

# Open Country Impact Report 2020-21



Registered Charity Number: 1107331 Company Number: 5155859

## Getting People with a Disability 'Out There Together'



For the past 31 years, Open Country has enabled hundreds of people with a disability to access and enjoy the countryside. Since the pandemic began in March 2020, our small charity has worked hard to find ways to help our members find solace in nature and the outdoors. We have faced funding, staffing and resourcing challenges but our focus was always on ensuring we could support our disabled members when we couldn't get #OutThereTogether.

Despite these challenges, Open Country has continued to offer both face-to-face and online activities for our members. We've also provided high quality information, training and advice to organisations wanting to provide better access to their countryside sites and events as well as to individuals and their families wishing to access the countryside independently.

Funding continues to be a challenge to our small charity and we are reliant on the generosity of local people, businesses and organisations donating their time, resources and money to help our award-winning charity flourish.

Our Impact Report highlights some of our key activities from the 2020/21 year and the ways we have had to adapt our support to ensure we can continue to get #OutThereTogether in the future.



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## About Us

Open Country began in 1990 as a project managed by: The Countryside Commission, Harrogate Borough Council, North Yorkshire Social Services, Harrogate Health Authority and the Fieldfare Trust and funded by Powergen, Yorkshire Field Studies Trust and Mencap. Since then, Open Country has developed into a small charity with huge aims! In an average week **we now run up to fourteen countryside activities**, as well as keeping on top of the small mountain of administration work associated with all that we do. Over the years we have been recognised by many awards including the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.



## Our achievements in 2020-21

Despite the limitations of the pandemic, we worked with **216 members and volunteers**.

We organised **146 face-to-face activities** including nature conservation projects, walking and allotment groups.

We offered **16 different online Zoom sessions** totalling nearly 500 hours.

We created a brand new **Breakfree pack** for the Wakefield district and completed the surveying work for two other packs for the Leeds district.

We made over **1,700 wellbeing calls** to help people isolating or shielding at home.

We recorded **24 Audio Walks**, a new innovation which helps bring the outdoors indoors for people isolating or shielding.

We had **46 enquiries for our Countryside Advice Service**, supporting landowners and countryside sites to improve their countryside accessibility.

We took delivery of a **new minibus** for our Wakefield project, funded by grants and donations.

We created **3 nature activity packs** to entertain and educate members at home.

**5,000 wildflowers were planted** in a bid to help rewild the Wakefield district.

**Three of our Countryside Directories were updated** to help anyone discover accessible places to visit or groups to join in the north of England.

We continued our **Good Access Scheme**, an award recognising the best new countryside access projects locally. Sustrans was recognised this year for its sterling efforts to improve three sections of its National Cycle Network locally.

A number of our 135 volunteers have **continued to support our members both virtually and face-to-face**, helping them to stay connected with nature and the outdoors.

## Our key objectives for 2021-22

We are in the first year of our new **five-year Business Plan**. During this period, our six **Strategic Imperatives** are:

- Build a national profile and voice.
- Deliver more activities to more customers.
- Design best practice services, delivering health and well-being benefits.
- Develop a national network of partners to support our increased profile and reach.
- Employ and develop the best staff, volunteers and trustees.
- Increase fundraising capacity and income generation.

2021/22 will in essence be a rebuilding year, where we concentrate on making the adjustment from a pandemic operating model to one more closely resembling 'normal' times. We will know if we have been successful because we will have:

- Welcomed at least 300 people on our countryside activities.
- Gained a National Lottery bid (or similar), allowing us to acquire 2 FTE staff for our Wakefield project.
- Fielded 55 enquiries to our 'Countryside Activities Service', a 10% increase.



- Retained and developed 80 networking partners.
- Achieved a 10% year on year growth in our social media following.

### **CASE STUDY ONE:**

#### ***Our allotment – a safe space to work, socialise and relax***

Our new weekly Allotment Group started in July 2020 providing our members and volunteers with a 'safe space' to meet and work during the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

On top of the general maintenance, the group replaced the rotten raised beds, built an arbour, a cold frame, pallet seating and pallet planter, grew oak trees from acorns and constructed bird and bat boxes. The group also contributed their time and effort to the wider allotment area, painting the entrance fence, compost toilet, picnic tables and benches on behalf of the other plot holders.

Our accessible allotment has been a real boon during the last year, enabling our disabled members, volunteers and staff to work, socialise and relax. Collectively we have found comfort in sowing seeds, digging over beds, weeding, watering plants and harvesting produce, all whilst having a natter with each other! One member comments: "Coming to the allotment gives me a great feeling of calm - I enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the place."

