

# 25 Exceptional Years

Real Life Options Group  
Annual Review **2016-17**



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An Annual Review is about what happened in an organisation in the last business year (April 2016 to March 2017).



This review is for the Real Life Options Group which includes Real Life Options and 1st Homecare.

# Introduction

It gives us great pleasure to introduce the Real Life Options Group 2016-17 Annual Review. Looking back on the previous year always provides a good opportunity to celebrate the inspirational people we support as they continue to make independent life choices and journey towards achieving their aspirations and dreams.

The following pages reflect achievements of the people we support and our passionate staff members who have once again demonstrated their commitment to ensuring that the people we support come first throughout the Real Life Options Group (which comprises Real Life Options and 1st Homecare). In fact, the recent staff survey highlighted this loyalty with nearly **90% of staff saying that the work they do gives them a feeling of personal achievement.**

2016/17 represented another year of significant progress for the Group. We have continued to build a robust platform upon which to grow future services, whilst securing and delivering new contracted services. We are very grateful for the work of Azra Kirkby as Interim Chief Executive who led us through this year before David Sargent came on board in March 2017. From this position of stability we will continue to build upon our reputation for excellence and innovation.

This year's 25th anniversary celebrations for Real Life Options have enabled us to reflect on our founding vision, purpose and values and take steps to better embed these within all that we do. Going forward we are confident that these values remain central, driving us to continue to achieve the very best in high-quality support.

**Thank you to each of our staff members, partners, supporters and advocates for achieving such great results over the year.**

## Plenty more to come

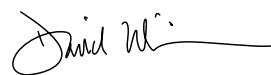
"This is a really exciting time for the Real Life Options Group. It has taken a long time to build the national presence of the organisation to what it is today and it's great that 25 years on our approach is still very much focused on the importance of delivering excellent person-centred services to put people in control of their own lives. Our long term vision for the Group is to continue to build upon what we are already doing well and continue to push the boundaries of innovation in how people are supported to best achieve their potential."

**David Sargent, Chief Executive**

**David Sargent**  
Chief Executive



**David Wilkin**  
Chair



David Sargent is our Chief Executive and David Wilkin is our Chair – together they are in charge of the Real Life Options Group.



They are both very happy with all the good things that have happened in the last business year.



# Celebrating 25 Years of Making a Real Difference



Real Life Options has a rich history of delivering exceptional support **for over two and a half decades to thousands of people across the UK**. 2017 is an important year for us as it marks our **25th anniversary since being founded on 23rd March 1992**.

## Humble Beginnings

We are really proud of how successful the Real Life Options Group has become since our humble beginnings, being organised from the home conservatory of our founder David Wandless. Today the Group has grown into a national organisation, providing support for **1,486 people** and **employing 1,854 staff** with a **£39.7m turnover**.

## One of the UK's Leading Care and Support Providers

As one of the leading care and support providers in the UK, the Real Life Options Group has an excellent reputation for providing person-centred care and services to support people to live their lives the way they want to. Working closely with over 40 different local authorities in England and Scotland, we are known for providing self-directed support to ensure people have equal rights as citizens, to maximise their independence and social inclusion and to exercise choice about their own lives.

## Influencing Public Policy

Over the years Real Life Options has also played an important role in influencing public policy and delivering a step change in support services for people with learning disabilities. This has included turning the Care in the Community legislation into a meaningful reality for people accustomed to long-term institutional living; and subsequently continuing to drive change by promoting rights, independence, choice and control and inclusion.



This year Real Life Options celebrated our 25th anniversary because it has been 25 years since the company started.



The company keeps on getting bigger each year. We support 1,486 people and have 1,854 staff.

## Distinctive New Branding

This year we launched our new branding to tie in with our organisational strategy for future growth. The revamped logo looks modern, dynamic and approachable, but also promotes the professionalism, people and character of our organisation. Our distinctive new strapline helps to convey what our organisation stands for – a real choice, a real voice, a real difference.

“Since launching the rebrand we have received very positive feedback from the people we support, our staff teams and our partner organisations. It really helps to underpin our ambitions for the future.”

**Vivien Simon, Executive Director**

## Continuous Growth

Real Life Options continues to develop and this year has seen growth across the Group. We have focused on the development of key areas, and expanding our existing services as well as introducing new ones. In addition, we have been exploring new models of service delivery and investing in a new HR and Payroll system to effectively streamline the payment process for our continually growing staff team and improve efficiency across the business.

**Huge congratulations to Carol from Stockton on Tees, who fought off tough competition to win our UK-wide competition to design our 25th anniversary card.**



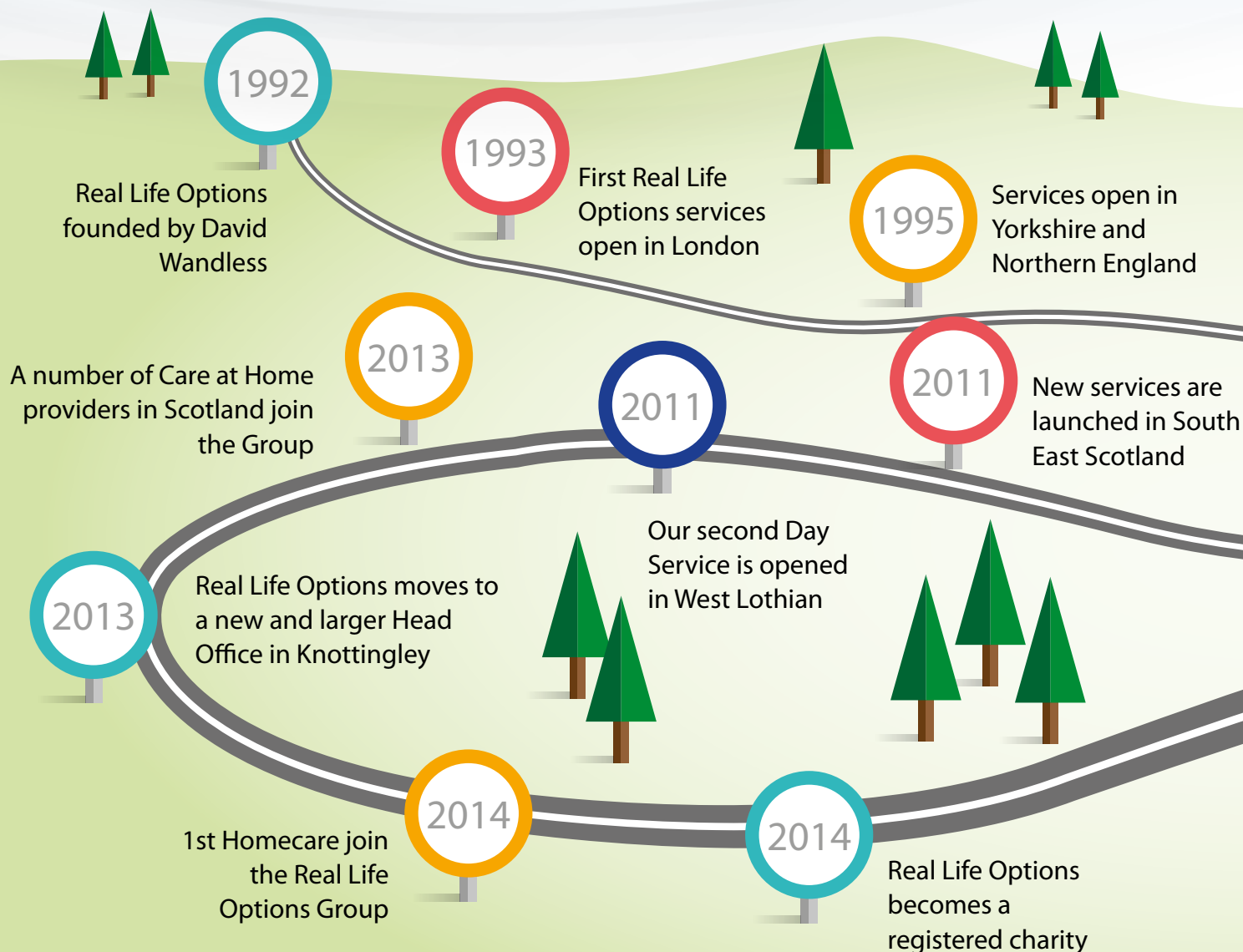
Last year Real Life Options changed its logo to make it look more modern and bright so people can recognise it more easily.



