



opencountry
out there together

Registered Charity Number 1107331



IMPACT REPORT

2024/2025

**35 years of helping people with disabilities
to access and enjoy the countryside**

Welcome from our Chief Officer

Over the past 35 years, Open Country has helped thousands of people with disabilities in Yorkshire to access and enjoy our beautiful countryside. We have achieved this with a clear mission, a dedicated team and a packed programme of accessible events - and over the decades we have grown from strength to strength.



In this report, we're reflecting back over the past year, highlighting our many achievements as well as our hopes and plans for the future.

Increased membership, more activities, a bigger team, new venues and new horizons all bring new challenges for us.

One thing is for sure - we can't do what we do without YOU! We hope you will continue to join us 'Out There Together'.

Thank you for being part of our special community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David Sharpe".

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Contact us

For more about our services, our activities, and how you can join us in transforming the lives of people with disabilities and mental health challenges, contact us:

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REGULATOR**

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About Open Country - 35 years of activities

Open Country started in 1990 as a pilot project in Harrogate and has now evolved into a valued charity with over three decades of experience.

We deliver our unique services across Yorkshire, with a mission to help people with disabilities to access and enjoy the countryside.

In an average week, we run 26 outdoor activities across our three hubs for people with disabilities - from tandem clubs and outdoor pursuits to nature walks and conservation work.

For the wider community, we produce countryside directories and information packs promoting accessible trails across Yorkshire and beyond.

We also give high quality training and advice to organisations wanting to provide better access to countryside sites. Recently we have worked with organisations including The National Trust, Yorkshire Water and North Yorkshire Council.

Over the years, we have been recognised by many awards including the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.



Our vision is to improve the physical and emotional wellbeing of our disabled community, by creating opportunities locally and nationally to access and enjoy our beautiful countryside.

We currently have hubs in Harrogate and Wakefield, and in early 2025, we opened our new hub on Teesside.

In addition to our hubs, we also run activities in Barnsley, Ripon, Selby, Wetherby and York.

Out there together! Caroline's story



Caroline attends our allotment group in Harrogate and finds it helps her to manage her mental health challenges.

She says: "I really enjoy coming out with Open Country, otherwise I would struggle to get out and join in with things.

"Coming to the allotment really helps me. It's a nice peaceful atmosphere, and I like the smell of the flowers and plants. I like doing things there and I am learning ways to help myself feel better."

Meet our Open Country team

David Shaftoe is our Chief Officer, ably supported by his staff team. We have 9 full-time staff and 9 part-time staff members.

Harrogate Hub: Countryside Activities Officers - Kate Leggett, Mark Kingston, Emilia Baran, Tom Marsh, Sharron Smith, Karen Place and Lizzie Hughes

Fundraising Manager - Vera Pavlova

Fundraising officers - Netty Newell and Fiona Richardson

Communications Officer - Rachel Gregory

Finance Officer - Julie Whitwham

Wakefield Hub: Hub manager - Simon Pedley. Countryside Activities Officers - Beth Longfellow, Elspeth Robinson, Ella Dixon. Barnsley Countryside Activities Officer - Bob Mawson

Teesside Hub Manager: Ellie Rawden



Kate Leggett



Simon Pedley



Ellie Rawden



Mark Kingston



Tom Marsh



Emilia Baran



Ella Dixon



Rachel Gregory



Elspeth Robinson



Vera Pavlova



Netty Newell



Julie Whitwham



Sharron Smith



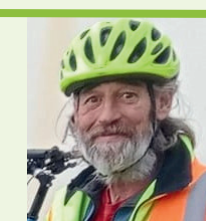
Karen Place



Fiona Richardson



Lizzie Hughes



Bob Mawson



Beth Longfellow



170
volunteers

4

Our volunteers

We are only able to run our services thanks to the amazing support of a small yet dedicated army of volunteers.

We currently have 170 volunteers, who are involved in almost every aspect of our work, generously giving us their time and skills.





