



# Annual Report 2023-24

The 'go to' organisation  
supporting people aged  
50+ living in County Durham



**An independent local charity working with  
communities throughout the County**

## Message from the Chair, Denise Elliott



This year has once again been a year of uncertainty and change. The ongoing pressures of the cost-of-living crisis and political indecision have continued to impact the lives of our communities and place increased demand on the services we provide.

As a Board of Trustees we have seen change too. A new Chair, and two new Trustees bring strengths and experience to reinforce our already robust governance, maintain our sustainability and deliver our strategic vision.

This year, Age UK national began the review of their Strategy and their relationship with their Brand Partners; Age UK County Durham being one of those partners. Our colleagues at the national team have emphasised their intention to ensure a new more open, less patriarchal relationship. We are involved in this work through membership of working groups and the submission of constructive feedback and are looking forward to seeing the final proposal.

Closer to home our amazing volunteers continue to be an integral part of our organisation, delivering our services and staffing our retail outlets. Without the volunteer community we could not achieve the outcomes for our service users across the County and we are truly grateful for their dedication and time. With more volunteers we deliver more and support more of those in need and therefore we are always seeking to recruit volunteers to join our team.

Our staff too, have worked tirelessly to deliver our charitable aims whether that is in our retail outlets or managing and delivering the services that enable people aged over 50 to receive the support they need.

Finally, I would like to thank the Management team who through the leadership of our CEO Robyn Holmes have continued to direct and successfully deliver our strategy in these uncertain times.

On behalf of the Trustees, I thank you all.



## Chief Executive Officer Report from Robyn Holmes

It is always good to begin the year with a positive, recognition that the services we offer are not only meeting the needs of all people aged 50+ across County Durham but are delivered to a high standard expected of all Age UK services.

We were proud to receive the Age UK Quality Mark, enhancing the quality award for information and advice services awarded the previous year.

These awards offer a guarantee that the knowledge, skills and understanding of all our staff ensures our clients receive the best possible support and advice.

The year has been one of change and innovation. We have said goodbye to some amazing staff and welcomed eight inspiring people joining our admin, digital, research, finance and information and advice teams.

The world and economic climate are constantly changing and we have responded to these changing needs and circumstances with new and flexible services.

We are building an advocacy offer that supports the most at risk of financial crisis. We are addressing the growing issue of loneliness and isolation through exciting new projects to encourage social engagement and directly addressing the exclusion of many older people due to expanding digital services.

Age UK national began a consultation with all Age UK brand partners on a new shared strategy and branding agreement. The process will take some time, the purpose to establish a more legalised contract, new branding and additional agreements on where and how services might be delivered across the regions.



To conclude, this report will outline the many projects and services we have delivered to people aged 50+ living in County Durham.



We hosted our conference in October 2023 at Ushaw College, welcoming over 70 guests from across County Durham and filling the day with interesting and valuable financial information, music, advice, workshops and of course a hearty lunch.

It will demonstrate the value of the work we do, the impact and reassure all people aged 50+ that there is a ‘go to’ organisation in County Durham that is dedicated to making later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience.



## Dementia Therapies

The innovative partnership established between Age UK County Durham and **Bishop Auckland College** resulted in **23** individuals living with mild to moderate dementia, benefiting from therapies and activities.

Funded through Age UK National, the sessions offered Maintenance Cognitive Stimulation therapies (MCST). Students from the college provided a hot lunch and the afternoon was filled with a wide variety of activities provided by students. In addition, we hosted MCST morning sessions in Durham.

The funding from Age UK National ceased in October 2023 but we continued to offer the shorter sessions in Durham until further funding is secured.

## Digital Inclusion

The programme continued to develop and exceed our expectations— reaching **1223** individuals to raise awareness of all matters relating to digital technology and supporting **249** new clients through the delivery of both group and one to one sessions.

**13** Digital Champion volunteers supported the delivery of **453** one to one home visit sessions alongside **15** group sessions in community settings, attended by **125** individuals.



# Mental Health and Wellbeing

**In partnership with TEWV, this project aims to respond to the Health Impact Assessment (Covid 19 June 2020)**

The Assessment identified increases in the need for low level early mental health support pathways and the need for early intervention and prevention to mitigate the increased demand to secondary services.

No one was to be left behind and the service offer would be proportionate to the individual's needs.

