

# Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Services



## ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

“UTASS...

A place for everyone.  
Supporting people living and  
working across the Durham Dales.”

# Introduction



Anyone who has had the slightest involvement with UTASS recognises that UTASS has had another incredibly busy year. From the agricultural community's perspective, 2025 provided the same continuing uncertainty as 2024 with both central government and DEFRA announcements coming out, it seemed weekly. Some of these announcements were contradictory and were often overturning previous decisions. Whilst that is the negative side which required UTASS to provide a steadying hand on the tiller for our agricultural community, on the positive side the continued uncertainty, whilst unsettling for the farming community, certainly kept farming high in the national news agenda, which cannot be a bad thing.

Rural Watch seems to be ever more embedded in our community and further afield, and is used as a template for elsewhere. The Lived Experience Project, a vital cog within the Mental Health Transformation, continues to make sure those in the upper dales have a voice, and are heard.

In both the farming and the rural community, UTASS continues to cement its place as the go-to provider of assistance and advice in the upper dales. Long may this continue.

For those who have missed this, 2025 was our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, and doesn't time fly. Whilst I have been a Trustee now for nearly 8 years and Chairman for 4 years, I was of course aware of UTASS for many years before my direct involvement. When we look back at the roots of the organisation, and those determined visionaries, who in difficult times decided that "something must be done", how proud they and we should be. In those 25 years, there have been a number of crises, not least foot and mouth and the Covid pandemic, and where a crisis has arisen, UTASS has stepped up to the mark and done what has been necessary. To mis-quote the old Commercial Union advert UTASS does not turn a crisis into a drama.

As members will recall, our King has been a long-term supporter of UTASS through (what was the Prince's Countryside Fund), now the Royal Countryside Fund, Richard Betton and Emma Spry were both invited to attend a reception at Buckingham Palace with the King, at which the King, through the Royal Countryside Fund acknowledged the appreciation of all organisations including UTASS, which are members of the Royal Countryside Funds Farms Support Groups Initiative. This confirms that UTASS does receive recognition at the highest level for what our organisation does and we should all be immensely proud of this.





# Introduction

Over the course of the year we have welcomed Jo Middleton initially as helping on reception and now having moved to become the Training and Events Coordinator, Tracy Profitt providing Domestic Support and Sue Anderson as the new Lived Experience lead.

Sadly there have been retirements and leavers which have included Gladys Mugambi, our Parish Nurse, Becca Melville, our Volunteer Coordinator, Becky Land the Lived Experience Lead, Julia Stephenson the Training Coordinator and Bob and Sheena Danby who retired respectively as Manager and Domestic Support.

Sadly two of our Trustees, Sarah Elton and Fay Hutchinson, decided to retire during the course of the year but I am delighted to welcome Bob Danby, Martin Peat, and Allan Hobson as new Trustees.

The Reverend Rachel Benson, one of our most active and conscientious patrons, decided to step down in 2025, having given 25 years of dedicated service to UTASS. A lunch was given in honour of Rachel who will be sorely missed, although we have promised to keep her informed of any developments, because her retirement does not of course bring to an end her great interest in the development of UTASS.

December also saw the retirement of Rosemary Thompson and Rosie Thompson, the Hosts (and entertainers) of the farmers' lunches up in Teesdale and Weardale. I was extremely glad to be able to attend the December lunch at the Moorcock and say a few words in thanks to both Rosemary and Rosie and make a small presentation to them both. Rosemary responded with characteristic wit! The farmers lunches will continue to be organised by Anne Scott, however we now have three new hosts; Karen Scott for the Middleton-in-Teesdale lunch, Tracy Turnbull for the Barnard Castle lunch, and Emma Hall for our Weardale lunch at St Johns Chapel.



On that final point I sign off this year's Chairman's Statement with thanks to all our members, our staff and volunteers. These thanks I express personally and on behalf of my Co-Trustees. I must also express my thanks to my Co-Trustees for their continued support and indeed diligence in pushing the UTASS project forward. They give their time unsparingly, their reward is seeing UTASS flourish, and perhaps KitKats and Tunnocks chocolate teacakes at a trustees meeting.