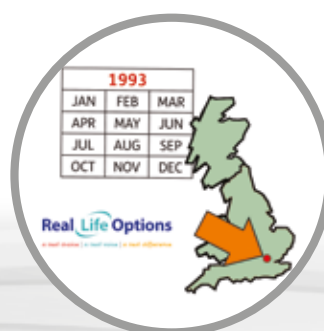
Carol from Stockton on Tees won our 25th anniversary card competition.

# Our Story

We are thrilled how much the Real Life Options Group has managed to achieve since 1992. Here are just some of our highlights from the past **25 years**...



Real Life Options has done a lot of good things since a man called David Wandless started the company in 1992.



Our first service opened in London in 1993.





**TOTAL**  
LOCATIONS



**TOTAL**  
PEOPLE  
SUPPORTED



We now have lots of services in different cities in England and Scotland.



1st Homecare joined the Real Life Options Group in 2014. 1st Homecare helps to look after older people in Scotland in their homes.

# Vision, Purpose and Values

## Revamping our Vision, Purpose and Values

25 years after the Real Life Options Group began

The Real Life Options Group was founded on strong values that put the people we support first so that they are always enabled to live their lives as they choose.

During 2017 we have been reaffirming those values to make sure they remain at the heart of everything that we do.

### Our Vision

- ✓ To be recognised as leaders in enabling people to achieve their potential

### Our Purpose

- ✓ To provide excellent social care and support

### Our Values



#### RESPECT

- ✓ We will **listen**
- ✓ We will treat everyone **fairly** and with **respect**



#### HONESTY

- ✓ We will act with **integrity**
- ✓ We will **honour** our commitments



#### RESPONSIBILITY

- ✓ We will take **ownership** and be accountable for our actions
- ✓ We will act responsibly within our **communities**
- ✓ We will be **financially** and **environmentally** responsible



#### EXCELLENCE

- ✓ We will champion **teamwork**
- ✓ We will promote **innovation**
- ✓ We will develop **potential**



### Our new company vision (or what we want to see happen):

We want to be known as one of the best companies at supporting people to do all they can.



### Our purpose (or what our job is):

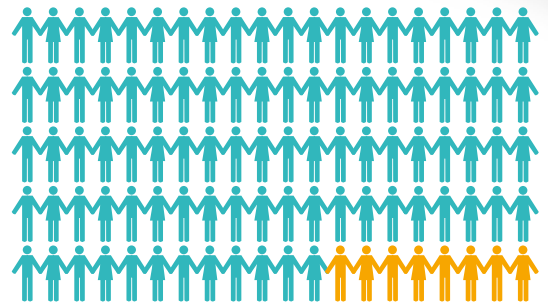
To give great care and support.



## Living our Values

Each staff team throughout the organisation had the opportunity to complete an interactive exercise to identify how they can live the values in their job every day – regardless of whether they are a Support Worker or working in our Finance team. **The values were also shared throughout the Group in an accessible EasyRead format.**

Our values of **respect, honesty, responsibility** and **excellence** underpin our person-centred approach as an organisation and help us work towards our vision of enabling every person to achieve their potential – whether they are someone we support or a member of staff.



# 92% OF STAFF

agree they have a **good understanding** of the **Real Life Options Group values**



Deputy Chief Executive  
Azra Kirkby presents staff  
with Real Hero Awards



### Our values (or how we will do things):

- Respecting you
- Being responsible
- Being honest
- Being great



Ask your Service Manager for the EasyRead version of our vision, purpose and values to find out more about this.

# Our Approach

The Real Life Options Group has been delivering person-centred services nationally for 25 years, enabling people to make choices and live their lives as they choose. We believe that with the right structured support at the right time, people will develop greater independence and reach their full potential.

We have considerable experience working with people with a range of needs including learning disabilities, physical disabilities, autism, mental health issues and complex and challenging behaviours, in addition to providing care at home for older people.

We are known for providing self-directed support to ensure people have equal rights as citizens and can maximise their independence and social inclusion in their local communities.

## Enabling People to Reach their Potential

We work with every person we support to develop their own **person-centred plan**. This identifies their dreams and aspirations and outlines how we can best deliver flexible, safe, 'active support'.

Our **Wheel of Support** demonstrates the support planning process that underpins our approach.

Throughout the Group there are many success stories of this effective approach enabling people to achieve greater independence, confidence and social inclusion.



We make sure all our support is right for each person so they can do all they can.



Everything our staff do is written in the Wheel of Support which explains the good things we hope to help happen.

## Valuing and Respecting our Staff

It is most certainly the people that make Real Life Options the excellent organisation that it is. Ensuring our diverse and skilled staff teams know they are appreciated is of great importance to us. Through our annual Real Heroes Awards, we celebrate staff members who have shown unwavering commitment and dedication in going above and beyond the call of duty to deliver an exceptional quality of service and a real difference to the lives of the people we support.



This year also saw the launch of the Real Benefits employee discount scheme which invites staff to take advantage of a number of exclusive discounts and special offers across high street retailers, restaurants and cinemas, as well as savings on holidays, family days out and much more.

## A Real Voice: People We Support Forums

Forums are very important in Real Life Options as they provide an excellent platform for the people we support to **voice their thoughts and learn more about important issues.**

They also provide an opportunity for families of the people we support to get involved and are usually followed by fun social activities, such as bring and share lunches, competitions or games such as bowling or pool tournaments.

Forums are also attended by local commissioners who want to learn more about what goes on at Real Life Options – along with other notable figures from the local community such as fire officers who have presented interactive talks about fire safety and what people can do to protect their homes.

There are lots of achievements that have arisen from these forums over the past year. Notable examples include people we support increasing in confidence and public speaking skills to such a degree that they were comfortable stepping forward and chairing the forums. Other people have developed their cooking skills so they could contribute home-baked cakes, helping to foster a greater sense of community.

## Developing our Staff

The Real Life Options Group remains committed to developing staff potential with **over 10,450 places on classroom-based training and e-learning courses** completed by staff across the UK throughout the course of the year.

Support staff who are new to the organisation receive a comprehensive sector-leading induction which covers person-centred approaches and underpins the values of the organisation, in addition to linking in with the standards outlined by Skills for Care and the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

In addition, some senior members of staff have achieved a specialist Prince2 Project Management qualification which will help to implement projects effectively across the organisation.



We have forums for the people we support so they can talk to staff and each other about different topics and share their ideas.



We have done lots of training to help our staff do the best job they can.

# Our Year in Numbers

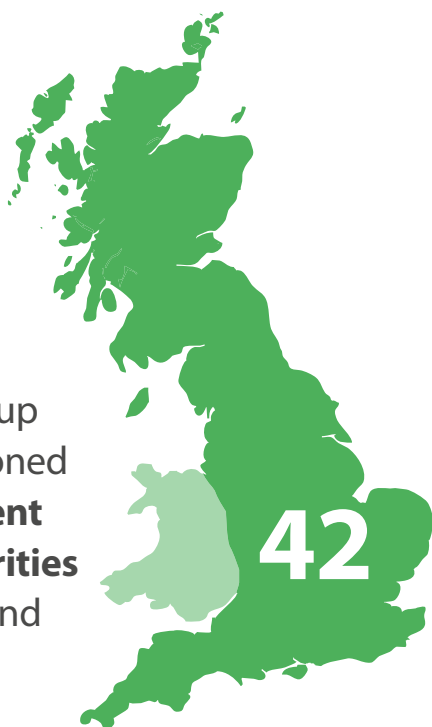
The Real Life Options Group delivers **54,386 hours** of care each week



This year the Real Life Options Group provided support to



The Real Life Options Group is commissioned to **42 different local authorities** in England and Scotland



The Real Life Options Group continues to work closely with Local Authorities to **provide cost-effective services.**



Last year we were paid £39.7 million to support people.