In partnership with TEWV, we employed two Psychotherapists, a Physiotherapist and an Occupational Therapist. The team is supported by two wellbeing workers. The initial aim was to address the anxieties and low mood caused by the

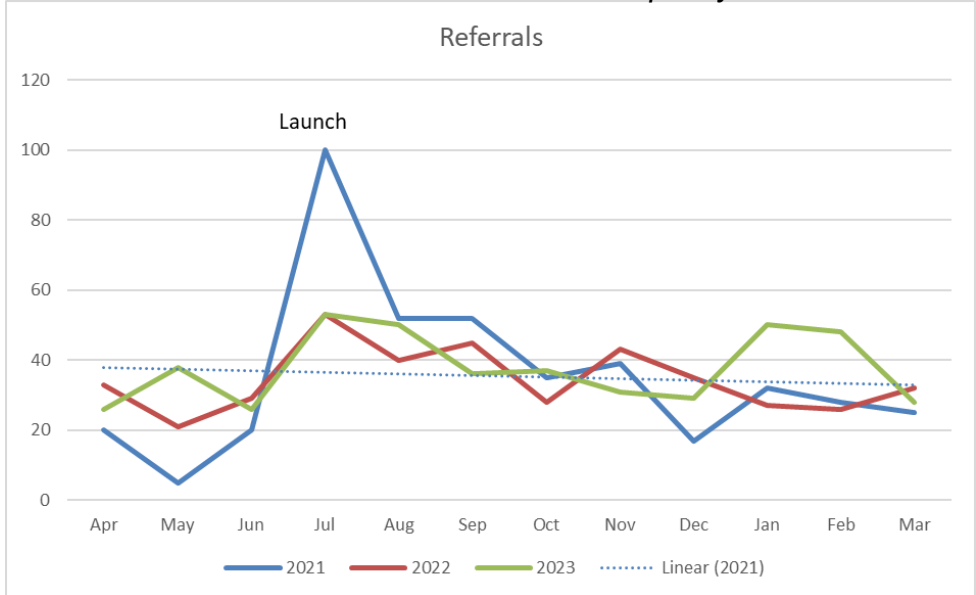
pandemic, the sense of despair and suicidal ideations.

Although the anxieties due to the pandemic have reduced, people are referring with high levels of anxiety and low mood due to ever changing external factors such as cost of living, energy, Ukraine, health issues and access to services.

A significant number of older people are also seeking support for past traumas, domestic violence, bereavement, trauma, that they wish just to be listened to. The service is offered to all people over the age of 50, although the age group most engaged with the service is those aged 75-84, predominately living alone.

As the external influences shift from Covid to the

## Referral numbers remain constant due to capacity within the team



increases in the cost of living, threat of war, the age range of those referring into the service is dropping and the number of people aged 50-64 with a long-term health condition is increasing.

The welfare workers offer regular support to those who wish to have contact and conversation to lift their mood and prevent further worries and anxieties, they also offer a contact service to those who may be waiting for 1:1 support.

We have addressed the increasing demand for the service in engaging further Psychotherapists and Counsellors.

- **1289** individuals have referred into the service since Autumn 2021
- **468** clients were referred from April 2023 to March 2024
- **126** new referrals between January – March 2024 (**65** clients were assessed and referred for Counselling, **15** for Physiotherapy and **46** for Welfare Calls.

## Social Activities

The programme of social activities supporting our mission **‘to promote the well-being of all older people and to help make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience’**, offered some exciting new opportunities including an organisational first – canoeing on the River Wear in Durham!



In total **749** individuals accessed a programme of **838** physical and social activities through out the year.

**76%** of clients accessing

the programme were aged 70 years and over.

New additions to the programme during the period included indoor archery, bellyfit, canoeing, craft workshops, needles & natter and Culture Companions taster sessions.



Feedback from the canoeing sessions has inspired us to schedule more adventurous water sports activities for the future.

In addition, physical activity sessions were



delivered in 3 assisted care settings in **Ouston, Seaham and Spennymoor** supporting **64** individuals across **139** sessions from April to December 2023.



The sessions focussed on strength and balance and incorporated fun activities including new age kurling and indoor archery, adapted to enable those with limited mobility to fully participate.



## Help at Home

The project was established to assist people with small DIY and gardening tasks and shopping errands.

Despite rigorous campaigning we did not manage to recruit the volunteer support necessary to make the offer responsive and viable was unsuccessful and the DIY and Gardening element ceased at the end of the year.

### During that time:

- **60** clients were supported with shopping
- **1502** shops completed
- **59** clients received regular garden maintenance
- **76** clients received DIY tasks
- **13** volunteers recruited to support shopping

*'Of all the help received over the past, Age UK County Durham are the only ones I've felt secure with.'*

## Information & Advice

**Our Information and Advice service is free, confidential and impartial helping anyone aged 50 and over, their family and carer's access benefits and services**

We aim to support older adults maintain their independence and improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

We offer a factual, holistic service with information and advice on issues such as finances, health, housing and access to local services.