We move into 2026 in the knowledge that UTASS is in good heart, and ready for the challenges of the year to come.

**Michael McGarry**  
**UTASS Chairman**

# Farming Support



2025 was another busy year for our farm support team, they continued to navigate the constant, and often last-minute, changes within the sector. From dealing with historic Higher Level Stewardship schemes to newly designed Sustainable Farming Incentive schemes as well as Higher Tier schemes for those on commons and upland farms.

**72%** of farming members said we helped them deal with farm paperwork.



Welcome news arrived in May 2025 for farmers with existing **HLS** (Higher Level Stewardship) agreements, as the government confirmed that payment rates would be increased. These rates had not been updated for more than a decade and had fallen behind those offered under the newer schemes such as Countryside Stewardship (CS) and the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI).

In September, the new **CSHT** (Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier) scheme opened for applications to those members who had been invited to apply and received pre-application advice and

completed any preparatory work. Only a small number of members were selected for this initial invitation-only phase, and we have provided support to those progressing applications. A wider rollout is expected, with more members anticipated to be invited to apply in 2026.

Throughout the year, UTASS has continued to **provide a voice** at local, regional and national levels in educating and communicating with both political decision makers and those organisations that deliver grants and schemes. The team continues to maintain a good relationship with the RPA and Defra through the Farmer Welfare Group, resulting in access to invaluable contacts when issues have arisen. Richard continues to ensure UTASS and our members' voices are heard at every opportunity, collaborating with the North Pennines National Landscapes, the NFU, and numerous online workshops to develop and implement government policies.

At the start of the year, in January, several local businesses, organisations and farmers were joined at UTASS by local MP Sam Rushworth and the former Defra Minister, Daniel Zeichner.

Discussions ranged from farming practises in the local area to issues farmers locally and regionally are facing. Thanks must go to the NFU Durham District Office for their efforts in organising the event.





# Farming Support

 **84%**  
of farming  
members said we  
helped to reduce  
stress.

The **Agricultural Secretary** support continued to be invaluable to members throughout the year, helping with day-to-day farm record-keeping and dealing with a range of agencies, including the RPA, APHA, BCMS, LIS and local councils. This included assistance with sheep and cattle movement notifications, registering calf births, farm assurance inspections, keeping medicine records, and supporting members with appeals and planning applications. This help was especially important for members who do not have internet access or who are less confident using IT, as many of these tasks now have to be completed online.

The support provided helped members stay compliant and reduced the administrative pressure on their businesses.

Throughout the year, the Farm Support team produced eight **agricultural briefings**, outlining new scheme offers, updates on regulations, simplification of policy documents and reminders of key dates, allowing members to find out everything they need to know in a simple format.

In early 2025, we supported our farming members with applications for the **SFI** (Sustainable Farming Incentive) scheme. However, on 11<sup>th</sup> March the government unexpectedly announced that the entire 2024 SFI budget had been allocated, and it immediately stopped accepting new applications. As you can imagine, this caused considerable stress for our members, several of whom had already begun their applications but were unable to submit them in time.

Following pressure from farming groups, the scheme reopened in July 2025, although only for certain businesses that met specified eligibility criteria. A revised SFI scheme was expected to be published in the summer of 2025. Unfortunately, no formal announcement has yet been made. We now hope that DEFRA will release details of the new SFI offer in early 2026.

 **80%**  
of farming  
members said we  
helped them cope.

Richard continued as secretary for several **grazier groups** in the Dale, as well as for two groups of Field Reeves on local common land, with Caitlin continuing to act as 'assistant secretary'. Our graziers' groups have been affected by delays in the Agricultural Transition Plan, with commons often treated as "too difficult" to deal with. Ongoing pressure, including from UTASS, has led to a small but welcome increase in HLS payment rates – the first rise since February 2006. Moving into Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier would offer much better rewards for the environmental benefits delivered through grazing, but at present this is only possible for one group.