We give 54,386 hours of care each week to support lots of people in England and Scotland.



91%

of staff understand how their work contributes to the **overall success** of the Real Life Options Group

This year the Real Life Options Group has

1,854  
EMPLOYEES



5,009

CLASSROOM BASED  
TRAINING PLACES  
completed by  
staff across the UK



89%

of staff feel that their colleagues show **concern for the wellbeing** of the people we support in a caring and meaningful way

5,454

e-learning courses  
completed by staff

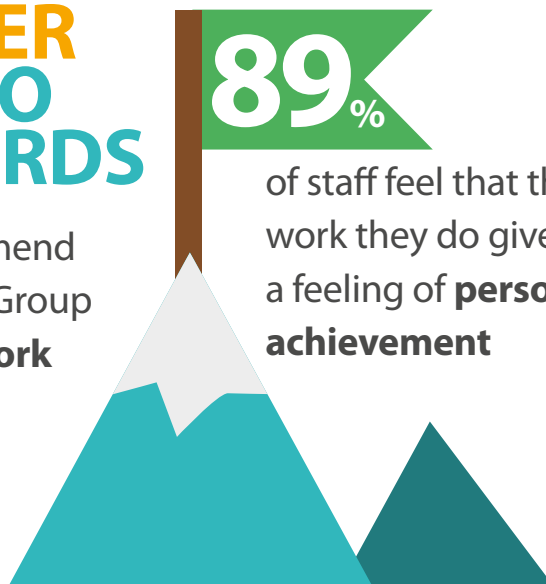


OVER  
TWO  
THIRDS

of staff would recommend the Real Life Options Group as a **good place to work**

89%

of staff feel that the work they do gives them a feeling of **personal achievement**



Training our staff so they can do their best job is very important. We have done lots of classroom training and computer courses to teach staff new things.



Lots of our staff think that Real Life Options is a good place to work and their job makes them feel happy.

# Our Year in Review

2016-17 was a very successful year for the Real Life Options Group. It was a year during which we not only kicked off the celebrations for our impressive 25th anniversary milestone but also welcomed a new Chief Executive, developed thriving partnerships and launched pioneering new initiatives.

Here's a round-up of just some of the great activities that have been going on across the UK.

## You're Hired!

**The people we support played a crucial role in the interview process of our new Chief Executive David Sargent, who joined the Group in March 2017.**

Move over Sir Alan Sugar, when it comes to making the really important recruitment decisions, Real Life Options have just the interviewers for the job! Step forward Angela from Stockton-on-Tees, Anjum from Newcastle and George from Angus in Scotland.

The trio formed an important 'people we support' panel for the Chief Executive interviews held at Head Office. All the candidates were put through their paces answering questions and making presentations to explain what they would bring to the role, in addition to a more formal interview panel led by Chair David Wilkin.

"The people we support panel is a really important part of the recruitment process. The experience of the people we support underpins everything we do as an organisation; they are involved in the interviews for all staff – Support Workers as well as Executive Directors – as it's crucial that we continue to recruit people who are person-centred in the way they work. Our three interviewers brought a great deal of commitment, perception and energy to the day; they thoroughly challenged each candidate."

**Andrea Holden, HR Manager**



Lots of great things have happened at Real Life Options in the last business year.



3 of the people we support helped to pick our new Chief Executive David Sargent by asking him difficult questions in an interview.

## Innovative New Approaches

**Real Life Options is keen to encourage awareness of learning disability and promote careers and volunteering in social care.**

During 2016 a Speaker Programme was developed that offers an interactive presentation to community groups, schools and colleges. Local Women's Institute groups have been the first to enjoy the talks which include creating your own one page profile, a quiz and discovering 'a day in the life' of a person supported by Real Life Options and their Support Worker. Where possible our speakers include a person we support and a Support Worker. At a talk in Yarm, Rachel from Hartlepool spoke about the activities she takes part in and how proud she was of taking part in the 'It's a Knockout Tournament'.

### **Critical Friend Programme: peer-to-peer support**

We developed our Critical Friend Programme as a process to drive high standards of quality in services, alongside our framework for continuous improvement. Service Managers from across the UK visit other services to observe practice and conduct audit checks. A group panel follows the visit in which constructive feedback is shared on how to further improve quality in an open and honest environment.

The programme is already yielding very positive results and after originally being launched in the North East and Yorkshire region, this programme is now being adopted in our other areas.



### **Interactive Recruitment Process**

During the past year we have also taken a creative new approach to recruitment, developing a bespoke in-house programme, incorporating new tools. These inclusive, interactive activities empower the people we support to take the lead and run the interviews themselves, as well as enabling their Support Workers to take a more active role in the assessment process.

This new approach was piloted with a senior level recruitment position and proved to be a great success in identifying the most suitable candidate for the job in addition to making it a much more enjoyable and engaging process for the people we support and the interviewees.

**"Peer-to-peer support is a great way to not only improve services, but also to promote teamwork and develop the skills of our Service Managers."**

**Tracy Connelly, Area Manager**



We have started some better ways of including people we support in more of our interviews so they can run some activities to help choose the best staff.



We have made a new talk which we can do at events to explain to new people about what Real Life Options does.



# Our Year in Review

## Election Sessions to empower the people we support to vote

**Every British citizen has a right to vote and it is important that the people we support at Real Life Options can have their say. That's why we have run several sessions about voting as well as making sure that information is available to everyone for each election.**

We are pleased that most of the political parties produce EasyRead manifestos which we find really helpful and actively share throughout the organisation.

Our sessions explain how to deal with finding out information and the practicalities of voting and provide the opportunity for people to ask questions. We also host a mock election so people we support can feel confident about the steps involved when they visit their local polling station.

"It's really important that everyone feels comfortable voting. It's everyone's right and so it's great to help people find out about how everything works and it's also very useful to help our Support Workers find out what to expect when supporting people at polling stations."

**Anthea Sully, Head of Business Development and Communications**

**"It's definitely helped me, it's been very interesting."**

Angela from Stockton on Tees



There have been some important elections recently when people have had to make choices about what they would like to happen.



We held some practice voting days so people we support knew what to expect and could make their own choice.



## A Knock-Out Success

**Fun was the order of the day as people we support and staff enjoy themselves at exciting carnival tournament.**

Real Life Options representatives were out in full force for a recent carnival-themed 'It's a Knockout challenge' held in York, in collaboration with partner organisation The Wilf Ward Family Trust. People we support and staff alike enjoyed donning crazy costumes and competing in the hilarious team games, which included a giant inflatable assault course and getting covered in foam! The plucky Real Life Options teams performed exceptionally well with *Team David* (named after the person we support who was Team Captain) achieving a well-deserved second place and *RLO Poolies* claiming third place.

**"I really enjoyed it.  
It was fun."**

Faith from Hartlepool

## Giving Back to the Community

As part of our Corporate Social Responsibility, the Real Life Options Group is passionate about giving back to the communities in which we work. We have established a regular charity day initiative, whereby our offices and services host different events each month to support a range of charities; from Children in Need and Macmillan Cancer Support to the National Autistic Society and the Epilepsy Society. In addition to fundraising, we are keen to improve awareness of important topics, such as the Dementia Friends campaign run by Alzheimer's Society, which is the UK's biggest ever initiative to change people's perceptions of dementia.

"Dementia is something that touches the lives of many people, not only the people that Real Life Options support but also friends and family of our staff. It's really important as an organisation that we raise awareness and we are hoping many of our staff will sign up to become Dementia Friends."

