

Celebrating Our Real Heroes



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An Annual Review is about what happened in an organisation in the last business year (April 2020 to March 2021).



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

Introduction

We are delighted to introduce the Real Life Options Group 2020-21 Annual Review.

This provides a summary of business operations and financial performance while showcasing some of our inspirational stories, achievements and life choices from the people we support.

This is a joyous time for Real Life options as we celebrate 30 years of supporting people to live the lives of their choice, confident in the knowledge that they are in a safe place to explore opportunities.

It has taken a long time to build the national presence of the organisation and it's great that 30 years further on, our approach is still very much focused on the importance of delivering excellent person-centred services, ensuring that people are in control of their own lives.

Real Life Option's social impact in local communities goes from strength to strength and we are delighted to have been able to develop brand new services which are designed from the ground up around the expectations of people with learning disabilities and autism.

Real Life Option's focus going forwards is to maintain long term supportive relationships and to develop additional effective integrated partnerships to maximise the benefit for people we support.

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 about all the good things that happened in the last business year.

Our Approach

Our Approach

This last year has been one highlighted by acts of heroism and sacrificial giving. Against the backdrop of the challenging COVID-19 pandemic, the Real Life Options Group has never faltered in delivering exceptional support to thousands of people across the UK.

During a time of extreme crisis and challenge, our dedicated support teams have demonstrated much resilience and strength, adapting quickly to new PPE requirements and changing how they worked to help keep people safe. We knew they were all key to the lives of the people we support long before the term 'keyworker' was coined.

The Real Life Options Group is known for providing responsive, individualised support for a wide range of people, including those with learning disabilities, autism, physical disabilities, complex needs and behaviours that challenge, in addition to care at home for older people.

The needs of the people we support changed dramatically this year, with many people confined to their homes for the duration of lockdowns due to Government shielding advice, with some learning to interact with their family and friends online for the first time and others embracing the opportunity to learn new skills and adapt to their change in routine. It's fair to say that everybody stepped up to the challenge – both our staff members, and of course the people we support. We were, indeed, all in this together.

Our Plan in Action

Our national organisation employs thousands of people working in close partnership with **46 local authorities** in England and Scotland. We provide self-directed support to ensure that people have equal rights as citizens and the best possible opportunities to maximise their independence and social inclusion in their local communities.

We did not allow the pandemic to stop progress toward achieving our strategy. In fact, we have made great strides towards making real strategic change for the better and recently restructured our staff teams to create a more focused approach to reach our goals.

Responding to COVID-19

Our prior investment in digital technologies paid dividends when faced with the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Our office-based staff teams seamlessly adopted virtual video meetings and utilised our internal app, Real Talk, to stay in touch while working from home to support our operational teams out in the field.

Alongside frequent Leadership updates, and COVID-19 briefings, we also seconded employees from a range of different roles to form a dedicated **COVID-19 Operational Support Team**. This team led on strategic advice and operational support in relation to the pandemic and allowed for excellent communication across the Group.



Our staff worked really hard to support people during the COVID-19 pandemic.



We continued to give the right support to help people, even when their needs changed in lockdown.

New Initiatives

2020 saw the unveiling of our **Community Connections Fund**, the development of our **Support and Enablement Programme** and the rolling out of **digital support plans** to achieve outstanding results.

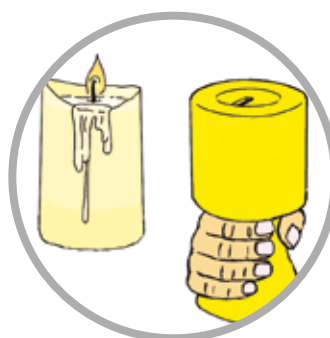
In addition to holding exciting 'Staying at home' competitions to keep people entertained during lockdown, we also launched the new **Memorial Learning Fund** to honour those people who sadly died during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Community Connections
Fund



We introduced lots of new things, including fun competitions when people had to stay at home.



We also started a new Memorial Learning Fund to remember people who have died.

Our Purpose

Developing our Purpose-Led Strategy

The unprecedented global events of 2020 served as a timely catalyst for the Real Life Options Group to readdress its corporate purpose. With key workers, such as our national support team, more valued than ever before, it was crucial for us to capitalise on this renewed focus of helping others.

Consequently, in early 2021, our Leadership team began work on modernising our approach and **started to develop a new Purpose-Led Strategy**. Based on six key themes, this revised purpose will be centred around always delivering a life-long connection with the thousands of people we support.

This will be achieved through a number of complementary initiatives, including our Support and Enablement Skills Development Programme, our Community Connections Fund, and championing independence at home through different methods.

With the initial purpose framework already created, the final stage of development is underway with a wide-scale consultation taking place with employees from across the UK. This bottom-up approach will help to identify meaningful measures to assess how effectively our purpose is being implemented in our services and will ensure that our reaffirmed focus resonates with employees at every level. Following completion of this final consultation, the new Purpose-Led Strategy will be formally launched in late 2021.