*'When my husband went into care, I was lost but with the help and understanding of Age UK County Durham staff things are a lot better.'*

We provide factsheets, leaflets, signpost and make referrals to partners working together to maximise support.

### **During 2023-24, we**

- Supported older people to receive **£7,407,250** in previously unclaimed benefits
- Made **1020** home visits.
- Completed **1033** disability benefit forms
- Received **4640** client enquiries
- Completed **435** Benefit Eligibility Checks sessions as part of the Eon Warm Homes Project
- Supported **227** older people with food vouchers, energy vouchers and household goods

through the Household Support Scheme

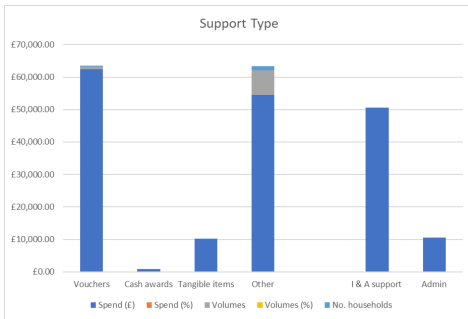
- Launched a monthly clinic to complete Blue Badge applications.
- Provided **145** older people with holistic I & A support by Age UK Cost of Living Funding.
- Delivered a Financial Advocacy Service

*‘With your help I am financially better off. I am an avid reader and now I can buy books whenever I want and other little luxuries which were beyond my reach. Thanks so much for your help and kindness.’*



# Household Support Fund

**£185,500** was allocated to Age UK County Durham from **Durham County Council**, administered through **County Durham Community Foundation**.



The purpose was to support the most vulnerable and at risk through the cost-of-living crisis. All referrals were triaged for support and additional information and advice support, including assessing eligibility for benefits and money management was offered.

Clients were also offered energy and food vouchers, support with purchasing essential items such as a fridge, cooker and other necessities.

- **6293** hot meals were delivered in association in partnership with Shildon Town Council Shildon Alive, Jubilee Fields Community Centre, Fulforth Centre in Sacriston and Junction 7 in Newton Aycliffe.
- **£92,766.40** was spent on providing hot meals and food voucher to a total of **1570** households
- **£20,496** was given to **74** households to support them with energy costs.



We received a small grant of **£2868** from Durham Community Action's Household Support Fund which was used to support **15** individuals experiencing financial difficulties due to poor mental health.

## Retail

The start of the new financial year got off to a brilliant start with the **Big Help out** in May 2023 for the King's Coronation.



We had a fantastic turnout of our existing volunteers and extra help from people wanting to be involved on the day.

We had a Coronation Party with decorations and a buffet and even had the BBC reporting live from the Superstore.!



It was a wonderful opportunity to show how much we appreciate all our volunteers and how important they are to the

successful running of our retail operation.

We ended the year with 7 additional volunteers and continue to recruit more.

**Retail income for the year was £23,9315.** This gave us a 2% increase on last year's sales.

With the cost-of-living crisis, we had to be reactive with our pricing and drive sales by selling extremely competitively and in volume, ensuring we kept our stock turning and customers coming back.

This is reflected in the customer numbers and units sold compared to the previous year.

- Units sold **62,748** vs last 52944 (+19%)
- Customers **23,998** vs last year 22115 (+9%)

*giftaid it*

Gift aid for the year came in at **48%** with an increase of 50% on the previous financial year.

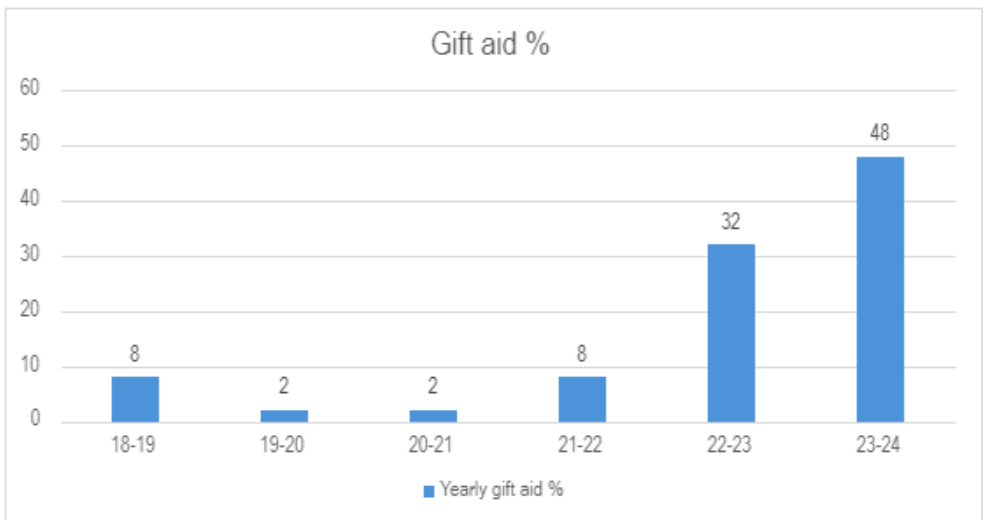
This is a fantastic result as the Charity Retail Association reports the average Gift Aid percentage for charities is usually 32%.