**62**   
of our members  
have been supported  
with an SFI application  
since November 2023.

# Farming Support



March 2025 marked the end of funding from the Royal Countryside Fund and Defra's Farm Resilience Fund, so we made sure to make the most of the **Farm For The Future** funding while we could! Four meetings took place, all aiming to help farming families to understand and prepare for the changes that are coming within the agricultural sector.

Update meetings were held for those farm businesses that have been involved in the programme since the start, while Ian Cairns and Janet Fairclough joined us once again to help new members understand the financial side of farming and environmental opportunities such as SFI and other funding/schemes.

Finally, we held an on-farm walk and talk discussing 'weatherproof' farming and how to



understand soils. Since the start of the programme, over 160 businesses from across the Durham Dales have benefitted.

**160+**   
**businesses across the Durham Dales benefitted from the RCF Farm for the Future Programme**

In summer the farm support team and a small number of farming members were joined by Keith Halstead, Executive Director of the Royal Countryside Fund (RCF) to discuss how UTASS has developed over the years since the first pot of funding we received from RCF over 20 years ago, compared to the current farming challenges our members are facing and potential future funding that may become available.

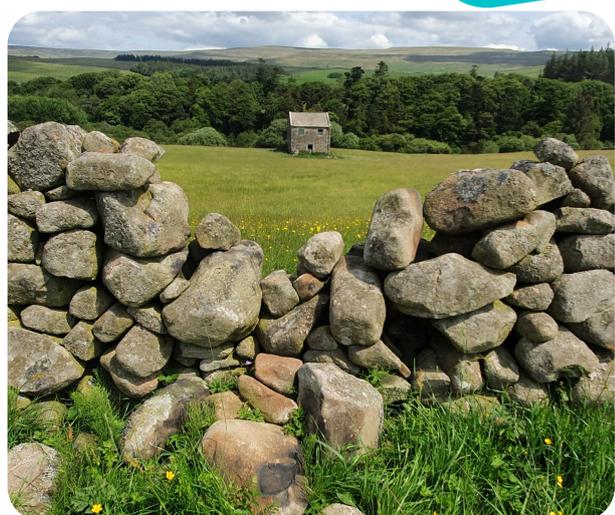


With the sudden closure of **Capital Grants** in November 2024, farmers

welcomed the announcement that the scheme was to re-open on 3rd July with a budget of over £150 million, however with the major demand for the scheme the window closed less than a month after it opened on 1st August, once again leaving many farmers and their advisors frustrated,

especially those who had draft applications ready to submit.

**20+**   
**members were supported in submitting capital grants.**





# Farm Events

Following the launch in 2024, the **Defra Farmer Welfare Fund** allowed us to organise several events throughout 2025 including 'suppers on us' evenings, a big farmer breakfast ahead of lambing time, an RPA support drop-in at a local auction mart, a farm Health & Safety meeting with Deepdale Off-Road and the local NFU branch, a very popular Sheep Post-Mortem event, organised in conjunction with the AHDB and Ben, of Farm Post-Mortems Ltd, and an even more popular event - An Evening with The Sheep Game where 170 spectators were

joined by social media influencer Cammy Wilson at Barnard Castle Auction Mart! The fund also allowed us to offer more 'farm' tailored training, with the Emergency First Aid at Work for Farmers course proving extremely popular.

“We loved that UTASS organised 'A night with Cammy Wilson aka The Sheep Game' - it was a fun and sociable night as well as it being inspiring hearing how Cammy got into farming and his ups and downs! Thank you for organising it!”  
- The Hutchinson Family



Photo taken by the Royal Countryside Fund

Our **Local Women in Farming** group went from strength to strength throughout the year, with over 60 women now on our contact list. The group, also funded by the Defra Farmer Welfare Fund, met monthly over the course of the year, with a quick break during the lambing months. Sessions have included trips to Ox Close Farm, Tebay Farm Services and Cross Lanes to find out more about diversification, a pre-lambing & calving session followed later in the year by a pre-tupping session, to pick up some top tips and tricks ready to use on the farm, a Women in Farming event organised by Northumbria University, and a Wellbeing4Life session reminding us how important it is to look after ourselves and those around us. We finished the year with a Christmas crafts and quiz session at the Moorcock Inn, with supper!