Delivering True Social Value

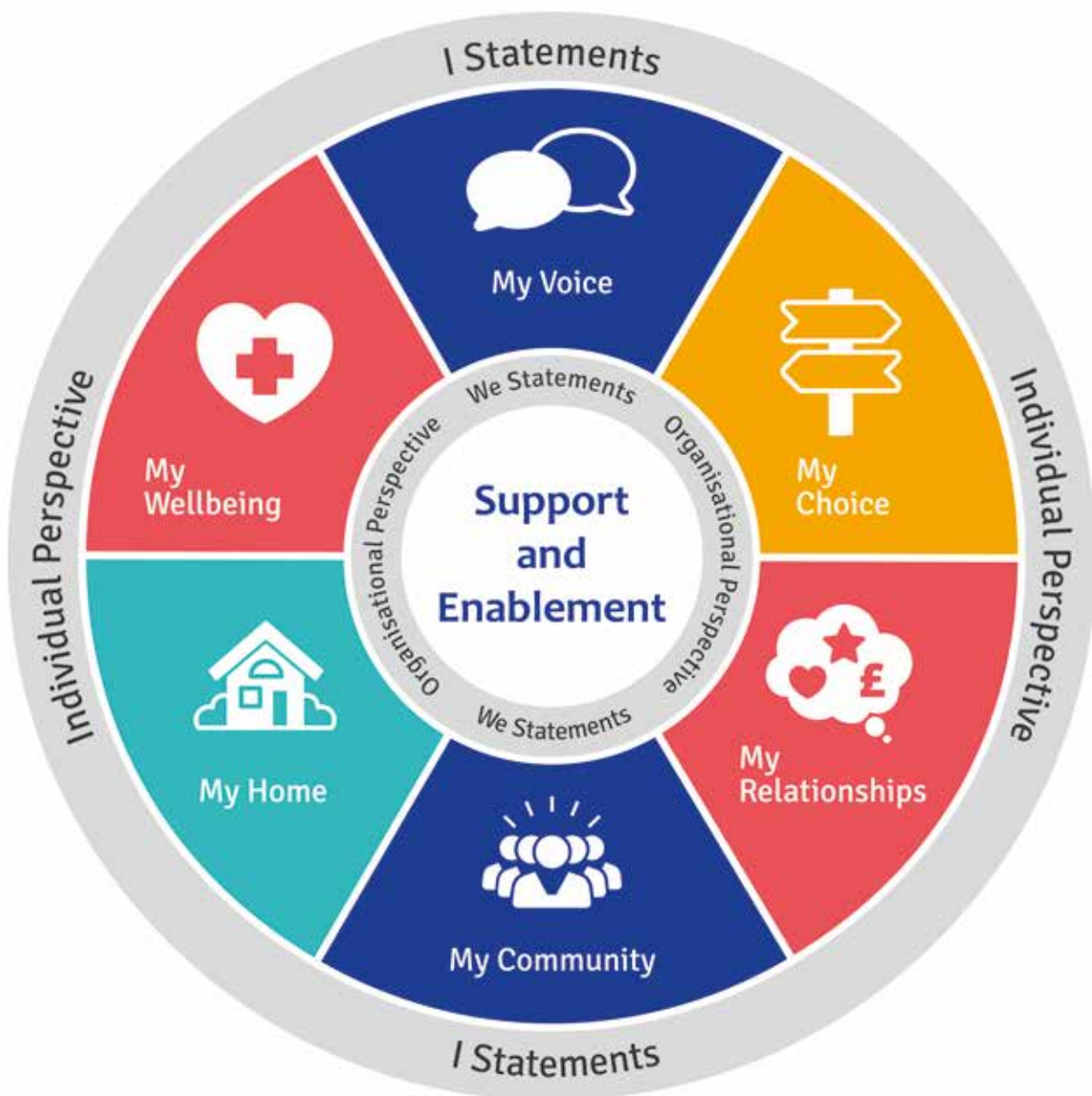
Delivering tangible social value in the community and the lives of the people we support has long been a core tenet of what the Real Life Options Group stands for. We are busy collating information that evidences our social impact and expect to report on this in our next annual review.



We have started work on creating a new purpose for the Real Life Options Group.



We want to make sure that we support life long connections in our purpose.



We have also been planning how to report on our social value impact.



We have been busy creating our support and enablement skills programme.

Inspiring People

Some of this Year's Highlights...

Exchanging Football for Gardening

All across the Real Life Options Group, the people we support embraced trying out a wide range of new skills during lockdown, with a little helping hand from our Support Workers.

Following government guidelines to stay at home, David from Oxford decided to swap football boots for gardening tools and embarked on a garden makeover, with assistance from his Support Worker Julius.

David was keen to **grow strawberry plants** and enjoyed eating the fruit so much that he asked staff to support him to grow more plants. David enjoys seeing the garden flowers bloom and remembers to water them regularly to keep them at their best.

David now also has a badminton net in his garden which helps him keep fit in addition to an outdoor darts board and enjoys playing against members of his support staff.



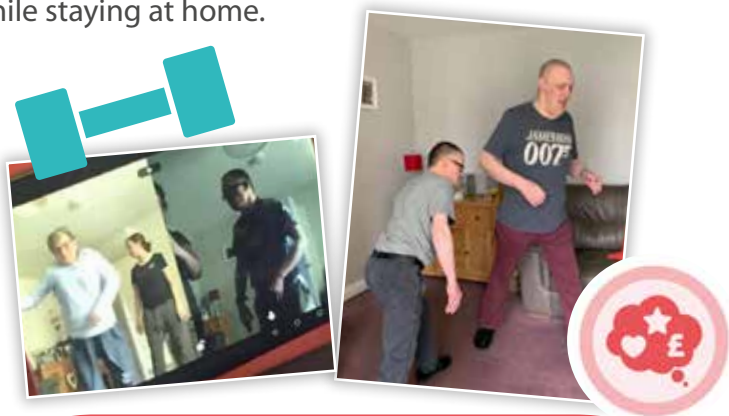
David is delighted with what he has achieved with the support of his team and says, "I love my new look garden."



Using Technology to Keep Connected

Friends David, James, Stephen and Lilian made the most of **online keep-fit videos** during lockdown, with Joe Wicks being a firm favourite. With help from Support Worker Sammy, regular sessions were set up using iPads where they could see each other exercising together, albeit in different houses.

The use of technology has been fantastic for keeping the friends connected while they are unable to spend time together socially. Similarly, the housemates have been supported to have FaceTime calls with their families and friends which has been so important for keeping their spirits up while staying at home.



"I am so proud of how well everyone is doing and how staff have supported people to learn new ways to keep in touch. They all loved making the video and seeing each other on screen. I can't wait to see what they will come up with next."

Leigh McCusker, Service Manager



David has been growing strawberries in his new garden.



Friends in Redcar have been keeping fit with exercise videos.

Connor's Sponsored Walk

Connor from Angus **raised a whopping £300 doing a sponsored walk** to support two local community projects. Inspired by Captain Sir Tom Moore, Connor walked 101 miles around Forfar and Arbroath. Support Workers, June and Graham kept Connor company along the way.

The sponsorship money is going to The Learning Tree Partnership which supports people with learning disabilities to gain skills in customer service. The second community project to benefit is Connor's local Enable Youth Group. The Group provides a platform for people to develop friendships, try new activities and learn new skills.

Connor thoroughly enjoyed spending time outdoors, seeing lovely views and spending quality time with his support staff. June and the rest of the team are very proud of his achievement.



Naseer's Taekwon-Do Black Belt

Naseer from Glenrothes earned a **1st Dan Black Belt certificate** from the esteemed Global Taekwon-Do Federation. His achievement marks years of dedication, training and focus, culminating in a prestigious accolade which less than one in every thousand participants achieve.

While he is no stranger to Taekwon-Do assessments, Naseer had to work extremely hard as the process for achieving a black belt is rigorous, involving the submission of a detailed thesis to evidence a thorough understanding of the five rules of Taekwon-Do in addition to a two hour technical session followed by the physical grading itself. Not only did this involve the destruction of boards with hands and feet, it also included physical one-to-one and two-to-one sparring, giving and responding to commands in Korean.

