

East Sussex Wheelchair Service

Newsletter

Spring 2024



Stories inside:

- Connor's Story – 5 - 8
& perspectives from the team Ross
Care Team
- SENDIASS offer - 9
- Service User testimony - 4
- Service User forum update - 10
- Children's Activity Day update - 10
- Local Service Spotlights - 11



CHEO turns one!



It has been a year since I started my role as the Community Health and Engagement Officer at Ross Care. Coming from a foreign country, just a few months prior, I initially felt of a huge challenge. The company also underwent some significant changes during this time. As I progressed, I unveiled more about the role and how I can make a change in the community I serve.

The CHEO role plays a vital function in the service provision mechanism in shifting the focus towards the lived experience of the service user. It challenges the medical model of disability and strengthens the social model which identifies that disability is necessarily a consequence of barriers set by the society by not being able to provide needed equipment, services, and a positive attitude towards people with impairments.

During this year we have been able to take several key strides towards achieving this goal.

- Establishing a service user engagement forum and regularly meetings to discuss ways to improve out services and co-design projects
- Establishing several new communication channels including social media platforms and a newsletter
- Collaborative projects with several community partners
- Organizing a successful work experience programme that resulted in a paid employment
- Developing and formalizing several internal mechanisms to identify and address deficiencies in service provision

I am so thankful to the community I serve, work partners and the Ross Care team members for embracing me and being so supportive. As we anticipate new challenges in the year ahead, your CHEO eagerly looks forward to creating more opportunities for our service users to feel liberated and achieve their fullest potential and life aspirations!



Service User Engagement Forum



Ross Care Open Days: Dec 23 & Jan 24



Making Every Contact Count



Eastbourne Cultural Involvement Group

Celebrating International Wheelchair Day



At Ross Care, we are privileged to see first-hand the impact the wheelchair can have on improving lives. As we celebrate International Wheelchair Day on March 1st, we're pleased to share a series of short reflections from our staff, Service Users & partners that highlight the positive impact of wheelchairs on individuals' lives.

What is International Wheelchair Day about?

International Wheelchair Day was launched on 1st March 2008 by, Steve Wilkinson with three primary objectives.

1. To enable wheelchair users to celebrate the positive impact a wheelchair has on their lives.
2. To celebrate the great work of the many millions of people who provide wheelchairs, who provide support and care for wheelchair users and who make the world a better and more accessible place for people with mobility challenges.
3. To acknowledge and react constructively to the fact that there are many tens of millions of people in the world who need a wheelchair but are unable to acquire one.



[Click to watch the video](#)
[Or scan QR code](#)

In celebration of International Wheelchair Day, we've put together a short video featuring seven different experiences. We asked participants to record their response to the question, 'How has your wheelchair had a positive impact on your life or those you work with?'. Recorded in Norwich, East Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire and Sheffield, these stories spotlight the diverse ways in which wheelchairs have helped support empowerment and freedom.

In the video, you'll meet Maddison, a bright young service user, and her mother, who share how Maddison's powerchair has not only boosted her confidence but also opened doors to new opportunities, including becoming the first disabled prefect at her school. Alex Gourney, one of our dedicated staff members and a wheelchair user for 25 years, shares how his wheelchair brings him freedom, comfort and safety, enabling him to lead an active social life and engage with his community. Clive Bassant, our Community Liaison & Engagement Officer, describes himself as being able to lead 'a truly independent life' thanks to his powered wheelchair. His powerful words, 'I am not wheelchair-bound, I am wheelchair-enabled, and I am wheelchair-liberated' resonate strongly with the theme of International Wheelchair Day.

Andrew from East Sussex showcases his enjoyment of wheelchair tennis, while Peter, a service user of Kent and Medway Wheelchair Service, shares his journeys around the world made possible by his powered wheelchair. Simon, a family member from Hampshire & Isle of Wight, emphasises the essential role of wheelchairs in facilitating other people's accessibility needs.

Dave Bramley, representing Wicker Independent Living, underscores the importance of tailored and high-performance wheelchairs, which often surprise customers as to the difference they make. Meanwhile, Tamsin Flint, Commissioning Manager for Kent & Medway Clinical Commissioning Group, highlights the broader societal benefits of improved mobility and accessibility.