**81%**   
of farming members said we helped them join in with things in the local area.



Photo taken by the Royal Countryside Fund

# Training



During 2025, UTASS has helped over 217 local farmers and members of the community with their **training** needs.

The year began with quad bike training in the dales and a further course was held in the summer at Weardale Ski Club where volunteers gained the much needed skills when driving on challenging terrain and in difficult conditions.

Regular Emergency First Aid courses have been held throughout the year. These have been attended by community groups across the dales and local businesses alike, including volunteers

at Cowhill Village Hall, local scout groups and members of The Upper Teesdale Botany Group. We have also held three fully funded courses specifically tailored for farmers. In total this year, UTASS has held Emergency First Aid training for over 100 local people, giving them the confidence to step in and help until the emergency services arrive.

In the spring we successfully received funding from The Netherton Trust to offer four young people the chance to attend a series of short rural training courses to help improve their opportunities for their future careers. Our young trainees have been offered to attend courses such as first aid, chainsaw maintenance, tele handling, safe use of pesticides, hedge-laying and dry-stone walling. The courses have helped improve their chances for finding employment as well as building their confidence through learning practical skills in a non-classroom based environment.

**“I thought the training was excellent. It was easy to understand, and the practical exercises were extremely helpful. The course leader was friendly and approachable and also very informative.”** - Trainee

**69%**  
of users say that UTASS has increased their knowledge & skills.

Once again, funding from the Wellesley Trust Fund enabled us to invite young people in the Durham Dales to apply for driver training support. With over 40 applicants, we were able to award £350



towards car driving lessons for 19 young people, 4 benefitted from pre-tractor test preparation, 3 young people completed the Lantra 13-15 training and one young person was able to complete Lantra Rough Terrain Telescopic. This training is essential in educating young people in health and safety and leading to better access to opportunities.

**“The training was excellent. I was very impressed with how much progress I made in one day.”** - Trainee



# Training



Our practical courses in dry stone walling and hedge laying have proved as popular as ever too. Paul from the Northumbrian Dry Stone Walling Association was joined by his team of volunteers, helped show our local trainees the art of dry-stone walling. The taster days were held over two Saturdays in the

## 215+



**training places provided in 2025.**

summer at a local farm in Woodland. The weather wasn't kind on either day, but this failed to dampen the enthusiasm. All eleven trainees embraced the opportunity to be hands-on and learn new skills. The wall looked pretty good too!

In contrast, the British Wool Board Shearing course took place on one of the hottest weekends of the year! Over two days in June the trainees learnt the skills to give them the confidence to shear more sheep throughout the summer.

UTASS has also organised courses for the safe use of pesticides, chainsaw maintenance and cross cutting, telehandler, food hygiene in catering and several rodent management courses.

We would not be able to offer such a diverse range of training courses without the invaluable help of those who have given funding, provided venues, equipment and helped support us in other ways. A heartfelt thanks goes out to everyone who has helped UTASS throughout the year.



**"I only had basic knowledge from college, this course has given me greater in-depth knowledge"** - Trainee

**"I fully recommend the course. It was very informative."** - Trainee

**"The course has expanded my future job opportunities"** - Trainee



**"I have learned plenty of new skills, information and the legislation framework needed for this equipment"** - Trainee



# Young People



During 2025, we welcomed nine new **Young People** to our programme, bringing the total membership to 104. Weekly feedback from both young people and their parents highlights the positive engagement with the sessions and activities provided.