"It was hard work. I didn't think I would pass but I did. I bought a frame for my certificate. It is now on my wall above the fireplace"

Naseer from Glenrothes



Connor raised £300 for charity doing a 101 mile walk in Scotland.



Naseer achieved a Black Belt in Taekwon-Do, which is a type of martial art.

Inspiring People

Some of this Year's Highlights...

Trusting our People to Help Recruit

The COVID-19 lockdown restrictions prompted us to get creative about how to best involve the people we support in our recruitment process. We utilised a **Digital Panel to interview candidates** who hoped to join the Group as new Trustees.

The panel consisted of two groups of four people we support, accompanied by their Support Workers or Service Managers, in addition to a facilitator. Taking place via a Microsoft Teams video meeting, the panel interviewed the different candidates by asking a range of conversation-style questions, followed by a One Page Profile exercise.

Afterwards, each candidate was assessed and scored, and then the people we support fed back their valuable insights to our Chief Executive, David Sargent and Chair, David Wilkin.



"I liked everything about the walk. I enjoyed being with my friends and when people clapped and shouted 'well done' and 'not long now'."

Sheila from Newcastle

Shining a Light on Dementia

A group of people we support **raised almost £1,000 by taking part in the 5km Glow Memory Walk** in support of the Alzheimer's Society. Sheila, Paul and Anjum, from Newcastle, together with support staff, took part in the walk. Another friend, Maureen, was unable to join them and so instead contributed by raising funds and making a donation.

Sheila, Paul and Anjum were keen to play a part in raising awareness and funds for the Society as they have a friend affected by dementia. The trio and their support team, Carly, Helen, Helen, Hilary, Michelle and Jim, thoroughly enjoyed the atmosphere and encouragement from the crowds, particularly on such a cold night.



People we support helped to interview new people for our Board of Trustees.



A group of friends raised nearly £1,000 doing a sponsored walk in Newcastle.

Flying High To Stay Connected

Prior to the lockdown restrictions, we were delighted to enable Peter, a person we support in West Lothian, to enjoy the **holiday of a lifetime to Australia**. Peter was absolutely thrilled to be invited to visit his friend Steven, who is a former Support Worker at Real Life Options. Steven emigrated to Australia several years ago, but always makes time to visit Peter during his return trips to Scotland.

With the fantastic support of Support Worker Heather Paterson, Peter had an amazing time on his holiday, visiting a number of Perth's many attractions including the City Zoo and Pinaroo Park to see the kangaroos. The friends enjoyed barbeques, went on boat trips, visited a chocolate factory and even managed to fit in a weekend vacation at the beautiful Dunsborough Beach.

Peter, who is sure to remember his adventure to Oz for many years to come says, "It was good to see Steven and I really enjoyed my holiday."

Swapping Singing for Secateurs

Steven from Leeds is an enthusiastic rugby player and keen musician. Steven could often be found busking and entertaining passers-by with his singing and guitar playing in the city centre prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to underlying health conditions, Steven followed Government guidelines to shield at home.

Not one to be dispirited by the lockdown, Steven kept busy **transforming his mum's garden** with the aid of Support Worker, April. Their efforts have converted an unused overgrown space into an area where Steven and his family can relax and enjoy being outdoors. Delighted with the results, the hard-working team celebrated the garden makeover with a socially distanced barbeque.

"Steven is a very sociable young man. We are so proud of how Steven has handled being at home and what he has achieved over the lockdown period."

Joanne Stringer, Service Manager



We helped Peter visit his friend in Australia and he had a good holiday.



Steven did lots of work to make his mum's garden look better.

Inspiring People

Some of this Year's Highlights...

Leading Skills at Community Farm

Congratulations to Stephen from Fraserburgh for achieving his **Level 1 Certificate in Leading**. Stephen earned this achievement through a placement at a local community farm where he helps take care of the animals. Stephen has hugely grown in confidence during the one year placement and loves working with the horses at the farm and, in particular, a Shetland Pony called Phoenix.

To achieve his certificate, Stephen learnt how to groom, feed and exercise the horses, and how to lead a horse around a pen. He was shown how to keep their stables clean and how to make a warm bed from straw. He has also discovered what horses like to eat — they all enjoy oats, hay, apples and carrots, and one pony even likes bananas!

In addition to looking after the animals, Stephen has been taking care of the wheelbarrows at the farm — pumping tyres and greasing the wheels. To his delight, Stephen has recently been promoted to help in the engineering shed where he can put his newfound maintenance skills to good use.



David's Goal Scoring Pays Off



Life can be daunting for people who are affected by anxiety and who lack confidence in their ability to make decisions in their day to day lives. David from Newcastle, who has been supported by Real Life Options since 2016, has made **massive steps towards greater independence** and is now much less reliant on his parents.

David, who had previously disengaged from health care services and the wider community, now has the right level of support that enables him to plan his schedule in a way that suits him. Health care appointments and trips to the barbers are no longer a worry for David or his parents, who have recently been able to go on holiday knowing that David is happy and feels safe.

He recently formed a great partnership with new Support Worker, Bryan, who has been supporting him to meet his goals. David surprised everyone by saying he wanted to try visiting different locations, such as Alnwick Gardens and Whitehouse Farm, which has proved a great success.



"We are so proud of David and appreciate the support he receives. Bryan has been an amazing addition to the team."

David's Mum



Stephen from Fraserburgh got a certificate for leading at a local farm where he looks after horses.



David from Newcastle has grown in confidence and is enjoying visiting new places.

Garden Makeover a Huge Success

Friends in Fraserburgh are delighted that an idea arising from their Loons and Quines (a local term for boys and girls) Forum two years ago is now a reality. With the assistance of their support staff, they have been busy raising funds to **transform their shared garden into a welcoming community space**, where they could spend time with friends and hold their meetings.

After a flurry of fundraising activities involving sponsored walks, bric-a-brac, crafts and bake sales, a dance and a family day event, the friends and their support team raised almost £6,000. Thanks to local Councillor, Doreen Mair, staff also learnt about the local Community Payback Scheme, and before long, a volunteer crew was organised to prepare the site and start the garden project.

Everyone is over the moon with the results. Resident guinea pigs, Daisy and Leela, are enjoying their dedicated outdoor run and the home grown fresh greens. The garden is now a colourful and tranquil space, with seating areas, bird boxes, bug hotels and planters. Newly planted cherry and apple trees attract the birds and provide much needed shade in the warmer months.