Azra Kirkby, Deputy Chief Executive



Some of the people we support had fun competing in teams at an It's a Knockout tournament.



We raised money and talked about Dementia Friends which helps older people when they start to forget things.

# Our Year in Review

## Dignity in Care

**Ensuring people are given choice, control and a sense of purpose in their daily lives.**

We were honoured to fundraise and increase awareness of the **2017 Dignity Action Day**. Focused around the importance of dignity in care, this was a celebration of the difference all our Support Workers are making in the lives of the people we support every day.

Dignity Action Day aims to ensure people who use care services are treated as individuals and are given choice, control and a sense of purpose in their daily lives – principles that the Real Life Options Group whole-heartedly embraces.

As well as fundraising for the National Dignity Council, staff were encouraged to sign up as Dignity Champions to join the Dignity In Care national network of over 83,000 individuals and organisations who work to put dignity and respect at the heart of UK care services to enable a positive experience.

## Our Partnerships

**From the very start the Real Life Options Group has been committed to working in partnership with other organisations and networks.**

We believe that by working together we can have a bigger impact in influencing developments in public policy that will ensure social care continues to develop in ways that offer choice and control for people with learning disabilities. We are active members of the Coalition of Care Providers in Scotland, the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group, Learning Disability England, Learning Disability Voices and the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group. Real Life Options has been a long term member of the Association for Real Change (ARC) and we are delighted that Anthea Sully, Head of Business Development and Communications, is now a trustee, further cementing this relationship.



We supported Dignity Action Day which celebrated all the good things Support Workers do.



We have been working with other companies to make things better for people with learning disabilities or autism.



## Have Your Say

**Making improvements based on your opinions and feedback.**

2016-17 marked the launch of both the new and improved **Service Survey for the people we support** and the revamped **Staff Survey for all employees**. Both surveys were crucially important in gauging the opinions and feedback of everyone involved with the Real Life Options Group and establishing a better picture of what people think so we can continue to improve what we do.

The staff survey revealed strong levels of satisfaction and commitment in the responses, with nearly **90% of staff saying they felt the work they did gave them a feeling of personal achievement**. The surveys provided some helpful views about how we can work together for our shared vision for the future and the Board are very committed to making sure that everyone benefits from the suggestions that have resulted from the surveys.



We did two important surveys last year – one for the people we support and one for staff to ask what they thought and what we could change.



People said lots of great things in both surveys and were very happy. A team of people are now thinking about how we can make things even better.

# 1st Homecare

## Leading the Way

**All of our Care at Home providers in Scotland are now grouped together under the 1st Homecare brand.**

During 2016 1st Homecare, the main subsidiary company of Real Life Options that delivers personalised care at home and support services, absorbed the other Care at Home companies in Scotland – Alpha, Lowland and Senior Service.

Consolidating all the companies under the 1st Homecare brand has helped to present a unified offer with consistent information and standards of service. The move has helped to benefit the people we support and staff, as it has led to easier sharing

of best practice on personalised care at home, as well as being more cost effective. The transition has been very smooth, with no impact on services to people we support, which have continued to be delivered to the same person-centred standards as usual.

**“The move to a single homecare service organisation in 1st Homecare has been an important part of our journey to improve **quality of service** for the people we support. Staff and managers always work hard to ensure we focus on ensuring the best support we can deliver. **The revised structure helps us to support that effort in a more co-ordinated way.**”**

**John McDonald, Executive Director**

## Brand New Website

**1st Homecare also launched a brand new website in 2016 which provides a wealth of information about the range of services available and how best to access these.**

**The new website is easier to use and is brighter and more interactive, providing more informative, accessible details about our work.**

**[www.1sthome-care.co.uk](http://www.1sthome-care.co.uk)**



1st Homecare is our Care at Home service used mostly by older people in Scotland. Some other similar companies joined with it last year.



1st Homecare also made a new website to explain what they do and how they can help older people.



## Innovative Work in Edinburgh

### Working in partnership.

1st Homecare is a **contracted partner of the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian** to provide ongoing care at home services for older people in the Forth and Inverleith Neighbourhood Partnership areas in north Edinburgh.

We are contracted to provide **personalised care and support**, using an outcome based approach within an awarded budget, to enable people to continue or resume living in their own home with a good quality of life.

Over the past year we have continued to work in **close partnership** with the council and NHS to ensure a smooth transition of all services.

We deliver **flexible, person-centred support** to help maintain individuals' independence within their own homes and to keep people active in their local community.

We have a **very experienced and highly trained** team of Care Workers providing individuals and their family with appropriate levels of just enough support to enable individuals to retain choice and control over living at home.

"1st Homecare was successful in securing two new areas of operation in North Edinburgh. A new branch, office and training facility has been set up to deliver the large contract. The new staff team has been developing effective partnership working with colleagues in the local health and social services team. A new flexible approach to delivering support means that individuals can have greater choice in the timing of their support, enabling it to be more person-centred, rather than being confined to rigid times that may not suit."

**John McDonald, Executive Director**



1st Homecare has been working with other companies in Edinburgh to help more people stay in their homes and do activities close to where they live.



We have been working well with the council and the NHS to make sure people get the support they need when they need it.

# Inspiring People

## Some of this year's highlights....

### Marching to the Rhythm of the Drum

A great number of people we support have enjoyed the benefits of drumming sessions held throughout the year. The drumming was an **excellent vehicle for people to communicate and express themselves** as well as being great fun.



**"I really enjoyed it. My favourite part was doing our names on the drums and learning about where they were from in West Africa."**

Paul from Newcastle



### Baked to Perfection

Lots of talented bakers from across the UK got busy baking tasty treats to enter **the Great Real Life Options Bake Off competition**. There were a number of charity bake sales with lots of great success stories pouring in, such as Mairi Clare from Angus who embraced the challenge to host her own coffee morning and raised £198 for Macmillan Cancer Support. After much deliberation Joanne from Leeds was awarded the Star Baker prize for her show-stopping Rainbow cake.



Lots of people we support really liked playing the drums together and making music at a number of drumming courses.



The Great Real Life Options Bake Off competition meant lots of people baked cakes for charity. Joanne from Leeds won the Star Baker prize.



## Write This Way

Real Life Options always seeks **every opportunity to empower the people** we support to have a voice in the organisation and our quarterly **Real News magazine** provides a perfect platform to showcase individual contributions.

The editorial team is always on the lookout for how to best involve new contributions and this past year has seen the people we support **write their own articles, share their artwork and quizzes** and a number of people, such as Fiona from Hawick, **share their delicious recipes** so others could try them at home.

Meanwhile, Christopher from Angus in Scotland jumped at the **chance to grill our new Chief Executive David Sargent** in an interview for the magazine.



Mairi Clare from Angus invited lots of people to have coffee and cake for charity and raised £198.



A number of people we support have written stories or shared recipes and artwork in our company magazine.

# Inspiring People

## A Meal fit for a King

Our An Carina Day Service in Livingston pulled out all the stops to organise a **spectacular Burns Nights Supper** for all the people we support and staff. The centre was transformed into a restaurant for the day and there was great excitement in creating the atmosphere with music, poetry and lots of tartan attire.

"The whole event was absolutely fantastic, it was a really good day. It was very encouraging to see all the staff really embrace it and the people we support loved it."

**Martin McInrue, Service Manager**

## Riding High

Philip from Durham jumped at the **chance to show off his horse riding skills** when he recently met Real Life Options Chair David Wilkin. Philip has been supported to go horseriding for a number of years now and has massively improved in confidence and has built up a great relationship with his instructor.

"It's great to meet Phillip in person today and he has certainly proved himself to be a fantastic horseman. I'm very impressed – **he really was excellent.**"

**David Wilkin, Chair**



We held a Burns Night Supper at our An Carina Day Service in Livingston and everyone enjoyed lots of food, poetry and music.



Our Chair, David Wilkin, visited Philip from Newcastle to see his horse riding skills.