Our key achievements in 2024

- Established our new hub in Teesside
- Welcomed 566 people on our activities
- Produced three new breakfree packs - Nidderdale National Landscape, York and Selby
- Held our second Good Access Scheme Winners' Conference
- Acquired our first electric vehicle and charging points
- Increased staffing levels and activities, thanks to successful fundraising.

Key targets for 2025-2026

We are in the fifth year of our ambitious five-year business plan. During this period, our key objectives include:

- Work to sustain current levels of activities and member numbers in our Harrogate and Wakefield hubs
- Commence service delivery in Teesside.
- Create a new 3-year plan for 2026 - 2029
- Work towards a quality assurance award
- Maximise our work through our 35th anniversary
- Expedite our Nidderdale National Landscape 'access for all' project, Phase 2.



How we are governed

Our trustees

We are fortunate to have a board of eight trustees who generously volunteer their time and skills to oversee our work and steer us in the right direction.

Our trustees meet regularly to discuss and advise on our performance, finances and marketing, as well as helping us to plan for the future.



Chair, Richard Firth; Chris Burt, Jayne Eyre, Jane Green, Tracey Jackson, Michelle Tempest-Mitchell, David Titchmarsh, Jonty Warneken.

Our advisory groups



We also benefit from the lived experiences of our advisory groups which comprise member representatives from each activity group, volunteers, staff and other interested parties. The groups - representing our Harrogate and Wakefield hubs - meet three times a year. We will also form a Teesside group in due course. The groups are a great opportunity for our members to feed back on activities and to ensure we are heading in the right direction.

Our Values

We are Caring



We are Spirited



We are Adventurous



We are Open



We are Insightful



Our vision and purpose

We enable people in Yorkshire with disabilities to access and enjoy the countryside. Our vision is to improve the physical and emotional wellbeing of our disabled community, by creating local and national opportunities to access and enjoy our beautiful countryside.

Together in electric dreams - new e-bus arrives



We were 'buzzing' after the official launch of our new electric minibus which arrived at our Harrogate hub in April after much anticipation.

Open Country member Caroline cut the ribbon, assisted by our local MP Tom Gordon, before we enjoyed tea and scones in the sunshine.

Our new bus - called Albus - is pretty wizard! It was funded thanks to the Postcode Neighbourhood Lottery and North Yorkshire Council UKSPF, and is comfortable and accessible for our members.

As a charity championing both the countryside and conservation, we're delighted to join the 21st century by embracing a more sustainable vehicle and reducing our environmental impact.

Tapping into Teesside with tandems and more!

We've opened our new Teesside Hub, operating out of the premises of the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust HQ, at Margrove Park, near Saltburn.

With new Hub Manager Ellie Rawden at the helm, we're looking forward to creating more accessible opportunities for people with disabilities. Planned groups include tandem clubs, accessible outings, wellbeing activities and nature and access work groups.