David is Hitting All The Right Notes

David from West Lothian is really making his voice heard in more ways than one. David used to be quite a shy person and would often need lots of encouragement to try new things and get involved in different activities. A few years ago, **David was supported to join a local 'Singing for Health' group** and since then, he has not looked back.



David's confidence has grown in leaps and bounds to the extent that he has encouraged others to get involved and join him in singing duets.

During the lockdown restrictions, David continued to develop his creative side and grow in confidence. He enjoyed working with his support staff to make fabric face masks in addition to producing some fantastic wall art outside his home, earning him a winning place in our local Real Heroes Awards.

"We are so proud of David and what he has achieved - for his energy, enthusiasm and for his bravery in trying something new."

**Fay Rodger,
Service Manager**



Friends from Fraserburgh raised money to improve their garden so they could meet each other there.



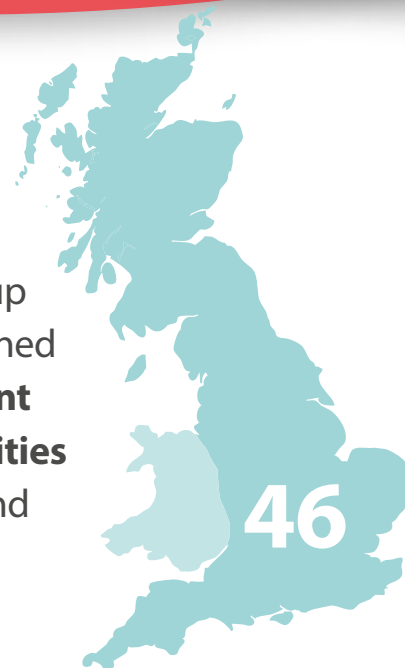
David from West Lothian is much happier since he joined a local singing group.

Our Year in Numbers



The Real Life Options Group delivers **42,711 hours** of support each week.

The Real Life Options Group is commissioned to **46 different local authorities** in England and Scotland.



This year the Real Life Options Group provided support to **1,332 people**.



**ANNUAL
TURNOVER**
£44.6m
IN 2020-21

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



This year we were paid 44.6 million pounds to support 1,332 people.



We gave 42,711 hours of support each week to lots of people in England and Scotland.



This year the
Real Life Options
Group has **1,860**
employees.

1,860
EMPLOYEES



31

**DIFFERENT
LEARNING
COURSES**

Staff across the UK attended **31**
different learning courses.



This year **129 people** provided
3,038 hours of volunteering for the
Real Life Options Group



Staff across the UK completed
16,120 learning hours.



This year 129
people delivered
3038 volunteering
hours.



We have done
lots of classroom
learning and
computer courses
to teach staff new
things and how to
do a good job.

Our Year in Review

Our Inaugural Digital Conference

2020 was a year of many firsts, and one of those was an **original Digital Conference** that was broadcast live to all staff in December. The virtual event took place instead of our annual roadshow and proved to be a very inclusive way of reaching a myriad of staff, allowing our support teams to watch the recorded sessions more flexibly at a time that suited them.

The themes of this year's conference were celebrating success, building confidence and capability, and looking forward to the future. It involved engaging live speeches from all of our directors, updates from our Support and Enablement team and the launch of our new Memorial Learning Fund.

The event culminated in an exciting digital **Real Heroes Awards ceremony**, which celebrated all of the shortlisted nominees and revealed the winners for each category. Our Chair, David Wilkin, served as compere, with people we support from across the UK lined up as presenters to announce the results.

"It would have been easy not to have a conference this year, but that's not the Real Life Options way. Instead we embraced the opportunity of using a digital format to be more inclusive than ever before and invite everyone in the Group to be part of the day. The Real Heroes Awards were a particular highlight to showcase the amazing stories of how people we support and our staff have flourished in spite of adversity."

David Sargent, Chief Executive



In 2020, we did our first digital conference for our staff to watch online.



We got to announce lots of new things and thank everyone for working well.

So Many Heroes

True heroes were out in force during 2020/21, with numerous staff going above and beyond what was expected of them to deliver truly exceptional support. People we support were equally fantastic, reaching new milestones and going out of their way to help others.

Unsurprisingly, **nominations for this year's Real Heroes Awards were at a record high!** All the winners were truly inspiring, and included Derek from Glasgow, who has regained the ability to walk again following a brain injury, Angela from Stockton, who has been incredible in her Advocate role — leading on self-advocate training and a PBS steering group, and Ann from Angus, who has overcome obstacles to take up walking for the first time in her life.



Following the virtual awards ceremony, we were flooded with positive feedback from people we support who were winners or presenters in the event, with reports that being involved gave them “a great confidence boost,” they were “thrilled and very excited” to be a part of the ceremony and that staff were “incredibly proud” of their achievements.

Ruth from Leeds said she “felt like she was on the Hollywood red carpet receiving an award,” with her Support Worker, Helen Swift, adding, “It felt like that to us as well when we were filming, she really did look lovely and so happy.”

“We know every single one of us has gone above and beyond in 2020. But the Real Heroes Awards recognise those people who have been truly outstanding. Those amongst us who have achieved something exceptional and really embraced our values — both staff and the people we support. It has been incredibly moving to read through all the nominations and it's been really heart-warming to hear about all the great things that have been going on across the Group.”

David Sargent, Chief Executive



We also did a virtual Real Heroes Awards ceremony to thank people for doing a good job.



Lots of people got trophies and everyone was really impressed with their stories.

Our Year in Review

Support and Enablement Update

Our Support and Enablement Team have gone from strength to strength this year, with two new Support and Enablement Partners, Lisa Livingstone and Susan Griffiths, now assisting the Head of Specialist Support and Development. Collectively, these three people have over 24 years of experience working at the Real Life Options Group, so have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of how to motivate our staff teams to achieve the very best in their roles.

This year we also received **international acclaim from the esteemed British Institute of Learning (BILD)** who used a number of video clips showcasing our exemplary person-centred support and enablement in their Level 4/5 diploma.

"Such good examples of high-quality support, showing the benefits of helping people participate and live an ordinary life. The clips illustrate so much about the person-centred approach, including the homeliness, the rapport with supported people and the fact that they are treated as equals. Real Life Options should be very proud!"