## Supporting Skills and Employment

Supporting people to get into employment and maintain those jobs remains very important for Real Life Options. A number of the people we support have rewarding jobs in the local community.

Several of the women supported at our Kingsway service in Skipton have a variety of jobs. One works in a local day nursery, waitresses at the local community church and has an interesting role at a local haberdashery which includes putting together sewing kits and selling at trade shows. Meanwhile another works as a waitress in a local café and has a job at the Sense Charity shop as well.

Another great example is Cheryl from Glasgow, who has worked at Asda for 17 years and has a great relationship with her colleagues outside of work. Having worked in a number of departments including the restaurant, grocery and George clothing, Cheryl has recently moved to a new position in the Services/Returns department and is enjoying the new challenge.

"I really enjoy my job at Asda and can't believe that I have been working there for 17 years. The George clothing department is my favourite as you get to see all the new clothing range coming in which is exciting. I love working with members of the public and the most rewarding part of my job is the friends I have made as I really get on well with my work colleagues and we enjoy some great nights out."

**Cheryl from Glasgow**



Real Life Options is very good at helping the people we support to get into a job and do their best.



Cheryl from Glasgow has worked at Asda for 17 years. Two women from Skipton both have lots of jobs, including waitressing and helping at a local nursery.

# Inspiring People

## Not to be Clucked at

The Real Life Options Group is passionate about **encouraging innovation** in our services.

Graeme Masson, one of our Support Workers based in Angus, was thrilled to see his ingenious idea to **introduce chickens at our Broomfield Service** become a reality.

National Real Hero Award Winner Graeme spearheaded the Therahen project which involved building the new chicken accommodation, conducting appropriate risk assessments, coordinating initial fundraising and networking with the local community.

All the people we support at Broomfield really enjoy the interaction with the chickens and adore feeding them and they have also gained friends through the associated community networking which has been hugely beneficial for them.

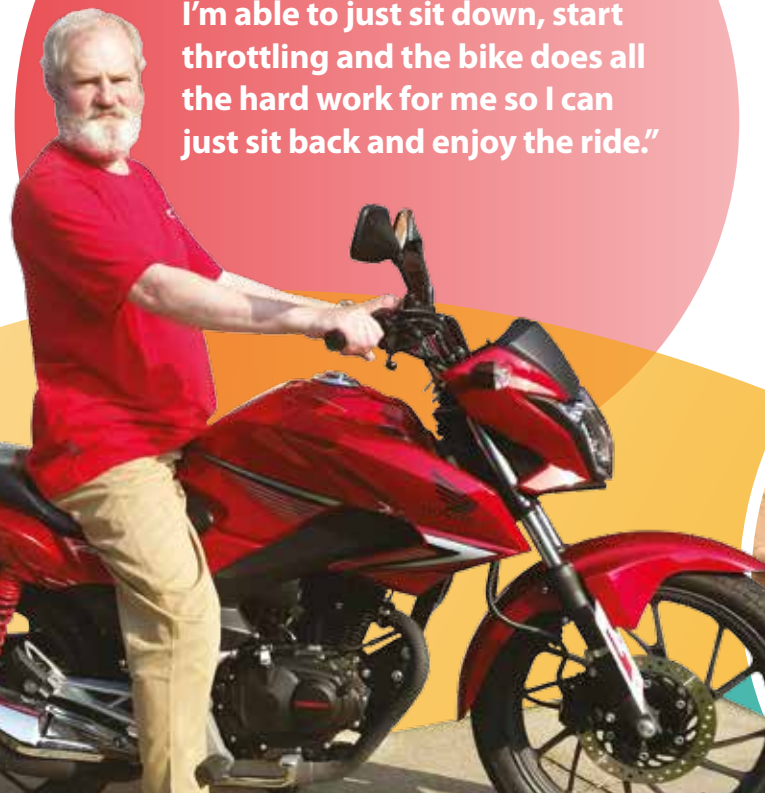


Graeme Masson, one of our Support Workers from Broomfield, has brought four chickens to his service so people we support can help look after them.

## Full Throttle Ahead

Kevin from Cleveland was delighted to **pass his compulsory basic motorcycle training test** with flying colours recently. After researching different options to buy his own bike, Kevin eventually settled for buying a new swanky red Honda CB125F motorcycle.

**"My favourite thing about motorcycling is that it gives you a choice of freedom. I'm able to just sit down, start throttling and the bike does all the hard work for me so I can just sit back and enjoy the ride."**



Kevin from Cleveland passed his motorcycle test and bought a new motorcycle which he is very happy with.



# A Real Choice: Darting Ahead

## Inclusive Darts Team Truly are Real Heroes

Respect and inclusivity are hallmarks of how Real Life Options supports people and we were thrilled to honour a local darts team in Hartlepool who brilliantly demonstrate this. **The Rossmere Darts Team** which includes Beverley Cave, Janet Grylls, Sue Linsley and Margaret Oliver have played together for ten years in different venues in Hartlepool. Three years ago they began to invite people we support to join the team and compete together equally in the league.

Rachel and Mary from Hartlepool are now valued members of the team who compete. The original team members have always been **very understanding and acted with dignity and respect to foster an inclusive environment** enabling the two supported ladies to feel relaxed and welcome.

**An exceptionally friendly team**, all the ladies also enjoy social nights and going on holiday together as well as taking it in turns to host a monthly Chinese meal.

**"The Rossmere Darts Team is fantastic. The ladies never judge and are very understanding, never moaning when they are bottom of the league. Rachel and Mary have grown loads in confidence since joining and they have made many friends in the league. The team have had offers of top county players to join the team but they have refused to change the members as winning every game isn't important to them. Instead what they value is loyalty and friendship."**

**Samantha Gardner, Service Manager**



**Chair David Wilkin presents the Darts Team with their Real Hero Awards**



A darts team in Hartlepool invited Rachel and Mary to join their team.



The darts team were given a Real Hero prize to say thank you for being so great.



# Delivering Excellence: Empowering People With Autism



## Two more of our services achieve official Autism Accreditation

The Autism Accreditation programme run by the National Autistic Society is an **internationally-recognised process** of measuring and evaluating whether a service reaches a set of standards for providing support to autistic people. A number of Real Life Options services have been **Autism Accredited for many years** and two of our Leeds services were the latest to become accredited.

"It's a really fascinating process working with the National Autistic Society (NAS). It's useful to make **you think about what you do every day and the impact that can have**. It's good to be officially recognised for all the hard work staff are putting in on a daily basis. The NAS conferences were really valuable too – they provided a **great opportunity to network with other service providers** going through the same process and gain inspiration by listening to people with autism talking about their own experiences."

Stephen Thackray, Team Coordinator

NAS worked with the staff teams to make useful recommendations throughout the process which has led to the **development of a number of new tools**, such as the comprehensive Sensory Assessment Tool, which records information about people in a much more detailed and accessible way.



Oliver,  
who attends  
an autism  
specialist  
college



Tyren enjoying  
a countryside  
walk



Two more of our services in Leeds have been awarded Autism Accreditation by the National Autistic Society.



Accreditation means that Real Life Options meets a good standard of quality and are supporting people with autism in the best way.

The actual assessment took place over three days and involved an external NAS review team who undertook a series of observations within the services and in the community in addition to reviewing paperwork, discussions with Service Managers, support staff and the people we support and sending questionnaires to family members, advocates and social workers.

Both services received **a lot of praise during the assessment**, being commended for their enthusiastic staff teams and for providing consistent yet individualised person-centred support to young adults with autism. They were also praised for their use of a **variety of communication strategies**, their structured training schedule and encouraging the people supported to **make choices and decisions**. The services were also congratulated on their multi-disciplinary approach and for the strong links that they had formed with other professionals, including psychiatrists, psychologists and speech and language therapists.



**Staff celebrate the successful Autism Accreditation**

The parents of those supported were also keen to express how choices are recognised and respected, explaining that “the needs of those living in the home are always given first consideration.”