Service User Testimony

THE UNSEEN WHEELCHAIR JOURNEY...

Ian Westgate MBE

Long standing member of the Service User Forum

When people see you for the first time in your new wheelchair, little do they know the journey you have already been on to get this far. To obtain the correct powerchair for you is not a case of picking it from a line-up of different makes and models, nor is it like catalogue shopping. It is a more sophisticated process than that.

The journey begins when you receive notification that you qualify for a powerchair and need expert guidance at every stage through the NHS wheelchair service and a date for assessment is set.



The assessment is to establish what type and style of chair would best suit your needs, size of frame, left or right-handed operation and type of cushion to help posture and comfort. Once everything is established an order is placed and the process begins with the supplier and the supply chain.

The chair arrives, and you eagerly go to collect it and be on your way but there are further final checks to see if it suits you. Is the hand control in a comfortable position, does the backrest need some tweaks, are the footrests in the correct position for your e.g. length? Little things but they all contribute to comfortable riding. Maybe the cushion needs some profile block to correct seating posture.

That done now comes the test drive. If it's your first powerchair there's a need to learn about negotiating dropped kerbs, cambered pavements, and narrow doorways.

Finally, you are good to go but will need advice on charging the chair, the care of the machine and cushion then finally you are good to go. By now you will have realised there is more to getting a powerchair than simply picking a pretty one from a display.

As you set off on your maiden voyage it is a good time to reflect on just how much work the wheelchair service professionals do to ensure you have the best possible experience with your new chair. East Sussex Wheelchair Service pays such attention to detail while making the process as comfortable as possible.

In 2023 Ross Care partner with Little Gate to Provide a Supported Internship at East Sussex Wheelchair Service. Here you can read all about his success story and those who've worked closely with him.

Hi, I'm Connor, and my story has some surprises. At first, I wanted to work with animals after finishing my diploma. But life had different plans for me, and now I'm a refurbishing engineer at the East Sussex Wheelchair Service.

This unexpected adventure began through a work experience project, a collaboration between the NHS Wheelchair Service and Little Gate Farm. Stepping into the service centre on that first day with my Job Coach, Paul, I had no inkling of how much I'd come to cherish the intricacies of reviving used wheelchairs.

I like finding problems and making sure everything works well, and that's what I do with wheelchairs. I pay close attention to details and can focus for a long time, which makes the job fun. And guess what? Ross Care offered me a paid job because they liked how committed I was.

But what makes this job special is the amazing people I work with. They made me feel like I belong - like I'm part of the team. The workplace is more than just a job; it's a place where I fit in. I never took my condition as a reason to hold me back. The work culture at Ross Care lets me be myself, expressing and behaving in the ways that make me comfortable.

I don't have big plans for my future yet, but I feel like this is a great start!



Connor's Story & perspectives from the team Ross Care Team



Perspectives from those who supported Conner into the role



Little Gate Supported Employment

Little Gate Supported Employment is a charity that is based in Beckley, East Sussex. The charity is 10 years old this year and has been instrumental in securing 136 paid positions for individuals with learning disabilities and autism, a number that continues to grow. At Little Gate, we firmly believe that individuals with learning disabilities and autism deserve to lead purposeful and meaningful lives and should be given the opportunity to pursue their dreams and aspirations.

Our supported employment model, a proven method employed over decades, empowers individuals to not only secure paid employment but also excel in their roles, adapt to new workplace environments, and become invaluable assets to their employers.

Little Gate's Supported Employment approach revolves around the philosophy of aligning the right person with the right job. We meticulously match individuals' skills, ambitions, and interests with the specific needs of employers in East Sussex and Kent. Through in-depth discussions with businesses, we assess their requirements thoroughly, ensuring that our trainees are matched with suitable paid positions. This careful matching process not only fulfils the hiring needs of businesses but also leads to transformative outcomes, changing lives for the better.

Paul – Job Coach

We are delighted with Connor's successful start to his career at the East Sussex Wheelchair Service. In my role as a job coach, it is my responsibility to assist trainees in adapting to their new work environment. Connor's seamless integration into Ross Care has been truly impressive. Darren, the Workshop Engineer, and Tom, the Warehouse Manager, quickly recognized and appreciated his special abilities.