Prof. Edwin Jones, RRN Specialist Advisor for Learning Disability at BILD

CQC also acknowledged our positive approach during an "outstanding" inspection at one of our Stockton services. The glowing report acknowledged that the staff were "**fully engaged**" with the approach, "**spoke passionately about the positive impact it had on people,**" and had "**created an environment that allowed people to thrive,**" with "**people with complex needs now truly engaged in activities such as laundry, cooking, meal preparation and cleaning.**"

The team have also been busy developing a **new Electronic Outcomes Tool and a Participation Log** which are aligned to the themes within our model of support. They have also redesigned a number of support planning tools to make them more user-friendly and enable the support teams to easily recognise levels of engagement which can be improved further.



Our Support and Enablement Team have 2 new people working for them; Lisa and Susan.



An important training course used videos from Real Life Options to show what good support looks like.

New Employee Journey Model

We were delighted to introduce our **new Employee Journey model** during this financial year. This underpins how we strive to ensure that every employee has a positive experience at every stage of employment, from application right through to being engaged in their roles and advocating the Real Life Options Group as a great place to work.

Each stage has a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which the HR team monitors to track our progress and drive continuous improvement across all areas. For example, dedicated work has taken place on our recruitment process and the waiting time to appoint new staff has significantly reduced to an average of just 21 days.

Listening to our Employees

We also introduced our first **digital Employee Voice staff forums and surveys** to gather insightful information from staff across the UK. With the geographical barrier removed, staff were keen to offer their opinions and there were some really positive interactions in the forums which generated a number of new ideas to be considered.

We also listened to employees regarding what new benefits they would like to see, and consequently introduced an **industry-leading Cycle to Work scheme** in 2020, with a **Health Cash Plan** to follow in mid-2021. We also **significantly revamped our Employee Handbook**, which included adding hyperlinks to our entire range of benefits, improving accessibility and ease of use.



We want people to know how to do their job and be happy when they work for us.



We did some staff surveys and groups to talk about new ideas, including a new bike scheme.

Our Year in Review

ASCEND Graduation - Class of 2020

Over 40 leaders across the Real Life Options Group recently marked the conclusion of **ASCEND**, a year-long management development programme, with an online celebratory graduation ceremony. The CPD accredited course has been uniquely created for our organisation to develop skills that enable and empower our individuals to lead teams effectively in providing excellent social support.

Graduates shared reflections on what they have learnt and how they have applied their new-found knowledge within their work environment. Our directors praised participants for their commitment to the programme and acknowledged how it has, without doubt, contributed to exemplar leadership during the challenges of working throughout the pandemic. The next cohort of leaders commenced their ASCEND journey in early 2021.



"It is with genuine heartfelt pride that I am delighted at the success of the programme and the part it plays in being a truly person-centred organisation."

Jill Hicks, Group Head of Policy and Support



Over 40 managers completed the ASCEND training course that taught them how to become good leaders.



The next group of people to be trained have already started their ASCEND course.

Digital Induction Revamp

With the COVID-19 travel restrictions in place for the duration of the 2020-21 financial year, we had to pivot fast with regard to how we onboarded new starters. Our **Group induction was transformed into a digital event**, meaning we could inform new recruits about everything they needed to know about the organisation in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Alongside this, our **digital Skills Academy platform** perfectly complemented this online approach, providing important courses on a myriad of topics.



CHAS Premium Plus

Real Life Options has been a Contractor Health and Safety (CHAS) accredited organisation for more than ten years. We are delighted to announce that for the second year running, we have **achieved CHAS Premium Plus certification**.

CHAS Premium Plus accreditation places a significant focus on maintaining high standards of health and safety. The Premium Plus accreditation is reserved for those companies who have been able to prove that they take their commitments beyond the basic level. In order to achieve CHAS Premium Plus, we have demonstrated high standards of environmental, quality and social responsibility across our whole operations, not just health and safety.

This accreditation is more than just a certificate on our wall. It is intended to bring peace of mind that we are doing our very best to ensure the safety of all our staff, the people we support and members of the public.



During the pandemic new staff learnt about their jobs online.



We got a CHAS Premium Plus certificate which means we are doing a very good job.

Our Year in Review

GoDigital

This year has seen continued investment in the GoDigital roll-out which played a key part in enabling people to stay connected when they were following guidelines to self-isolate or work from home. While the COVID-19 pandemic impacted massively on our working practices, having the appropriate digital technologies helped improved management information, good communications and efficient service delivery.

Digital Support Plans

We are pleased to report that **60% of our services are now using the new digital support plan system** and expect to have the full roll-out completed by April 2022. Security remains a primary objective; to ensure that we capture people's personal data and support details in a way that is compliant with GDPR legislation and our own data protection policies.

Throughout the year, we have made great strides in integrating people's person-centred support and enablement plans (PCSE) within their digital support plan to provide a more detailed overview of people's outcomes and success measures in achieving their potential.



New Hardware and Connectivity

Hardware and connectivity have been central to ensuring that our staff teams could continue to deliver and manage timely support and care. In addition to last year's progress with our organisation's digital transformation, we can report that a **further 30 laptops and 100 tablets (including 4G)** were issued across our services. These were regularly used by the people we support to enable them to stay connected with family and friends while self isolating and during periods of lockdown.

Hardware that was no longer fit-for-purpose within a business context, but still suitable for enabling people to develop digital/online skills, was **donated to emerging community hubs** as part of our community connections initiative.

Power BI Analytics

This year, we **introduced Power BI — a business analytics tool to improve management information and insights**. Initially, work has been focused on reporting on commissioned and delivered hours across the business, however over the next twelve months we anticipate Power BI being used more widely to improve operations delivery and reporting.



Support plans are now digital instead of on paper.



We gave our services 30 laptops and 100 tablets so they could talk to their family and friends online.

Connecting Teams Through Teams

With such a large geographical spread, Microsoft Teams played a major part throughout the pandemic. The platform was used to hold meetings, share information and keep in touch with one another, to maintain good mental health and wellbeing. During the last year, there has been an **87% increase, with 280 active users regularly using Microsoft Teams** as a business tool.