Across retail we have signed up **593 new gift aid donors** and received approximately **6,000** bags and boxes of gift aided donations with a similar amount of non gift aided bags and boxes.

### What is Gift Aid?

Donating through Gift Aid means charities and community amateur sports clubs can claim an extra 25p for every £1 given at no additional cost to the donor.

Gift Aid can be claimed if individual donors have paid the same amount or more in income tax or Capital Gains Tax in a tax year.

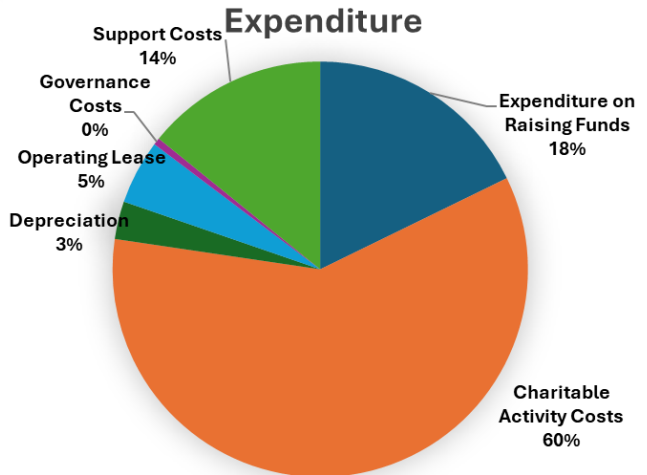
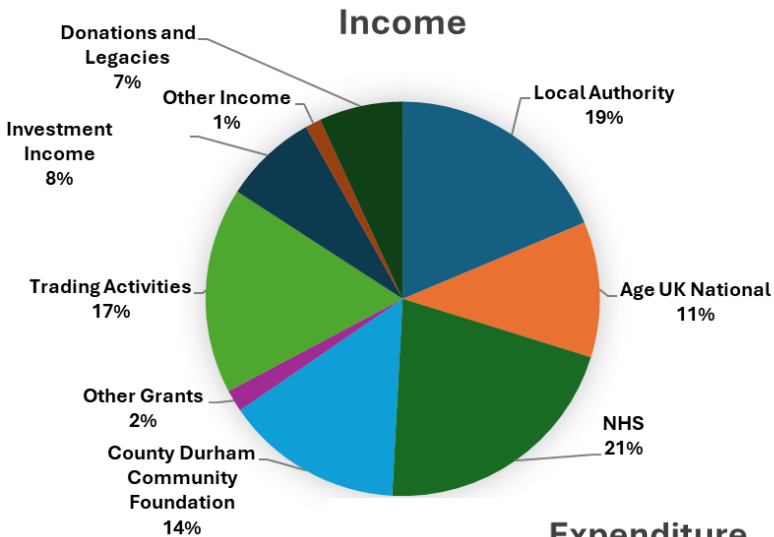


# Finance

We would like to thank Age UK, Durham Clinical Commissioning Group, Durham County Council, Durham Community Foundation, European Support Fund,

Shakespeare Trust, believe housing and County Durham Sport for the provision of grant funding.

Our thanks also to the many small groups and individuals who have given donations.



*All donations and legacies given directly to Age UK County Durham are used for the sole purpose of improving and supporting the lives of older people living in County Durham.*

**Contact us for more information  
about all our services and activities**

**0191 386 3856**

info@ageukcountydurham.org.uk  
ageuk.org.uk/countydurham/

**Information and Advice**

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your.rights@ageukcountydurham.org.uk

All donations, legacies etc given directly  
to Age UK County Durham (not Age UK)  
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Age UK Charity  
Quality Standard



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