We have been able to use the allotment in other useful ways, particularly growing fruit and vegetables to distribute to other disabled members who were shielding.



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## The Open Country Staff (6.2 FTE)

David Shaftoe continues his leadership of Open Country, superbly supported by his staff team. The team is very supportive of each other but some specific responsibilities are:

Ella Dixon is our Wild about Wakefield Project Officer.



*Ella Dixon*



*Alex Harrison*



*Sally Hobson*

Sally Hobson leads two conservation work parties.

Kate Leggett manages our volunteers and runs the Wild about Wetherby project.



*Lizzie Hughes*



*Kate Leggett*



*Tom Marsh*

Sharron Smith co-ordinates our Nature & Natterers and Walk on the Wild Side groups.

Alex Harrison runs the Thursday Walking Group (retired Oct 2020).

Lizzie Hughes is our Communications Officer (and runs the York Tandem Club).



*Ian Savage*



*David Shaftoe*



*Sharron Smith*

Tom Marsh is our in-house designer, supports the Wild about Wetherby project and provides staff cover.

Ian Savage is our Fundraising Officer.

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*I need to be out for some fresh air and lots of exercise with my friends or, as I call you, my second family, because I feel better with you than I feel at home.*

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*Bernie, Harrogate Member*

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## Our Volunteers

Without our team of dedicated volunteers we would not be able to get our members #OutThereTogether. They have continued to support our members during this challenging time, with some going above and beyond to help people stay connected with nature and the outdoors. Open Country volunteers are free to give as much or as little time as they are able. Here are some of things that our volunteers have to say:

Harrogate volunteer Christine said of our residential walking weekend in the Lake District: *“Thank you for an amazing weekend. It was great to see so many clients having a wonderful time. All that interaction, it does them all a power of good. I know we are all exhausted, but it is worth every minute just to see the pleasure they get from the weekend.”*

Hannah, a York based volunteer, says: *“Seeing how I can help make a positive difference to people is something I really value and cherish. I feel privileged to be part of the charity.”*

Mark is a volunteer with the Wild About Wakefield project and says: *“Sharing the simple pleasures of the countryside riding or walking together and seeing the positive impact it has on those unable to do something on their own is something to behold.”*



## Our Partners

Like many charitable organisations, we rely on our key partners to deliver our service:



## ‘Wild about Wakefield’

In its third full year of operations, our Wakefield project continued to firmly establish itself within the voluntary sector in the city. Ella Dixon is our Wakefield Project Officer, ably supported by **26 dedicated project volunteers**.

In normal times, we offer weekly activities in walking and conservation work, twice-monthly weekend activities and outings and a tandem club running from April to October. This year, since we were unable to deliver as many face-to-face sessions as we would have liked, we held an inspiring suite of **new zoom activities**,

including yoga, spinning, nature study and ‘boogie bounce’.

We were able to launch a **fledgling polytunnel project**, growing a wide range of wildflowers, to be planted out locally. We also revised our **‘Wakefield Countryside Directory for People with Disabilities’** and produced a brand new **‘Breakfree’** pack for the district, detailing a host of inclusive access trails.

Support remains encouraging, with an impressive network of delivery partners and contacts.



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*“Thank you all for giving me and many other people your time to help us enjoy our lives so much better. I can’t really express in words how I now have an opening in life.”*

**Wakefield Member**

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### ***CASE STUDY TWO: Adeel Mohammed, zooming and bouncing his way to staying mentally and physically active***

Adeel is visually impaired and has been taking part in some of our Zoom activities that were funded by the West Yorkshire and Harrogate Health and Care Partnership and delivered alongside Wakefield Recovery College and Vibe Fitness. He says:

*“I enjoy keeping active and visiting the countryside, something I did regularly with Open Country before the pandemic. As an alternative, I signed up for their weekly trampolining, combat fitness and yoga classes and they have kept me active both mentally and physically over the past few months.*

*I don’t go out of the house often, especially with social distancing, so these classes are the only way for me to get regular exercise. I also like the fact that they are spread throughout the week, giving some routine and structure. The classes themselves are fun and challenging! The instructors have been great at making sure they are accessible for visually impaired participants. The classes have helped with my confidence and I like the fact I am able to do the classes without physical sighted assistance.”*



