling not to be afraid to ask for help. I could talk openly, leave feeling lighter, and know I could always come back and continue where we left off. Now, I feel grateful, and incredibly proud of everything I've achieved.”



# Unity

**Unity provides specialist support for children and young people across Norfolk affected by drug or alcohol use, while helping professionals respond effectively to concerns.**

During 2025–26, Unity supported 817 young people through one-to-one interventions, targeted group sessions, and community-based support.

Alongside direct support, Unity strengthened awareness of substance use across Norfolk. We launched online resources, co-designed with young people, providing accessible information on commonly used substances and helping young people, families, and professionals access trusted guidance.

Unity contributed to wider sector learning. Our Lead Nurse presented at a regional public health conference organised by the Norfolk Drug and Alcohol Partnership, sharing insights into emerging concerns around Ketamine and synthetic opioids.

The presentation received high praise from Professor Rob Ralphs, Professor of Criminology & Social Policy and Deputy Director of Drugs, Policy & Social Change, who commented:

**“The talks were among the best I’ve seen from treatment services, and it was really interesting to hear about the local picture.”**

Recognising the importance of early intervention, we delivered training to 507 professionals on substance use, effective conversations, and parental substance misuse. These sessions increased confidence across the county. One participant shared:

**“I have a better understanding of how conversations, particularly early on, can support a young person to make beneficial changes.”**



Public Health Conference

### Young People take over Practice Week

During Norfolk's Young People Take Over Practice Week, young people told us they wanted adults to better understand their experiences. In response, we worked with them to create **From Stigma to Support: Changing the Conversation on Substance Use**.

The video shares young people's lived experiences, highlighting how stigma can prevent them from seeking help and the importance of compassionate, non-judgemental support. By listening to their voices, we can challenge stigma and improve access to support.

**90%**

of young people supported through specialist interventions reduced their cannabis use.

**86%**

of young people supported through specialist interventions reduced their alcohol use.





# YouCan

**YouCan supports children and young people affected by a parent, guardian, or family member's substance misuse. Funded by Norfolk County Council Public Health, the service helps build resilience, improve wellbeing, and reduce isolation.**

Over the past year, **247 young people** received one-to-one support in schools, homes, and community settings. During school holidays, this support is enhanced by lots of exciting positive activities, developing skills, confidence, and peer connections.

A highlight of the year was a two-night residential at How Hill, where young people enjoyed activities including den building, orienteering, clay modelling, owl pellet dissection, and a boat trip on the Broads. The residential provided opportunities to build confidence, develop trusted relationships, and reflect on personal growth.

To ensure that our support is accessible to all, we have also developed at-home activity packs (see photo above) and video guides, enabling young people to engage in creative and wellbeing-focused activities in ways that suit them.



**Young people supported through YouCan improved their resilience by**

**33%**

**and their wellbeing by**

**25%**

**compared to when they started.**

**One young person shared:**

"I have a new-found confidence that I didn't know I had."

**Another reflected:**

"There's been lots of new opportunities for me... I've tried new foods and new activities I hadn't before."

**The impact was also felt by parents and carers. One parent told us:**

"Thank you so much for taking them on the residential. They had a great time and loved the food! I did not think they would be at this stage a year later and you have been a huge part of that."





**I feel more comfortable with being me and haven't had to change into being a different me. Understanding my family better and that it wasn't me who was going crazy and I wasn't the only one who had it rough.”**

Young Person (YouCan)





# On Track

**On Track supports young people aged 13–24 who face barriers to education, employment, or training, helping them build confidence, improve wellbeing, and move towards positive futures through coaching, group activities, and community support.**

**Participant feedback highlights the impact of the On Track service:**

**91%**

**reported improved confidence and self-esteem.**

**100%**

**felt they received the help they needed.**

**70%**

**gained new knowledge and skills.**

These results demonstrate the value of early intervention and personalised support in helping young people overcome challenges and achieve their potential.



During the year, 217 young people accessed support through our On Track programmes across Norfolk:

- Central Great Yarmouth (Nelson Ward) Engagement Coaching supports young people aged 14–19 who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET. Through coaching and positive activities, 64% of school-based participants improved their attendance.
- Safe Space provides group activities for young people aged 13–18 who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET, focusing on motivation, resilience, and positive social connections.
- King's Lynn and West Norfolk Coaching supports young adults aged 16–24 furthest from the labour market, helping them overcome barriers and move closer to education, training, volunteering, and employment.

Funding from the Norfolk Smokefree Generation Project enabled 160 smoking cessation conversations with young people, volunteers, and staff. We also delivered a 10-week Exam Stress Programme at a Great Yarmouth high school, helping Year 11 students manage stress and prepare for exams.



## HARLEY'S STORY

**"I love attending the groups in Norwich. It's helped me become more confident and positive, and I feel comfortable around new people now."**

Before Harley found The Matthew Project, life had not been easy.

Living with ASD, physical health challenges, and the heartbreaking loss of his mum to cancer, Harley often struggled to find his place in the world.

A year ago, Harley began working with The Matthew Project through the On Track programme, starting with one-to-one coaching.

With personalised support, encouragement, and structure, things slowly began to change. Week by week, Harley's confidence began to grow.



### **Reflecting on his journey, Harley shared:**

"I love attending the groups in Norwich – I've learned so much and made lots of friends. It's helped me become more confident and positive, and I feel comfortable around new people now."

### **Harley's dad said:**

"Today, Harley continues to grow in confidence and independence, supported by friendships, new experiences, and a community where he feels accepted and valued."