Real Talk App

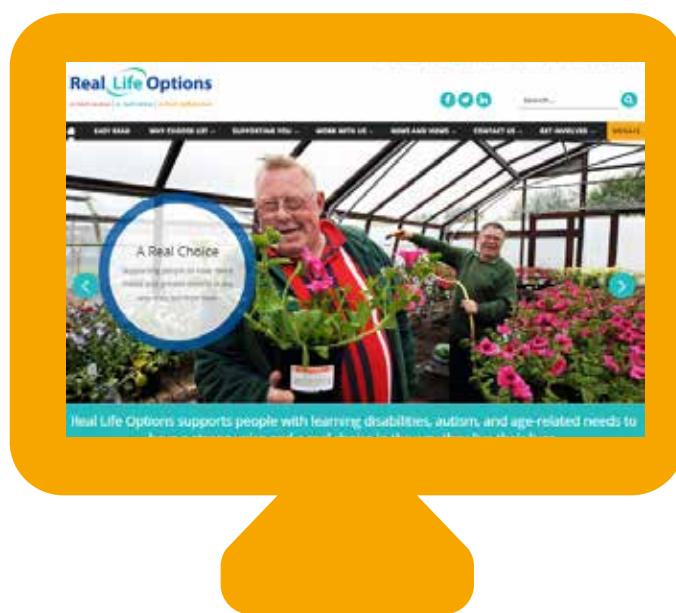
At the height of the pandemic, our **internal Real Talk app proved to be invaluable** in enabling people to stay connected, support one another and to receive timely COVID-19 government guidance and organisational best practice updates.

Digital Upskilling

Skills Academy, our online learning portal, now includes **digital learning modules to upskill our staff teams in using Microsoft software**. These are easy to follow units that enable people to improve their knowledge and competencies at their own pace and in their own time. These modules will also be made available to the people we support who wish to learn more about using technology.

Website Accessibility Improvement

We regularly review our website to see how we can make it as easy as possible for visitors to find what they are looking for in addition to including tools that open up the website experience to a wider audience. During 2020/21 we **upgraded numerous website features**, including our Browsealound tool, our search functionality so visitors can easily find what they are looking for, and our quick links to recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Care Inspectorate reports.



Lots more of our staff now use video meetings to talk to each other in their jobs.



Our internal app, Real Talk, helped people to stay connected during lockdown.

Our Year in Review: Care at Home

Service Improvement and Optimisation

Unsurprisingly, the past year has been dominated by the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Every aspect of the way in which we deliver care at home was reviewed and, in collaboration with the COVID-19 Operational Team, measures were implemented to ensure the health, safety and well-being of our staff, the people we support, their families and visitors to our services.

Our teams rapidly adapted to new ways of working and we are proud that **we maintained uninterrupted service delivery throughout every lockdown**. We commend our staff for their dedication in ensuring the needs of the people we support were met in full during these most stressful conditions, especially as many of them were classed as extremely vulnerable and were recommended to shield at home.



Despite the turmoil of the pandemic, we were still committed to the journey our teams had started on the previous year. Our focus was very much directed towards continuing to improve the quality of our service delivery and investing in our staff. Through optimisation and making efficiencies in the way our services are provided, **undelivered hours were reduced by 492 hours, call monitoring improved to 90%, while compliance and eLearning uptake improved across the business to 98%.**

We listened when staff asked for new uniforms; prompting the launch of our stylish new branded uniforms which were complimented by our new weatherproof jackets, fleece and backpacks to carry all the additional PPE. We further invested in our staff through the launch of the new Care at Home eLearning platform on Skills Academy, and received very positive feedback on how the design of the courses had made it easier for staff who previously struggled with online learning.



1st Homecare supports older people to remain independent in their own homes and in their communities.



We gave all our 1st Homecare staff smart new uniforms and new backpacks to carry all the masks, gloves and face shields that they need.

Expanding our Care at Home Division

We are delighted to announce that in this financial year **we acquired the Shrewsbury-based Affinity Homecare**, which is now part of the Real Life Options Care at Home division. This new addition to the Group fits well with our ambition to gradually expand our Care at Home provision across the UK.

Affinity Homecare is a well-established Care at Home provider based in the West of England. Led by Service Manager, Melissa Morgan, the business has around 45 permanent staff, and offers a comprehensive range of personal care services to facilitate independent living for 71 people. The company has been providing care at home services since 2015 and is rated 'Good' across all domains by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

It has also **now been over a year since Montana Home Care joined the Real Life Options Group**. The team, led by Service Manager Gemma Williams, has settled in very well as they continue to deliver a high standard of care. Being part of the wider group meant there was additional support for the team throughout the pandemic as their staff worked selflessly to meet the needs of the people they support. We also had opportunities to celebrate the team's successes which was showcased during our annual conference, helping to raise the profile of our Care at Home division.



People Focused and Well Led

This year we all celebrated during the Real Hero Awards with multiple Care at Home employees taking home accolades. Overall, the Care at Home Team of the Year award went to 1st Homecare Irvine. One of the highlights during the virtual award ceremony was when some of the people we support took part in presenting the awards to our staff, as this was a first for us and certainly a pleasure to have everyone join us in our celebrations. Our Service Managers who had participated in the ASCEND Leadership and Management Programme also graduated in January 2021 and Julie Stuart, 1st Homecare Dumfries Service Manager, received the ASCEND Outstanding Achievement Award.

During this financial year, **work also began on a website relaunch for 1st Homecare**, which will be more visually appealing and easier to navigate. The upcoming site will also provide more comprehensive details about what Care at Home entails and how our exceptional staff teams help to enable people's independence so they can continue to live in the comfort of their own homes.

We also welcomed new staff to our Care at Home team, working together to support them in their personal development as they embark on a rewarding career in social care with the Real Life Options Group.



This year a new company called Affinity Homecare joined the Real Life Options Group.



Lots of care at home staff won Real Hero Awards and work started on a new website for 1st Homecare.

Get Involved

Putting Volunteering Into The Spotlight

Volunteering has grown from strength to strength this year as community spirit and genuine acts of kindness have touched the lives of many.

People living in and around the Newcastle area have been **thoroughly entertained with songs and guitar playing from local volunteer group 'Into the Spotlight'.** The six friends and Real Life Volunteers — Ian, Michael, Bruce, Arthur, Elaine and Daniel — have been performing popular songs from across the decades in the grounds of care homes to entertain and lift people's spirits.

Feedback from both care homes has been extremely positive with staff reporting that the experience has positively impacted on people's general wellbeing. "Everyone enjoyed the performances and seeing the big smiles on people's faces was lovely to see. We love that we can make a positive difference to people's lives and performing live music is great for our own mental health too," said volunteer and Into the Spotlight group member, Ian Curry.



Building Confidence Through Volunteering

It has been incredibly heartening to see such a great number of people step up to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteering their time to help others. One of our new volunteers **Mike in Glasgow came forward to help out with essential shopping** services on behalf of people who were shielding.