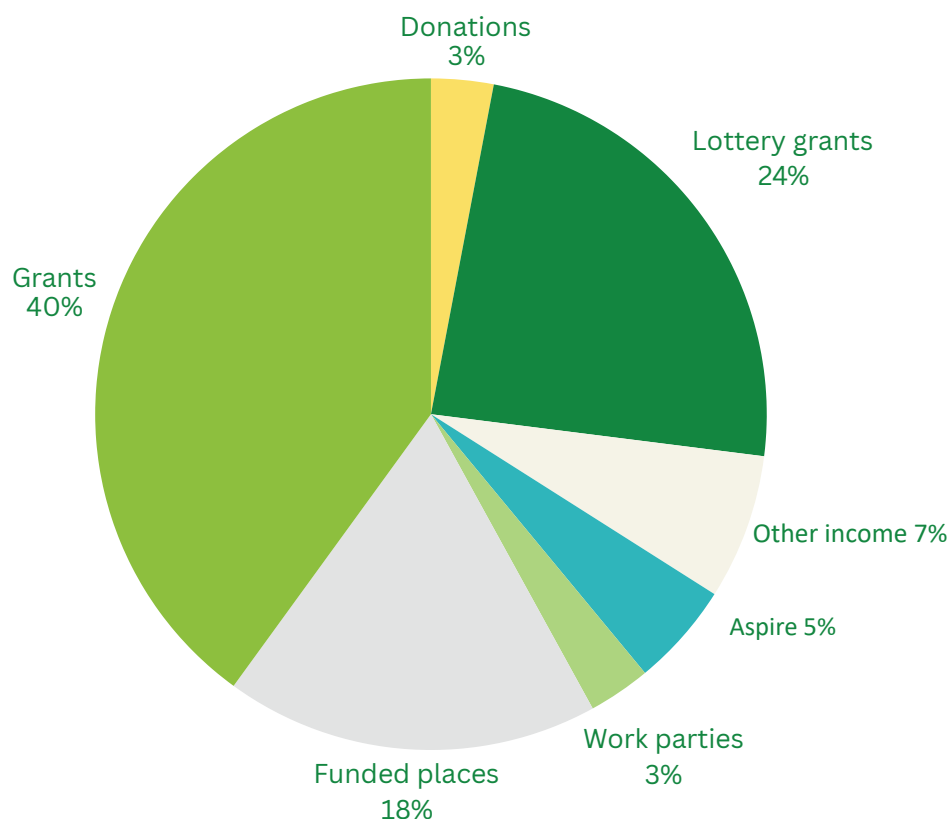
Thanks in particular to Sport England and the Murray Fund for their support with our Teesside Tandems project.



How we are funded

Our main income sources in 2024-25 were funded places, donations, grants (including National Lottery) and contracting agencies.

We needed to raise over £600,000 in 2024/25 to deliver our services, which currently span Harrogate District, Wakefield, Teesside, York, Selby, Wetherby, and Barnsley.



		2025	2024
Income			
	Charitable activities	536,311	387,325
	Donations and legacies	21,294	34,300
	Other income	1,756	3,434
	Investments	10,846	5,917
	Total income	630, 410	584,962
Expenditure			
	Charitable activities	617,258	456,882
	Total expenditure	617, 258	456,882

Our funders 2024 – 2025



None of what we do is possible without the generous support of our community - your support keeps our tandems pedalling, our services growing, our minibuses on the road, and our members 'OUT THERE TOGETHER'.

During the year we received invaluable financial and in-kind support from the following organisations and individuals.

Thank You!



Alan Rayner; Alpkit Foundation; Anna Baldwin; Aspire; Boshier-Hinton Foundation; CityConnect; Bruce Wake Charitable Trust; Cash4Clubs; Coca-Cola; Co-operative Local Community Fund; Cone Exchange; Danny Heptinstall and Rajni Jassal; David & Julie Turner; Daniel Fleming; DEFRA via Nidderdale National Landscape; Department for Transport; Douglas Arter Foundation; Duke of Devonshire's Charitable Trust; The Feoffees; Finline-Global; Frickley Athletic Community Foundation; Friends and family of Gwen Agar; Friends and family of Nicky Serlin; Garfield Weston Foundation; Harrogate & District Allotment Federation; HDH Wills 1965 Charitable Trust; HM Young Offenders Institution Wetherby; Horbury Heritage Community Trust; Huddersfield & Wakefield Rotary Clubs; The Inman Charity; Jan & Mike Bartholomew; Jonty Warneken; June Pamela Mooray; Judit Madi; Kenneth Hargreaves Trust; Meadfleet/Friends of Parkinson's Park CIC; Microsoft; National Coal Mining Museum; National Lottery Community Fund; NHS South West Yorkshire Partnership; Nidderdale National Landscape; Nineveh Trust; Noble Charitable Trust; Normanton Rotary Club; North Yorkshire Council; North Yorkshire Councillors Matt Walker, Chris Aldred, Arnold Warneken, Paul Haslam; UKSPF - North Yorkshire Council; UKSPF – Wakefield Council; NOVA Wakefield; Otley Town Council; Oscar Bedford; Philip Robinson; Plantlife; Point North (Banks Property Grassroots Fund); Purey Cust Trust; Rhododendron Trust; Roger Cordier; Sovereign Health Care; Skinny Designs; Sally Weatherill; Scotton Parish Council; Shears Foundation; Simon Thomas & Outriders; Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust; Tees Valley Community Foundation; You've Got This; Everyone Active; The Bostock Foundation; The Cheridan Raithby Charitable Trust; The David Family Foundation; The Finnis Scott Foundation; The George A. Moore Foundation; The Liz and Terry Bramall Foundation; The Primary Club; The Sylvia and Colin Shepherd Charitable Trust; The Teesside Charity; Tom & Julie Leggett; Wakefield College; Wakefield Council; West Yorkshire Combined Authority; Wakefield District Housing; Warburtons; Whitewell Wellbeing Ltd; The Woodland Trust; Wakefield Yorkshire Wildlife Trust; Yorkshire Building Society.