**80+**   
**pizza's consumed  
in 2025**

Over the year, more than 80 pizzas and a wide range of other hot foods were shared during sessions, supporting a welcoming and inclusive environment and encouraging regular attendance. These sessions continue to be based around the 5 ways to wellbeing, promoting a wholesome lifestyle: Connect, Keep Learning, Give, Be Active, Take Notice.



A broad programme of activities was delivered to meet the interests of participants and promote social, physical and creative development. These activities included sailing, kayaking, gaga ball, scavenger hunts, litter picking, jewellery making, themed parties, Nerf battles, blind food taste testing, baking, basketball coaching, den building, pizza making, multi-sports evenings, quizzes and bingo, pamper sessions, movie nights, "Minute to Win It" games, self-portrait painting, ghost-hunting activities, discos, Christmas decoration



**"We can be ourselves and we always have fun!"**  
- Young Person

making and canvas bag painting.

**"We love UTASS"**  
- Young Person



**"We do something different each week if we want to."**  
- Young Person





# Young People

## 102

**Registered young people attending the youth sessions**



Young people also took part in a range of off-site and school holiday activities. These included visits to Bowlees Farm, Mud and More pottery sessions, Planet Leisure for laser tag and bowling, 4 Motion Skate Park, Hamsterley Forest and The Bowes Museum, where members participated in a giant

**“ Excellent programme, there’s always so much for the kids to get involved in ”**  
- Parent of Young Person

squeegee painting workshop. In addition, young people completed a sponsored walk around Grassholme Reservoir in aid of Teesdale Sailing Club. This activity raised £174, helping to fund new equipment in response to recent thefts and helped sustain our annual sailing trips.



## OUR YOUTH TEAM ARE...

- Adele Dickeson
- Gina Richardson
- Melanie Lee

**“Thank you all for looking after our kids and taking them to many exciting activities.”**

- Parent of Young Person



## 236

**miles travelled in the UTASS minibuses for offsite trips**

**“Thank you so much to everyone at UTASS - particularly all those involved in your youth club. Your efforts are deeply appreciated by myself, the Committee, and all the club members. Getting UTASS out in the water is one of the highlights of our year and your fundraising efforts will help ensure that continues to happen despite the break-in.”**

- Teesdale Sailing Club



# Supporting People



This year has been a year of continued growth and real impact for the **Time Together** project. Under the leadership of our Teesdale Project Coordinator, Suzanne Wallace, the project has gone from strength to strength, expanding its reach and deepening the difference it makes across our rural communities.

Thanks to the ongoing commitment of our volunteers and supporters, the project has

continued to provide meaningful companionship and reduce loneliness for people across Teesdale. We are delighted to report that we now have over 40 active volunteers, each playing a key role in strengthening social connections and offering

genuine human contact where it is needed most.

**“With the right pairing, even an hour together can brighten someone’s entire week. It builds confidence and strengthens mental health.”**

- Wiebke, Volunteer

With more than 80 referrals received, and over 45 individuals currently being supported, the demand for the project clearly continues to grow. Our volunteers visit their matched companions weekly or fortnightly, offering friendly conversation, help with small errands, or simply the reassurance of regular company. These seemingly small moments of time have a lasting and powerful impact on wellbeing.

The project continues to demonstrate how compassion, connection and community spirit can transform lives. We remain committed to supporting individuals to feel healthier, more confident, and more connected within their community, and we thank every volunteer whose time, kindness and empathy make this work possible.

**58%** of users said services accessed at UTASS helped them to feel healthier.



**Time Together:**

- Supporting People
- Mindfulness & Compassion
- Building Connections



**“My weekly visits mean so much. We share stories, look through photos, and enjoy simply spending time together.”** - June, Referral

**“I always look forward to seeing my companion. She’s so grateful, and it gives us both something to look forward to. It’s truly a two-way friendship.”**  
- Andrew, Volunteer





# Supporting People

2025 was another busy year for our **Resilience Support** team, which now consists of two

Resilience Support Workers, a Peer Support Worker, a Parish Nurse and a Local Lived Experience Lead.