Since joining Ross Care, Connor has shown remarkable progress. His communication skills and social interactions with colleagues have significantly improved. Observing the positive change in his interactions at the Farm has been surprising to many of my colleagues. This success story brings me immense satisfaction, and I am proud to be a part of his journey at Ross Care.



Annette Cairns - Clinical, Quality and Governance Director

It is so great that Ross Care have been able to complete another work experience project with Little Gate Farm and that it has been such an overwhelming success for Connor and the East Sussex Wheelchair Service. I am very passionate about Ross Care working closely with in all our communities to offer apprenticeships and work experience, as well as creating opportunities for people with a disability to gain employment within our wheelchair contracts.

I think it is imperative that businesses across all sectors, consider the valuable contribution that people with a disability can bring to the workplace such as providing unique skillsets, improving morale and the overall company culture by enhancing diversity and raising awareness.

Maciej – Service Manager

At the core of our wheelchair service is the value of empowering individuals with disabilities. Taking it a step further, we teamed up with Little Gate Farm to offer a work experience opportunity. While we were hopeful about the positive outcomes, we were also mindful of managing risks and making necessary adjustments for a smooth integration.

Honestly, when I first met Connor with Paul and Jeev, I was a bit concerned about how well he would fit into the workplace. However, those concerns were quickly dismissed as Connor displayed his work ethic and technical abilities. Luckily, around the same time, a paid position as a reconditioning engineer opened up, and Connor applied and got shortlisted. People with Autism often face challenges in finding job opportunities due to traditional recruitment methods, especially at the interview stage. Aware of this bias, we made some adjustments to the process, and Connor navigated through it effortlessly.

Connor's unique skills have brought fresh ideas to our company, encouraging us to look at things from a different perspective. I believe this experience will set an example for other organizations to provide job opportunities for talented individuals, not only with Autism but also with various other disabilities.

Jeev – Community Health and Engagement Officer

As a service that identifies that the societal barriers are what is preventing individuals from reaching that potential as described in the social model of disability, we collaborated with the Little Gate Farm in providing a work experience opportunity to a young person with autism. We also recognise the value of inclusion and diversity and how that can infuse a unique perspective on the work culture in the organisation.

At the project's inception, I approached it with an open mind, unsure of the outcomes. Today, I am thrilled to announce its resounding success, culminating in a paid work opportunity for Connor. In my opinion, this project sets a good example of the need for businesses to think beyond traditional methods of recruitment and look at the long-term benefits to society. It also showcases that people with disabilities possess a unique set of skills and perspectives that can bring innovation and novelty to the workplace.

The role of the Community Health and Engagement Officer is to bring insights from lived experience to service improvement. I am excited about the potential that we have unleashed with this project which will allow us to expand to providing work opportunities to individuals with other types of impairments as well.

Special gratitude is extended to Annette Cairns, our Clinical and Quality Director, for initiating and guiding this transformative project. My special gratitude goes to Sam Affonso (Regional Manager), Maciej Michalak (Service Centre Manager), Allison Brampton (Clinical Lead), Thomas Blair (Warehouse Manager) and Darren Wakeford (Workshop Engineer) for their unwavering support throughout the duration of this impactful initiative.



Tom – Warehouse Manager

Connor's a real gem in the warehouse and for the whole company. As the manager of the warehouse, sorting out the stock on the shelves was a big challenge for me. But Connor took it upon himself – I mean, it was all his idea. His urge to keep things super organized got us rethinking and coming up with cool new ways to manage our stock.

We understand that Connor doesn't engage with small talk but is very passionate on certain topics. The team fully embraced his personality and could see his vast potential, so it was easy for them to be patient and allow Connor to settle.

Initially, I had to be more mindful of Connor neglecting breaks and working continuously. However, there has been a notable transformation. He has become assertive, effectively articulating the challenges he encounters during work. It's rewarding to observe his evolving confidence and communication skills.

Darren – Work Buddy

When I first crossed paths with Connor, I got this vibe that he's got some serious potential. So, I raised my hand to be his work buddy and help him ease into the new workplace. Let me tell you, the guy's attention to detail and ability to focus is off the charts.

Contrary to the common understanding of individuals with Autism, he had very interesting social skills, in his own way, that needed uncovering. I have witnessed how the work has transformed him into a much more confident and assertive person. We dug deep and found out that, besides being work buddies, we share a love for history, linguistics, and all things nerdy. That common ground turned our work relationship into something awesome.