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Our year in numbers

April 2024 - March 2025



566 people worked with



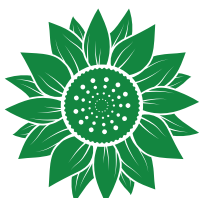
32,565 miles pedalled by our tandem clubs

- that is like cycling once round the world, and then pedalling to Barbados!



1,059 activity sessions held

3 new Breakfree packs created



35 enquiries to our Countryside Advice Service

12 new audio walks recorded



250 conservation tasks completed



5 residential trips enjoyed



More than 4,000 hot drinks consumed!
Countless memories and new friends made. . .



Members' Survey 2024



100% feel safe and supported with Open Country.

100% feel a real sense of belonging.

98% feel like part of a team.

98% say they feel fitter, healthier, and better about themselves after a day out with Open Country

Our annual members' survey reflected a strong sense of community, positive impact on wellbeing, independence - and increased time outdoors in nature!

Members expressed satisfaction with the services provided by Open Country, and there is clear evidence of the charity's positive influence on members' physical and mental wellbeing.

BEING PART OF TEAM OC



100% of members agree that they have fun with Open Country!

98% feel like part of a team, feel a real sense of belonging, and feel respected.

94% enjoy making new friends at Open Country.

85% have learned something new about wildlife and nature.

WELLBEING IMPACT



100% feel safe and supported with Open Country.

87% said they felt less alone.

77% feel more connected with their community.



HEALTH IMPACT



98% of members spent more time outdoors!

98% of people say they feel fitter, healthier, and better about themselves after a day out with Open Country.



62.5% say they would struggle to do any exercise without Open Country.

HOW IMPORTANT IS OPEN COUNTRY TO YOU?

79% said Open Country is important to them.



"I don't think I would have got through some of my life stresses if it weren't for them."

"It's very important because it gets me out and making new friends and chatting to people."

"Hugely important - every single session makes the day special!"

"I can get out to see new things and take part in activities I would never usually do. It really helps with my independence."



72% of our members were very happy with our service and felt there was no room for improvement!

Our Impact

Stories from our community of members and volunteers

MacKenzie's story

"I think I have enjoyed every single outing I have been on with Open Country. It's nice to get out and take my mind off things that are worrying me or make me feel sad."

MacKenzie is 28 and has been a member of Open Country for more than two years. She attends three sessions a week at our Wakefield Hub, taking part in the Trailblazers conservation group, walking group and Wild Things activities. She also enjoys our tandem club and weekend adventures.

She said: "I really enjoy getting out and meeting other people. I like being part of the Trailblazers (conservation group) because we do work which helps other people too, like clearing paths for people in wheelchairs.

"I think I have enjoyed every single outing I have been on with Open Country. It's nice to get out and take my mind off things that that are worrying me or make me feel sad."



Ian's story

"I struggle with communication sometimes, but there's no pressure on me when I'm with Open Country. "



"I have autism, but I wasn't diagnosed until later in my life and sometimes I struggle with depression. Coming to the Open Country allotment really helps me. It gets me active and fit, and I like to keep busy.