## How we are funded

		2021	2020
<b>Income</b>			
	Charitable activities	72,144	137,746
	Donations & legacies	147,732	202,259
	Other income (including furlough)	55,796	314
	Investments	1,105	962
	<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>276,957</b>	<b>341,281</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>			
	Charitable activities	266,700	267,502
	<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>266,700</b>	<b>267,502</b>



*The Covid-19 pandemic had a huge impact on our finances this year. Income was down by over 19% overall and it was only thanks to the furlough scheme and a significant amount of emergency funding from various sources that we did not see a large deficit. Despite the drop in income, our costs were only slightly lower than last year and the impact of the pandemic on our finances will undoubtedly carry over into 2021-22*

## Thank you to our supporters

During the year we've been delighted to receive support, financial or in-kind, from the following:

Age Partnership Charity  
 Alchemy Foundation  
 Anna Baldwin  
 ASDA  
 Aspire Community Benefit Company Ltd  
 Aviva Community Fund  
 Baily Thomas Charitable Fund  
 Bettys & Taylors Group Ltd  
 Bettys  
 Boston Spa Parish Council  
 Catherine Barber  
 Chris & Rebecca Hunter  
 CLA Charitable Trust  
 Community Foundation for Leeds  
 Co-op Local Community Fund  
 Councillor Geoff Webber  
 David & Julie Turner  
 Department for Transport  
 Dottie Renwick  
 Education & Skills Funding Agency  
 Ella Dixon, Bel Ashton & Ruth  
 Hargreaves

Engage Interactive  
 European Social Fund  
 G & P Hartley's Hillards Charitable Trust  
 Groundwork UK  
 HMRC  
 HM Young Offenders Institution  
 Wetherby  
 Hubby Tennis Club  
 J.J & M Burton Charitable Settlement  
 Live Well Wakefield Small Grants  
 Lower Ure Conservation Trust  
 Margaret Sutcliffe  
 National Lottery Community Fund  
 NHS South West Yorkshire Partnership  
 Nigel Scaife  
 Northern Powergrid  
 North Yorkshire County Council  
 Nova Wakefield District  
 One Family Foundation  
 Philip Robinson  
 Primary Club  
 Richard Doherty

Ripon Activity Project  
 Rotary Club of Harrogate  
 Sally Weatherill  
 Scotton Council  
 Sharron & Harvey Smith  
 Skinny Designs  
 St James's Place Charitable Foundation  
 TCV/OVO  
 The Alchemy Foundation  
 The Bostock Foundation  
 The Edward Gostling Foundation  
 The Scurrah Wainwright Charity  
 Tom & Julie Leggett  
 Toyota Parasport  
 Waitrose Limited  
 Wakefield Council  
 Wendy Potter  
 West Yorkshire Health & Care  
 Woodland Trust  
 W.W. Spooner Charitable Trust  
 Yorkshire Sport Foundation

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## How we are governed



We have a small team of **paid employees** who run Open Country on a day to day basis. We have a **board of seven trustees** who volunteer their time to oversee everything that we do. The Trustees meet at least five times a year and discuss the performance of the

charity, the finance and marketing, as well as plans for the future. We also have an **Advisory Group** comprising service user representatives from each activity group, volunteers, trustees, staff and other interested parties. It is used as a chance for members to feed

back on activities we have run in the past, as well as helping decide which direction we should be going in. Our **Patrons** are: Air Commodore Simon Bostock and Lord Willis of Knaresborough. David Stone MBE is our **Cycling Ambassador**.

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*“I’m envious of all the fantastic outings and activities you are running. I bet your participants are thrilled to be getting out and about again.”*

*Judith Owen, Whitby DAG*

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## Trustees

Giles Blessed, Ian Brotherton, Steve Constable, Margaret-Ann de Courcey-Bayley - Chair to December 2020, Richard Firth, Tracey Jackson - HR, Molly Lawson, David Robinson - Treasurer, Therese Smallbone - to April 2020.

## Head Office Advisory Group

Paul Carr, Ross Chapman, Nick Cordier, Paul Hughes, Wayne Martin, Shelley Moore, Andrew Morrison, Danielle Mulholland, Bryan Needham, Cynthia Outhwaite, Tom Reardon, Peter Taylor & Sally Weatherill.

## Wakefield Advisory Group

Marjorie Crofts, John Gallagher, Tony Howell, Barry Howey, Mike Larkworthy, Sarah Mills, Adeel Mohammed, Marc Morgan, Adam Stokes, Sue Worrall.

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