And let's talk about his sense of humour—it's like a puzzle sometimes, it is intriguing and special. It's such great having him around, making the workday way more enjoyable.

Working alongside Connor for the long haul?
Absolute joy.





Information and Advice from Amaze SENDIASS

Where can you go for free, impartial information and advice about all things related to special educational needs and disability (SEND) in East Sussex?

Amaze is a local charity that works with children and young people with SEND and their parent carers. Many of the staff and volunteers at Amaze have experience of caring for a disabled child ourselves. Our aim is to make things a bit easier for families by making sure you get the information and help you need. In East Sussex we run **SENDIASS**, the local SEND information, advice and support service.

Who can use us?

- Parents of 0–25-year-olds with any sort of additional needs including learning difficulties, physical and sensory disabilities, mental health needs and neurodevelopmental conditions like autism and ADHD.
- Older children and young adults with SEND, up to age 25.

You don't need a formal diagnosis to use our information and advice service.

What topics do we cover?

Anything to do with SEND, but most of our enquiries are about:

- Education e.g. support in school, Education Health and Care Plans, exclusions
- Health e.g. assessments, access to services
- Social care e.g. short breaks, direct payments
- Disability benefits e.g. Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payments
- Transition to adulthood e.g. moving to adult services, independent living, employment

[Contact AMAZE](#)



How to use us?

Start with our website www.amazesussex.org.uk to find lots of information and resources that may answer your question quickly and suggest what to do next. You could also register with us online <https://amazesussex.org.uk/pc-registration/> to stay in touch

Come to a workshop. We run a regular programme on key topics like “Getting the right support in school” and “How to claim DLA” <https://amazesussex.org.uk/events/> and they are a great way to get information and ask questions.

Contact our advice line by email sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk or voicemail on 01273 772289. We will get back to you with some tailored information by email or if it is something more complex, we will arrange to call you. The advice line is very well used so expect to wait a week or two for a full response. If it is something time-sensitive, tell us in your message.

What else does Amaze do?

In East Sussex we also:

- Help parents connect with others through online and in-person groups <https://amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/services-and-support/face-2-face-befriending/>
- Run peer support activities for young people <https://amazesussex.org.uk/young-people/groups/peer-support-groups/>
- Help with DLA and PIP claims <https://amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/services-and-support/help-with-dla-claims/>
- Offer navigation and training for parents of children on the neurodevelopmental pathway (autism, ADHD etc) <https://amazesussex.org.uk/parent-carers/services-and-support/ndp-family-training-and-navigation/>

Would you like to get involved in shaping better services?

Service User Engagement Forum (SUEF)



Since the establishment of the forum, the members have met four times via online and physical meetings.

Members discuss and give their feedback on the service provision aspect of the wheelchair service. We have also been able to co-design and co-produce several communication leaflets aimed at service users.

The group oversees the progress of the Service Improvement Action Plan and provide their valuable suggestions to improve the service provision process.

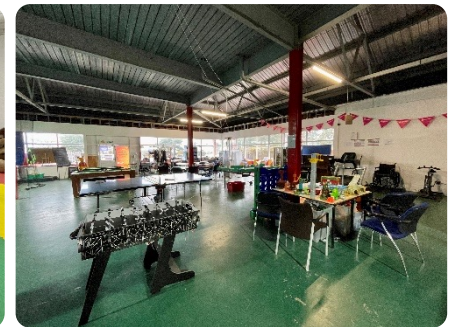
Next meeting

Planned for a physical meeting to be held on 6th Thursday June 2024 at Ross Care service centre - Eastbourne



[Click here or scan QR to join the forum](#)

ACTIVITY GROUP



You are invited to our Wheelchair User's Activity Group!

Meet new friends and join in with sports, games, and craft activities in the session



August 7th Wednesday
August 11th Wednesday



10.30 am – 12.00 pm



Defiant Sports
Sovereign Retail Centre,
Eastbourne BN23 6JH
(Opposite Asda and Boots)

[Click the link to register](#)



@ESWS_RossCare



Service Spotlights



We are delighted to inform that the Sight Loss Council in East Sussex has partnered with ES Wheelchair Service in improving the accessibility of communication material that are sent to the community.