All the people supported within the Leeds services are very **actively involved in their local communities** and are involved in a wide range of different activities. Tyren and Oliver both attend autism specialist colleges. John\* is a member of the Mind The Gap theatre programme, Neil\* attends a number of activity groups including arts and crafts and drumming, Dean\* works at an equestrian centre and Frank\* works at a local farm, which involves exhibiting the livestock at the Great Yorkshire Show.

“The process is really interesting, it’s so useful to **learn how we can adapt to become even better**. It was really eye opening for staff who are now even more aware about how to effectively support people. I genuinely think that it gave everybody a bit of a self-esteem boost – **it makes you realise that everything you are doing is worthwhile and really does make a difference to people’s lives.**”

Lindsey Bird, Team Coordinator

“This is a fantastic achievement for both services. It’s no easy task to secure accreditation. **The teams have all worked really hard** on this for a long time so it’s great to see it finally pay off.”

Vivien Simon,  
Executive Director

*\*Names marked with \* have been changed to protect the privacy of the people we support*



Family members said lots of good things about the Leeds services and were very happy that people could always make their own choices.



Staff were also told that they had very good ways of talking with the people we support and gave good support so they could do lots of different activities.



# Making a Difference: A Trip Down Memory Lane

## Christopher plays an important role in Strathmartine Hospital Histories project

The theme of a recent Learning Disability Week in Scotland was '**Looking Back, Thinking Forward**'. Looking back is an important step in moving forward and the Strathmartine Hospital Histories project in Scotland was a 5-month long project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to do just that. The project focused around **collecting the memories** of people who had lived and worked at the long stay Strathmartine institution for people with learning disabilities in Dundee before it closed down in 2003.

The project aimed to showcase the hospital history, in addition to making sure that people would not be institutionalised again because of their disability. It included a website (which hosted recordings, images and videos), an art competition, a 'Strathmartine Discoveries' event and a travelling exhibition.

Former Strathmartine resident Christopher, who is now supported by Real Life Options, played an important part in the project. Not only did he **share his story** but he also came up with some **brilliant creative ideas** that have driven some fantastic outcomes for the project.

"I've gained a lot of confidence in speaking to new people and was even on the TV as I was interviewed for the local news."

Christopher from Angus



Christopher from Angus has been helping with an important project in Scotland.



The project is about Strathmartine Hospital where Christopher used to live before he was supported by Real Life Options.





"I took part in filming for the DVD to share my experiences of my time at Strathmartine and also helped with the project newsletter, as well as taking part in the exhibition that was held in Dundee. I also came up with the idea of the art competition and the travelling exhibition so more people could be reached in different locations."

### Christopher from Angus

Christopher went on to win second place in the 'written pieces' category of the art competition, receiving a beautiful canvas as a prize. He said that his favourite part of the project was getting to **meet and reconnect with old friends.**



In the past people with learning disabilities had to stay at the hospital and were not allowed to make many choices themselves.



Now the hospital is closed and Christopher has been talking at events and on TV about how much better it is now he can make his own decisions.

# Achieving Potential: Reaching New Heights

## Ackie has an award-winning approach to motivating and inspiring people to try new activities

Ackie McGregor, one of our Support Workers from Scotland, is nothing short of an inspiration. Like so many of our support staff across the UK, Ackie is passionate about introducing new activities at his service to **help push people's boundaries and encourage personal growth**. He even recently won a Real Hero Award for his endless dedication.

Known for his relentless energy and enthusiasm, Ackie is always keen to motivate and inspire the people we support to try something different. Previous activities have included football competitions, trips to rugby and football matches and most recently even tank driving! In addition he organises a **monthly disco open to anyone with learning disabilities** in the local area, which has continued to gain popularity over the past three years and now attracts over 80 people from all walks of life.

Most notably, last year Ackie organised a team to take part in the Bronze Cateran Yomp – an intense 22 mile hike across a historical cattle smuggling trail around the Angus Glens to raise £2,500 for

ABF The Soldiers Charity which supports our soldiers and veterans. This involved 9 months of extreme walking and gym preparation for the plucky team taking part; Andrew, James and Craig, as well as staff members Ackie McGregor, Jordan Lindsay and Jennifer Tait.

*"The guys did phenomenal, the effort they put in each week doing the walks alongside staff was great. We were even lucky enough to have an ex-marine training us and it was a humbling but inspiring experience walking alongside him."*

**Ackie McGregor, Support Worker**

**The Bronze Cateran Yomp Team:  
Craig, Andrew, Jennifer, Ackie,  
Jordan and James**



Ackie, one of our Support Workers in Scotland, has been helping the people we support to be brave and try new activities.



He runs lots of fun events, including a monthly disco for people with learning disabilities and trips to rugby and football matches.



**But that's not all! Next year Ackie plans to lead the team in completing the Silver CATERAN YOMP (36.5 miles) and even plans to attempt climbing Ben Nevis – the highest mountain in Scotland (1344 metres above sea level).**

"Ackie always comes up with great ideas and sets goals to keep people motivated. To achieve the goals set, people need to be focused which incorporates teamwork, self-discipline, respect, fitness and healthy eating. All of this helps to keep people interested and encourages them to achieve as much as they can."

**Ben Gray, Service Manager**



**"We noticed a huge difference with the guys who took part as they became more motivated and worked extremely well as a team, which in turn changed their attitudes towards each other as they did not always see eye-to-eye beforehand."**

**Shona Smart, Team Coordinator**



Last year Ackie led a team of people we support and staff to do the Bronze CATERAN YOMP which is a 22 mile hike in the countryside.



All the team members finished the hike and had a very good time. They are looking forward to their next challenge.



# A True Hero

## Andrea Halliday helps to save Ian from a home fire

Andrea Halliday is known by all her colleagues as a very **compassionate and considerate individual** who always goes above and beyond to deliver the very best care to all the people we support.

Her relentless commitment was recently put to the test when she showed **exceptional bravery** when arriving at the house of Ian in Lockerbie. Upon arrival Andrea was shocked to discover that the house had been on fire and Ian had collapsed whilst trying to escape.

Andrea immediately informed the emergency services and supported Ian into the recovery position. She continued to talk to Ian who was drifting in and out of consciousness until help arrived. Thankfully Ian went on to make a full recovery and is very grateful for Andrea intervening when she did.

"I feel proud that I was able to help Ian and am really pleased that he's okay. Thankfully he only suffered from smoke inhalation and managed to avoid getting any burns. When I arrived at the house the fire had been so intense that the smoke alarm had melted and the floor was still so hot that my shoes started to melt whilst I was helping him."

**Andrea Halliday, Care Worker**

"Andrea was incredibly courageous when she discovered that Ian's house had been on fire and jumped into action straight away. It was her heroic actions that helped to save Ian's life and ensure he made a full recovery."

**Garry I'Anson, Service Manager**

Unsurprisingly, Andrea has since been named as one of the **National Real Hero Award Winners** and also received the inaugural **Real Hero Bravery Award** in recognition of her courageous actions on that day.



Andrea Halliday, one of our Care Workers at 1st HomeCare, has been awarded a Real Bravery Award for being very brave.



She helped Ian to escape from his house when it had caught on fire and made sure he was alright in hospital.

# Get Involved



## Fundraising Success

There has been lots of **fundraising success stories** over the past year with dedicated people raising money for Real Life Options. From fun coffee and cake mornings to challenging races, a whole host of innovative activities have been enjoyed to **raise money and awareness**.

Team Real Life Options represented the organisation at the Leeds 10k crossing the finish line to rapturous cheer. Elsewhere Anthony Kay, from our IT partner organisation, and his friend Michael Jeans braved an exhilarating skydive to raise money after being inspired by Michael's brother who has autism.

"It was great fun to take part in the 10k run with colleagues and we felt really **proud to be flying the flag for Real Life Options in Leeds**. I hope that we can continue to take part in community events like this and make them even more of a regular fixture in the future."