Mike, who is visually impaired, does not drive and used the volunteering opportunity to push the boundaries, proving that a physical impairment is no barrier to what can be achieved. Using public transport together with Google Maps, Mike enjoyed navigating around the city, which helped build his confidence in his own abilities while making a positive difference in his community.

Mike thoroughly enjoyed supporting Real Life Options during the pandemic and continues to volunteer while looking for paid employment.

He says, "Volunteering has been great for boosting my confidence. The shopping trips allowed me to familiarise myself with new parts of the city."



Some of our volunteers have been singing for people in care home gardens.



One of our volunteers, Mike, has been shopping for people who had to stay at home.

Community Connections Fund

Since the introduction of the Community Connections Fund, staff and the people we support have been busy developing local projects that enhance the lives of people with learning disabilities and connect them with the wider community. While in some cases activity inevitably slowed down due to the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we were delighted that people remained enthusiastic and continued to progress with their plans.

Throughout the last financial year, the **Community Connections Fund (CCF) has provided grants to support a range of initiatives** such as musical performances, community allotments, an upcycling workshop and sensory garden wellbeing projects.

To support the development and growth of future community projects, the Leadership Team with support from the **Board of Trustees has committed a further £250,000 over the next two years.** Grants from the fund will also be made available to growing community enterprises who can demonstrate that their aims and values are aligned to those of the Real Life Options Group.

A grant of £1,000 was used by the Newcastle-based volunteer group 'Into the Spotlight' to purchase outdoor speakers. This enabled the friends to safely entertain residents with live singing and music from within the grounds of a number of care homes in the area.

Housemates in Angus have been building their eco-credentials by recycling wooden pallets into garden planters and benches, with the aim of selling the products to buy more materials. With a £5,000 CCF grant, they purchased a range of joinery equipment, work benches and tools. As the project gets better established, the wider community will be invited to take part in free workshops to improve gardening and woodworking skills.

A number of sensory garden wellbeing projects across England and Scotland have been supported by grants totalling more than £11,000 from the CCF to purchase tools, garden features for birds and insects in addition to plants and planting materials. Not only are these being enjoyed by the people we support, but they provide community spaces for people to come together and socialise in a relaxing and safe environment.



Our Community Connection Fund give people money to spend on doing new things in their local area.



A number of sensory gardens have been given money so they can buy more tools and plants.

Our Team

Our Team

Ensuring that our staff teams are best placed to enable people to reach their potential is crucial to the Real Life Options Group. That's why this year we restructured our staff teams, with the intention of supporting future growth.

Our **Charity division** oversees the majority of our Real Life Options services, with our new **Enterprise division** overseeing our Care at Home services, certain Real Life Options services and pioneering new projects.

This financial year we also welcomed **Kate Platts as our new Director of Finance and Resources**, and appointed three new members to our **Board of Trustees; Charles Maltby, Colin McCorkindale and Richard Sloggett**.

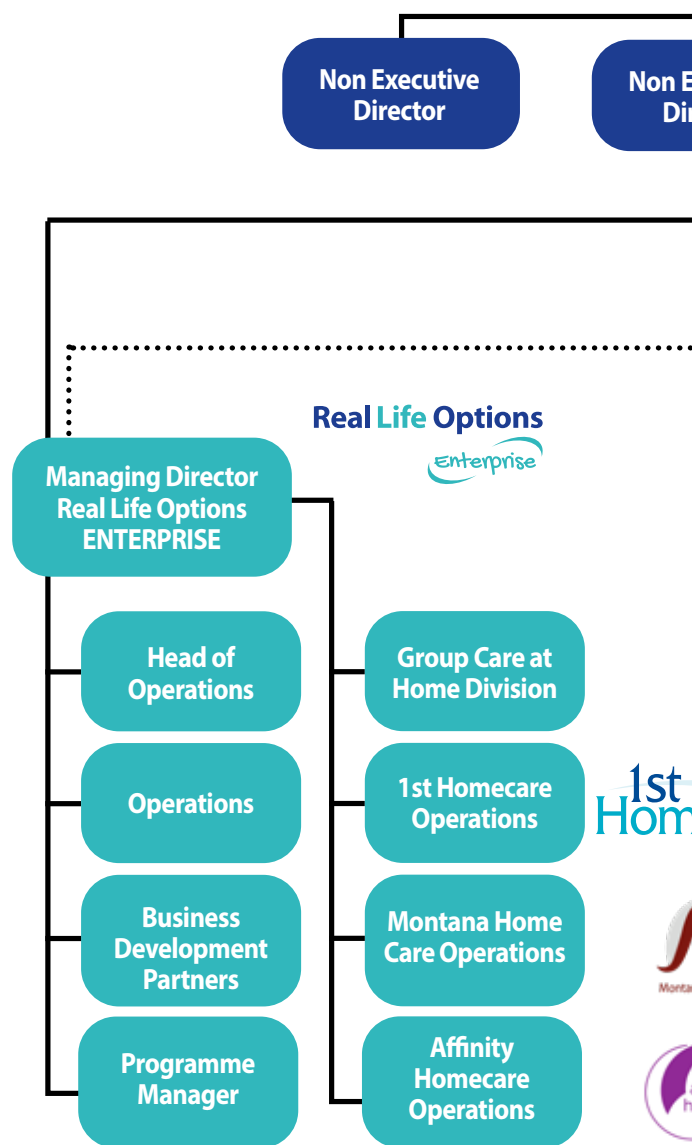
We also created **two new Support and Enablement Partner roles** to bolster the training of all our support teams to deliver exceptional support.