"It's very quiet and peaceful here which helps settle my thoughts. If I couldn't come here, I'd just be walking around aimlessly and I'd feel isolated – I don't like interacting with people I don't know. I struggle with communication sometimes but there's no pressure on me when I'm with Open Country.

"My younger brother comes here too – I can't look after him and we can't live together, but we meet up here."

Our Impact

Stories from our community of members and volunteers

John's story

"I really look forward to feeling independent and getting out of the house."

John, aged 24, used to love tandem cycling with his dad until an accident meant his dad was no longer able to go out with him.

He joined Open Country two and a half years ago and it has made a huge difference to his life.

As well as the tandem club, he enjoys going out on walks with Open Country.

"I love cycling and getting out into the great outdoors, and having fun. I feel free!

"I really enjoy meeting so many people to talk to and having a good conversation and we also go to the pub afterwards. I really look forward to feeling independent and getting out of the house."



John's mum Aileen said: "John adores coming out with Open Country – he gets very excited and focused and comes home afterwards very animated. John being able to get out and cycle again has been a really positive thing for us all."

Sally's story

"Being able to come out and support other people has helped me get through some stressful times."

Volunteer Sally is one of our longest-serving volunteers, involved since the very beginning of Open Country.

"When our members are having a good time, I have a good time. Being a volunteer with Open Country has been very important to me over the years - I feel fitter and healthier, and it's been very good for my mental health too.

Being able to come out and support other people has helped me get through some stressful times.

Open Country means a lot to me. My life would have been very boring without it!

"Volunteering with Open Country is a lot of fun – we really are 'out there together', enjoying ourselves and sharing different skills and viewpoints."



Our Impact

Stories from our community, members and volunteers

Open Country Breakfree packs - feedback from the public



"I just wanted to say thank you for your breakfree packs for York. I've been looking for new accessible routes and a resource like this, and so pleased to have found it! Your work is appreciated.

"The packs are absolutely brilliant and I can't wait to put them into action when the weather gets a bit warmer!" - **Pippa, from York.**



"The packs are so useful and accurate. You've done a brilliant job. With regards to the Wakefield pack, my partner and I have already made use of it by visiting various sites already to see for ourselves just how good they will be for group visits. Although that one was a few years old it was still so useful and accurate. The disabled friendly sites we have visited are all on our list for the group to visit." - **Alan, Chairman of a support group for people with long term chronic health conditions.**

Sandra's story

**"Open Country is like being part of a big family
- it's a very important part of my life"**

Sandra has Multiple Sclerosis and has been a member of Open Country for around 20 years, going on as many accessible outings as she can.

"I just love being outside in the countryside and Open Country helps me to access different places and scenery. When I first joined Open Country, my life was very limited. Being stuck in the house was very frustrating. If I couldn't come out with Open Country, my life would be really boring to say the least. I would feel truly isolated.

Open Country is like being part of a big family and a very important part of my life."



Out There Together in 2024-2025



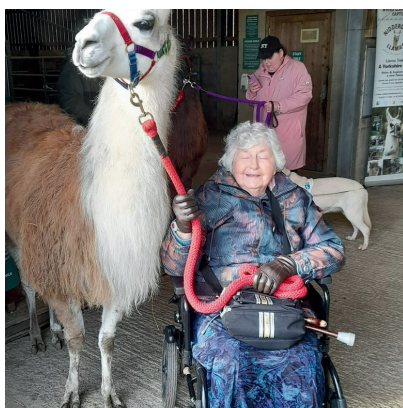
Tandems at York Racecourse



Adapted cycling at Thornes Park



Bullseye! Accessible archery at Scholes



Llama drama in Nidderdale



A walk on the wild side in the Lakes on a residential weekend



Tree planting tea break in Harrogate



Catch of the day at Ladybower Reservoir



Wild About Water in Wakefield



Snowdrops at Goldsborough Hall



Pond Dipping in Nidderdale



Alfresco Dancing in Wakefield



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