**Nicola Strong,**  
one of the team runners

## Staying in Touch

The families and friends of the people we support are often very involved with their lives and the services we provide to meet their individual needs. We produce our **quarterly magazine Real News** to help keep everyone up to date with the latest developments and activities taking place across the Real Life Options Group.

A digital version of Real News is also now available which people can choose to receive if they prefer, which is helping to improve our environmental efficiency and cost effectiveness whilst making sure everyone still stays informed and up to date.



Lots of people have been busy raising money for Real Life Options which helps to pay for some extra things our services need.



We have a company magazine called Real News that has lots of great stories from the people we support.

# A Day in the Life of a Support Worker

## Stepping into the shoes of Support Worker Paul Marshall in Leeds

“There’s no such thing as a typical day. All the people we support are **individuals with different needs**, so the job’s really varied and different every day.”

Paul has worked for Real Life Options for **over six years and recently was promoted to Team Coordinator**. Previously he worked as a Financial Advisor for 25 years but was inspired by his wife who has worked in the care sector for decades and has never looked back. “Being a Support Worker is certainly one of the most rewarding jobs in the world. **You know instantly if the job’s for you** when you start working. It’s great to spend so much time laughing and getting paid for having fun!”

On this particular day Paul was supporting Irfan from Leeds and it was clear from the outset that Irfan and Paul have a **great relationship** with lots of high fives and fist-bumping initiated by Irfan.

The day started with Paul meeting Irfan at his home in Leeds where he lives with his brother, who is also supported by Real Life Options, his sister and the wider family. Paul was on hand to help out with a scrumptious breakfast of crumpets and peanut butter, followed by personal care as Irfan had a shower, a shave and brushed his teeth.



Sometimes it is hard to understand all the different things a Support Worker can do every day.



Paul Marshall, one of our Support Workers from Leeds, has explained what he did on one recent day at work so people can get a better idea about his job.



As the sun was shining, the pair set out walking to a local day service to enjoy a cup of tea and socialise with the other people there. A small group then made a brief excursion by mini-bus to another nearby day service where Irfan **independently got involved in a lot of stimulating activities**, including a team Botchi ball game and taking Paul on at a game of pool.

After that it was time for a packed lunch, although Irfan and Paul popped into a social enterprise café enroute so Irfan could choose a drink to buy and interact paying the cashier himself. Even though Irfan could be described as 'non-verbal', it was immediately obvious that he had a lot to say and clearly communicated well throughout the day with a variety of Makaton signs, gestures and words.

As Irfan loves trains he was quite animated about visiting the train station, so the next stop was a bus to Leeds City Centre. Irfan expertly navigated around Leeds, guiding Paul to his favourite shop to buy a neon orange keyring before enjoying trainspotting at the station.

**"Being a Support Worker is certainly one of the most rewarding jobs in the world."**

Paul Marshall,  
Team Coordinator



Paul said every day can be very different when you are a Support Worker but it is one of the best jobs in the world.



On this day Paul was supporting a young man called Irfan who lives in Leeds.

# A Day in the Life of a Support Worker

"Irfan gets involved in a lot of activities, from football and boxercise to music groups. However, we do think he's getting a bit bored with his current routine so we are **planning to explore some new activities** – we're investigating a new Animal Awareness course or possibly a walking group as he likes being outside. Irfan always finds a way of effectively communicating what he wants to do."

Irfan thoroughly enjoyed whistling and waving at the trains and even high-fiving some policemen! The day finished with a final trip back to his local day service for a refreshing cup of tea (Irfan's favourite) and a bus ride and walk back to the family home, where Paul completed the communication log and updated Irfan's sister.

"I'd say the best quality for a Support Worker to have is a **sense of humour**, you have to be able to laugh at yourself!" shared Paul. "You do have to be patient too and you **need to be flexible** as you have to be able to react to different situations. You do need to be **emotionally ready** for the job – it can sometimes be challenging, especially when people get frustrated, but I take it all in my stride. I really enjoy being part of a team, but I do value my independence so it suits me to take the day as it comes."

Plus, I've always found the management team to be very approachable whenever I've raised any concerns."

"Being a Support Worker is most rewarding when you can tangibly see the difference you have made in someone's life, like Irfan. Another man I support, Luke, in the past couldn't cross a road by himself as he had no awareness of danger, whereas now six years later he is independently travelling to college by himself and looking for a job. **It's great to see the effort you put in can pay off and it reminds you to never give up on anyone.**"



Before they went out of the house Paul helped Irfan to get breakfast and then have a shower, shave and brush his teeth.



They visited two local day services to play games, meet other people and have lunch.

## Paul's Support Worker Diary

7.00

Meet Irfan at his home

7.30

Breakfast and personal care

9.00

Walk to local day service

9.45

Bus to other nearby day service

10.00

Botchi ball game & Pool

11.45

Visit a social enterprise café

12.00

Packed Lunch with Irfan's friends

12.40

Bus into Leeds City Centre

1.00

Shopping and walk around town

2.30

Trainspotting at train station

3.15

Bus back to local day service

3.45

Travel back to Irfan's home

4.00

Handover & Communication Log

**"There's no such thing as a typical day – it's really varied and different."**



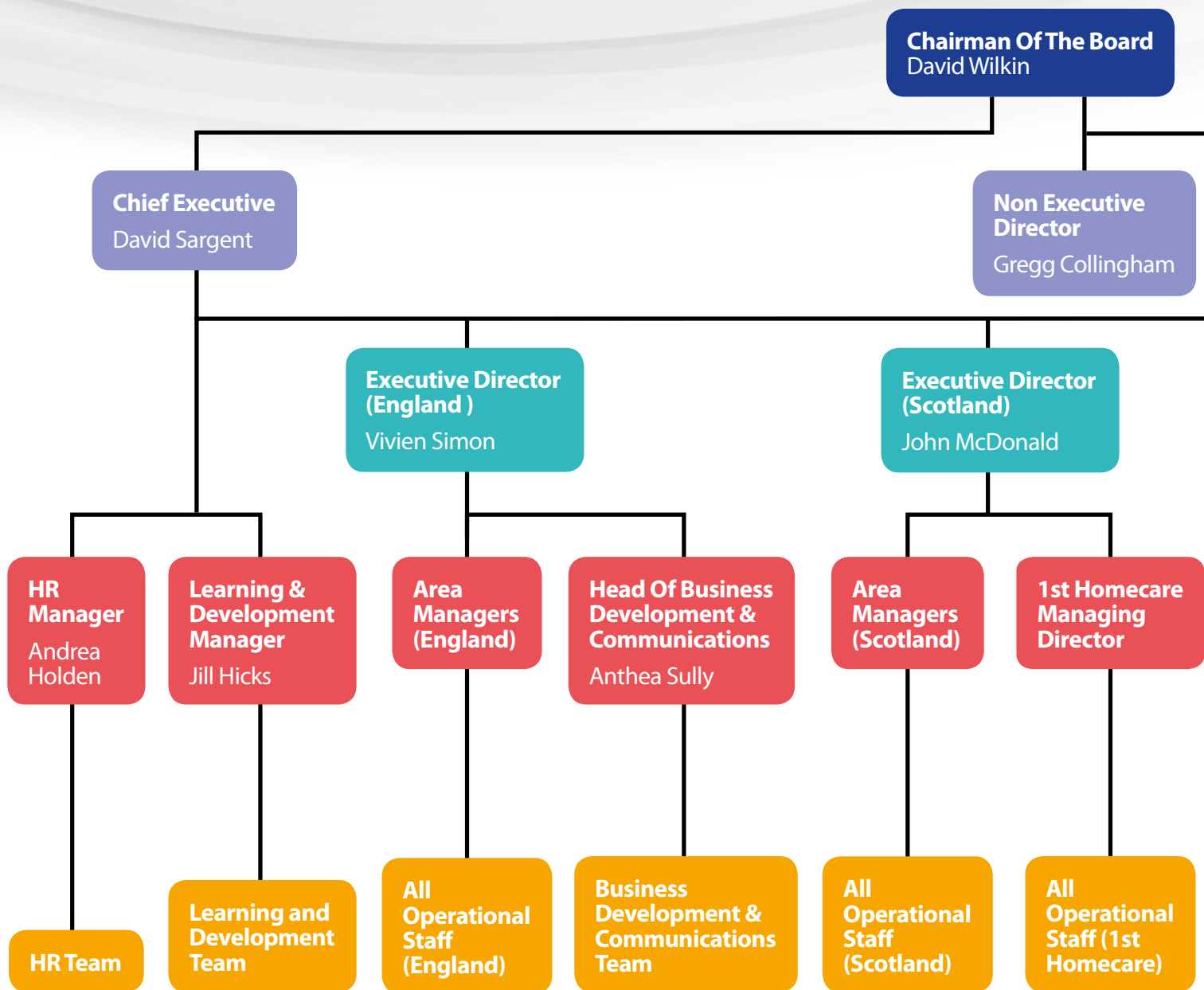
They visited Leeds to go shopping and went to see the trains at the station which is Irfan's favourite thing to do.