# Our People

## Volunteering

Volunteers are at the heart of The Matthew Project, supporting recovery, strengthening communities, and enhancing services across Norfolk. This year, increased volunteer involvement helped us expand activities and reach more people.

In total, 43 volunteers contributed 5,364 hours, sharing their time, skills, and lived experience to provide practical support, encouragement, and hope.

Lived experience remains central to our approach, with a third of our volunteers having personal experience of recovery.

This helps build trust, meaningful connections, and belief in lasting change.

At Next Steps, volunteers support the café, allotment, group activities, SMART Recovery sessions, and befriending services. Within Young People's Services, they assist with activities, peer mentoring, service development, and staff recruitment, with many being former service users.

Their commitment enables us to support more people, strengthen recovery journeys, and create opportunities for connection and belonging across our communities.







### VIC – VOLUNTEER

"I have been attending the Veterans drop in on a Tuesday evening which I help to run, whilst there I saw a notice asking for volunteers to help out at the hub during the daytime. I put my name forward, I was accepted to do a shift behind the coffee bar. I found members would talk to me, not being a young person I obviously have a little bit of life experiences and was able to give a little help or reassurance.

I saw in some small measure this made a difference, this meant a lot to me thinking that I could help lift a few spirits. Being a volunteer has made a large difference to my life and given me a lot of joy."



## Staff

Our staff bring the expertise, compassion, and commitment that make our work possible. This year, we continued to invest in training, professional development, and workforce growth, supporting staff, trainees, and students to build skills and progress their careers.

Staff achieved a range of professional qualifications, including the **Level 5 Certified Digital Marketing Professional**, **Level 2 CBT qualification**, and **JNC Youth Work qualification**. We also provided trainee practitioner opportunities and hosted an **MA Social Work student placement**, helping to develop the future workforce while strengthening our services through fresh perspectives and additional capacity.



Our annual wellbeing survey highlighted a positive and supportive workplace culture:

**100%**

agreed or strongly agreed **The Matthew Project supports them.**

**100%**

agreed or strongly agreed **The Matthew Project recognises dignity at work.**

**96%**

agreed or strongly agreed they **have opportunities for progression and development.**

**4.71/5**

average rating for recommending **The Matthew Project as a great place to work.**

These results reflect our commitment to creating a workplace where people feel valued, supported, and empowered to develop, enabling them to make a lasting difference to the individuals and communities we serve.

## GRAHAM'S STORY

**My sober date is  
29 May 2012.  
On 5 February 2026,  
I marked 5,000 days sober.**

"If I think back to those early days, the memories are stark. A police cell. A hospital bed. A homeless hostel I shared with people whose lives were as chaotic as mine. A fractured spine and a life that felt equally fractured. I had lost my marriage, my connection to my children, my home, and any sense of direction.

My world had shrunk to surviving day by day, and alcohol had become both the problem and the only thing I thought was keeping me going.

A small but significant shift began in 2012. While I was in custody, a criminal justice worker from The Matthew Project came to see me. It was a simple conversation, no big promises, no pressure, just a suggestion that I got in touch when I was released.

Alongside that practical support, I became aware of something deeper stirring.

Slowly, gently, I sensed Jesus calling me toward something different, it gave me just enough hope to take the next step, and then the next.

Years later, in April 2019, I joined The Matthew Project as part of the team. It felt like a full circle moment, returning to the organisation that had helped me take my first steps, now hoping to play a part in making that same space for others.

Through all of it, my faith has been a steady thread, not something loud or dramatic, but something that kept me grounded when things felt uncertain.

I find myself simply thankful, for the people who helped me when things were dark, and for the gentle nudge that suggested change was possible long before I believed it myself.

Here's to the first 5,000 days, and to carry on, one steady day at a time."



# Community Support and Fundraising



This year, our supporters, volunteers, and community partners helped raise vital funds and awareness through events including the **Stories of Hope Community Day, Finding Hope Together Remembrance Service, The Big Thank You, Thorpe St Andrew Fireworks Night, Soiree of Stories**, and our **Business Breakfasts**.

A particular highlight was the **Big Give Christmas Challenge**, which raised **over £58,000** to support our services across Norfolk. As part of the campaign, **Festive DINE** welcomed **31 guests** for a special community meal, and we would like to thank **Chef Jack Gosling and The Harper** for making the event possible.

We are also grateful to community fundraising groups including **UEA Students' Union, TATs Buskers**, and **Dogface Improv**, whose efforts helped raise both funds and awareness for our work.

The year also saw the launch of the **TMP Choir**, which has grown to around **12 members** and has already performed at Norwich Cathedral and St George's Colegate, bringing people together through music, hope, and shared experience.

Together, these events and partnerships help us build stronger communities and continue providing hope, recovery, and opportunity across Norfolk.



# Thank you to our funders



Alan Boswell Group Charitable Trust  
The 29th May 1961 Charity  
Norwich Consolidated Charities  
Norwich Freemans Charity  
The Souter Charitable Trust  
The Kerrison Trust  
The Paul Bassham Charitable Trust  
Sir Norman Lamb Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund,  
The Ellerdale Trust  
Borough Council of Kings Lynn West Norfolk  
Norfolk Community Foundation  
North Norfolk Youth Advisory Board (YAB)  
Great Yarmouth Youth Advisory Board (YAB)  
Septagon Charity  
Garfield Weston Foundation  
The National Lottery Community Fund  
Norfolk County Council  
JD Foundation  
Veterans' Foundation  
Norfolk Arms Forces Covenant



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