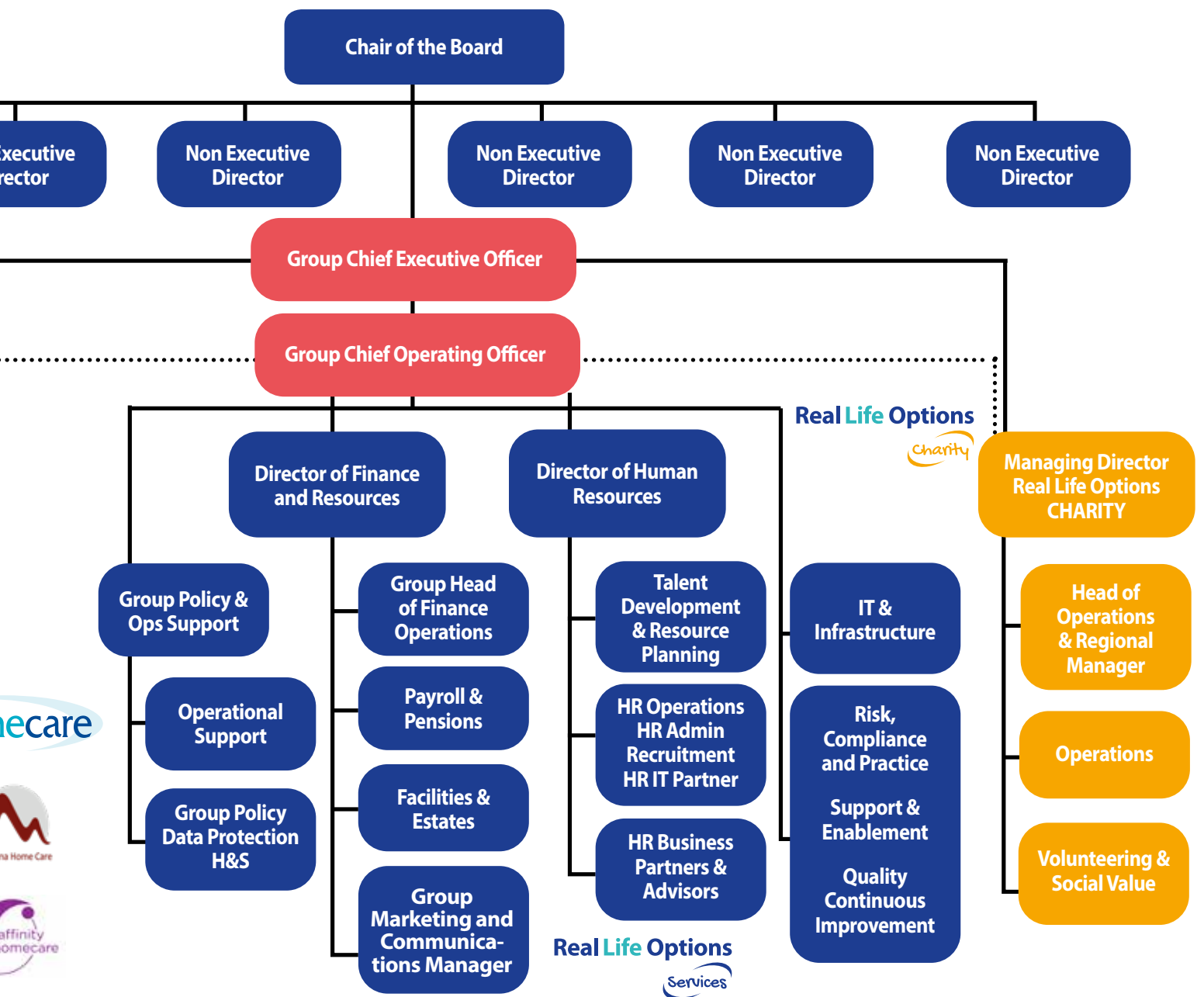


The people who work at the Real Life Options Group are very important in making it a good company.



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





Kate is our new Director of Finance who looks after all our money.



We also have two new Support and Enablement partners who help our staff give the best support.

Our Finances

Our Finances

This year's financial performance was affected by the challenging COVID-19 pandemic, but despite this, Real Life Options Group turnover was maintained at over £44m. Our net incoming resources before other recognised gains. Losses, transfers and tax was £525,000

Real Life Options continued to review its services to ensure they were financially viable. In Birmingham, several care homes were closed in line with Care Inspectorate vision to increase independent living services, and in London a day service was closed. Scotland continued integration of its services in Fife and West Lothian to improve quality and efficiency to generate financial savings in 2022.

Building on the previous year's work to make the care at home services more effective and efficient, whilst continuing to provide high quality care, 1st Homecare and Montana Home Care increased pre-tax profits during the year to £713,000.

During the year the Group received £1m in Government grants to support staff who were furloughed and the additional costs of personal protective equipment. Some Local Authorities continued to support the Group by making payments as per contracts despite the Group being unable to provide care due to COVID-19 restrictions, to secure ongoing care support into the future.

The focus on cost reduction continued during the year, and in Scotland agency spend was reduced by 71% from £550,000 to £35,000. Whilst savings were made in back-office staff costs, there were additional IT costs as the

office-based staff moved to working from home due to the UK COVID-19 lockdowns.

During the year the Real Life Options Group reduced the investment value held in two of its historic non-trading companies to zero to reflect the value of The Real Life Options Group more accurately. This reduced profit by £479,000.

There was little opportunity to develop new business during the year with Local Authorities choosing to extend existing care support packages rather than re-tender the services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There was some organic growth in Scotland when lockdowns were lifted, and in England we have been identifying new supported living services in Derbyshire to open in 2022.

The Real Life Options Group welcomed a new highly successful and reputable business based in Shrewsbury into the Group in February 2021, adding to the two existing care at home for older people businesses in Scotland by expanding into England. The business was purchased using Group reserves and debt.

	2020-21	2019-20
Turnover	£44,627,000	£44,993,000
Expenditure	£44,581,000	£44,266,000
Net Incoming Resources	£46,000	£727,000
Reserves	£7,449,000	£7,344,000



This year, we were paid £44.6 million pounds to help support people in England and Scotland.



This year, we reduced cost and invested in a new care at home service.

Where We Work

Where We Work

The Real Life Options Group operates throughout England and Scotland with the map representative of the geographic spread from London to Elgin.

Business Support Centre:

Real Life Options,
David Wandless House
A1 Business Park
Knottingley Road, Knottingley
West Yorkshire WF11 0BU

Tel: 01977 781800

www.reallifeoptions.org

1st Homecare Ltd

Unit 14B, Dickson Street
Elgin Industrial Estate
Dunfermline
Fife KY12 7SN

Tel: 01383 842947

www.1sthomecare.co.uk

Affinity Homecare

Suite D, Global House Sitka Drive,
Shrewsbury Business Park
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6LG

Tel: 01743 367000

www.affinityhomecareshrewsbury.co.uk

Montana Home Care Ltd

83 Grahams Road
Falkirk
Fife KY12 7SN

Tel: 01324 878572

www.montanahomecare.co.uk



The Real Life Options Group 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**

Real Life Options

a real choice | a real voice | a real difference



Business Support Centre:

Real Life Options,
David Wandless House, A1 Business Park,
Knottingley Road, Knottingley,
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Twitter: [@RealLifeOptions](https://twitter.com/RealLifeOptions)



Real Life Options is registered as a charity in England (No.1156259)
and in Scotland (No SC045939). RLO022