At the end of the day Paul talked to Irfan's sister about all the things they did and wrote it all down in a book so his Support Worker knew about it the next day.



# Our Team



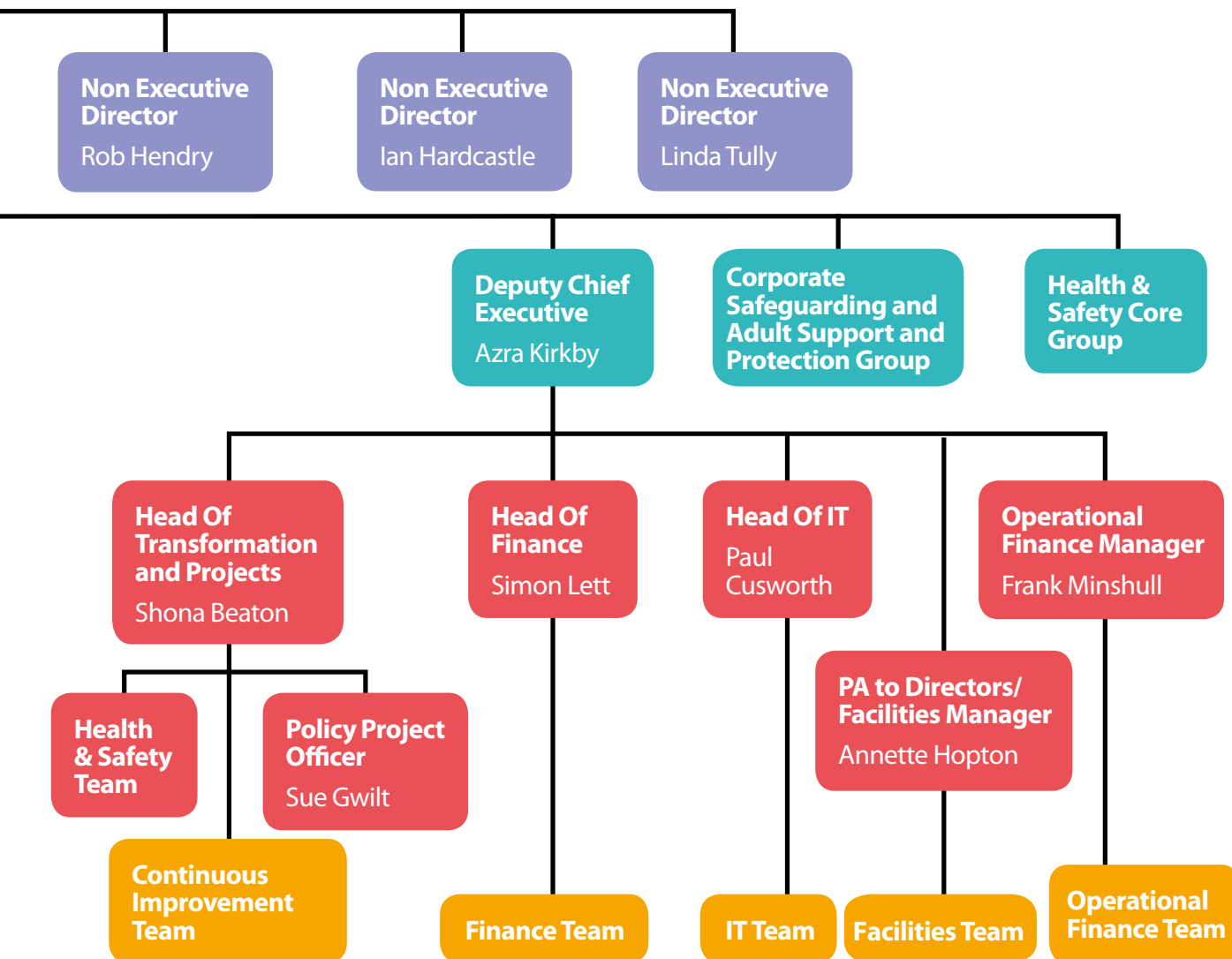
The people who work at Real Life Options are very important in making it a good company.



The chart on this page shows all the different teams and says who is in charge of each team.

As a person-centred organisation, the Real Life Options Group knows that **success is defined by its people**. We have a committed team of Service Managers, Team Coordinators and Support Workers who work around the clock to **deliver exceptional support to people across the UK**.

The Real Life Options Group is overseen by a Board of Directors incorporating the Executive Management Team and a number of Area Managers who provide operational support for different geographic regions.



The Chair (David Wilkin) and his team is in charge of everybody else. His team are called the Board.



The Board makes sure everyone is doing their job right and that people are being supported in the best way.

# Our Finances

We are very pleased to report a **successful year with an annual turnover of £39.7m**. This is down slightly from last year which was £40.9m because we have converted some of our services from care homes to supported living which are helping the people we support lead more independent lives and are more cost effective to run. This year of consolidation has also involved a review of systems and processes and the delivery of an improved shared service platform on which to grow.

The following is a summary of the Real Life Options Group financial results over the last financial year 2016-17.

	2016-17 Total	2015-16 Total
<b>Turnover</b>	£39,714,000	£40,911,000
<b>Expenditure</b>	£39,130,000	£40,483,000
<b>Net Incoming Resources</b>	£584,000	£428,000
<b>Reserves</b>	£5,484,000	£4,935,000

This Financial Summary is not the full statutory accounts but is a summary of the information which appears in the full accounts.

If required for further information the full accounts can be viewed on our website:

**[www.reallifeoptions.org](http://www.reallifeoptions.org)**



Last year we were paid £39.7 million to help support people in England and Scotland.



This is a little less than the year before because we have made a few changes to make things better so they don't cost as much to do.



# Where We Work

**Real Life Options**  
operates a number of  
services accross the UK  
from London to Elgin.

## Head Office:

Real Life Options,  
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Tel: 01977 781800

[www.reallifeoptions.org](http://www.reallifeoptions.org)

## Scotland Main Office:

Real Life Options,  
2nd Floor, Academy House  
1346 Shettleston Road  
Glasgow G32 9AT

Tel: 0141 778 3949

## 1st Homecare Ltd:

1st Homecare Ltd  
12b Burnbank Road  
Falkirk FK2 7PE

Tel: 01324 633377

[www.1sthome-care.co.uk](http://www.1sthome-care.co.uk)



Real Life Options has  
lots of services in  
England and Scotland  
where we help  
support people to  
live their lives the way  
they want to.



To find out more you  
can phone us on  
**01977 781800**  
or visit our website  
**[www.reallifeoptions.org](http://www.reallifeoptions.org)**

# Real Life Options

a real choice | a real voice | a real difference



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Association for Real Change