Sight Loss Councils are led by blind and partially sighted members. We tackle local issues and work with businesses and service providers to improve the accessibility of their services.

They passionately believe that by working together we can effectively drive real change in our local communities.

They also believe that as blind and partially sighted people we are the only ones who can truly explain to decision-makers and service providers what we need to live full and independent lives.

You can see the amazing work they do and join hands to make a difference by visiting their website - <https://www.sightlosscouncils.org.uk>

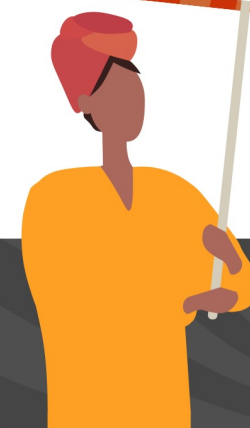


Wheels for All

Eastbourne Wheels for All provide a fantastic facility incorporating the athletics track within the Sports Complex, with a trackside clubroom offering refreshments and a dry area throughout the session. The centre is fully disabled friendly.

All WFA activity is delivered and developed by the East Sussex Bikeability team with several trusted volunteers, who promote the initiative far and wide across the county.

A cross country inclusive cycling event is named Inspire 4 All is organised by them to raise awareness on 27th July from 10 am - 4 pm starting from the Eastbourne Sports Park - BN21 2UF. All are welcome!



We are inviting community members and representatives to influence **change** in Eastbourne by sharing their thoughts, ideas and concerns, and create new opportunities together.

Thursdays **22nd of February**,
13th of June and
14th of November 2024
6:00 PM to 8:00 PM
At Eastbourne Town Hall, BN21 4UG

community@driorg.com
07586 340 592
www.driorg.com



Defiant Sports Update



Defiant Sports will be moving to the Archery Recreation Grounds in Eastbourne (BN22 7RR) in June.

They will be operating from one of the sports courts. There will be renovated changing rooms and many more facilities for accessible sports.

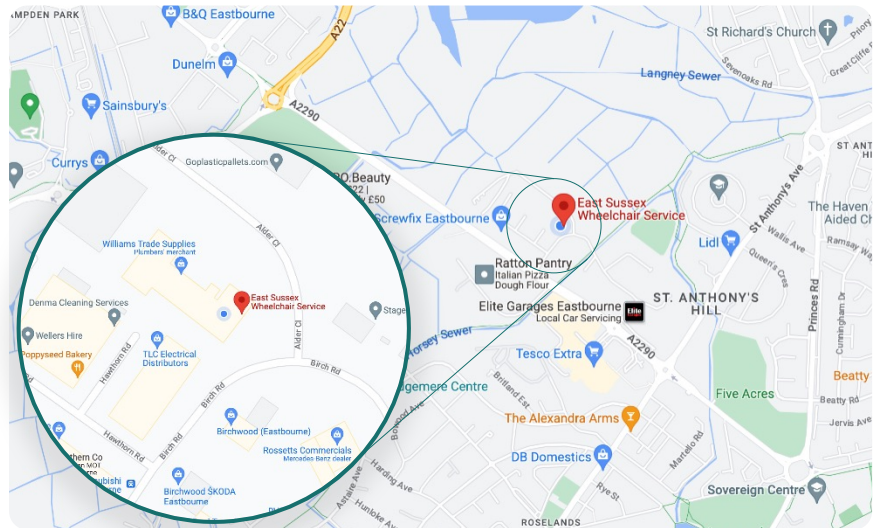


How to reach us...

East Sussex Wheelchair Services, Unit 8 & 9 Alder Close, Eastbourne, BN23 6QF



Scan this QR code to get your navigation
What3Wrods : [briskly.overjoyed.ages](https://www.briskly.overjoyed.ages)



Contact us

You can contact your local service centre team on:

0333 003 5619

Office in Eastbourne

East Sussex Wheelchair Services, Unit 8 & 9 Alder Close, Eastbourne, BN23 6QF

EastSussexWheelchairService@RossCare.co.uk

Community Health and Engagement Officer - CHEO

Jeewaranga.Gunasekera@RossCare.co.uk

Or

EastSussexCHEO@RossCare.co.uk

Mobile and WhatsApp

07974 888 595



Click the icons to reach us via our Social Media channels



@ESWS_RossCare