Our two Resilience Support Workers, Mel and June, have continued to work with clients as part of the Durham Resilience Service. The service offered is able to cover the Durham Dales, right from the top of Harwood down to Gainford, and across to rural Weardale. The flexible nature of the support enables us to visit clients out in the community, at their home or farm, here at UTASS, or at their GP Surgery in order to flexibly and comfortably meet their needs.



**“Just wanted to say thank you so much for talking things through with me. You have helped me so much and I am incredibly grateful”** - Client

The team are able to offer a wide range of support, whether that be for those affected by life-changing illnesses like Cancer or Dementia, or individuals and families navigating bereavement or domestic abuse. Now in its fifth year,

the Resilience Support has become a well respected part of local provision, continuing to work closely with statutory health and Social Services as part of the Community Transformation Programme. Our understanding of the additional stresses experienced by rural families is recognised by members and professionals throughout the area.

 **75%** of users said services accessed at UTASS helped them to feel less isolated.

**45%**  said 'mental health stigma' causes them stress.

Our team efficiently shared information, ensuring a flexible response to those in crisis. Over the year, we helped farmers, teenagers, older adults, working-age individuals, born-and-bred locals and those who have moved to the Dales more recently.

Various **Yoga & Wellness** sessions continued throughout the year, with June continuing to run a Gentle Yoga, Mindfulness and

Relaxation class here at UTASS everything Thursday. The hour session is followed by a cuppa and catch up... and sometimes even cake! With an average attendance of 8-10 people, the NHS recognises these sessions are effective in helping people keep mobile and reduce stress levels.



Tuesday evening yoga also continued to be very popular during 2025, originally starting the year on a self-directed basis. In September, the group found a local instructor to continue the sessions.

**“Appreciate the pace for total beginners like me. Loved the guided relaxation at the end”**  
- Yoga Participant

# Supporting People



We have continued to offer emotional support through our welfare team this year, thanks to our ongoing partnership with the Pioneering Care Partnership and support from Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust.

We have continued to host a **Lived Experience** Lead throughout 2025. The role gives local people a voice in discussions and decisions that affect them, through sharing their own mental health experiences. **Giving our area a voice, making sure they're heard, and helping shape future delivery.**

**70%**   
**of users said services accessed at UTASS helped them to cope better.**

Becky Land continued in this role to the end of March with Sue Anderson joining the team later in the year to further continue the role. Their aim; gather local people's experiences of accessing and navigating mental health services by speaking to individuals and reaching out through groups, as well as highlighting opportunities at local community venues. Information is then fed back to the Durham Dales Steering Group to identify what is working well and what requires improvement, as we all work together to make a difference through the community mental health transformation.



Gina Richardson has continued as our **Peer Support** Worker throughout the year, working together with various organisations; ensuring that support is available locally for those who seek help to manage and maintain their mental health.

Support is available to people living and working across the Durham Dales. Gina offers regular meet-ups to share experiences and help people to develop and work through their own action plans, so they feel a better sense of control of their own health and wellbeing and ultimately, more able to cope with life's challenges.

Gina also offers peer support through group activities, including a weekly community lunch and a newly formed social group for late diagnosed/undiagnosed adults with autism.

**Supporting each other, through shared experience**



The **Parish Nurse** service continued to have a significant impact in the community over the past year, supporting the Durham Dales community through compassionate spiritual care, advocacy and meaningful connection. Since the launch of the Parish Nurse role, over 48 individuals have received one-to-one support and many others have been helped by simple, honest conversations that offered encouragement and practical help. Home visits and outings have played a vital role in combating loneliness, ensuring clients have something to look forward to.

**“Just a line to say I am looking forward to your next visit. Wish I was seeing you more often as always helpful and give good advice.”**

- Client



# Working Together

Since its launch in 2018, our **Rural-Watch** WhatsApp group has continued to expand and adapt to the needs of rural communities. The original group was created in response to a rise in targeted rural crime and quickly proved to be an effective way for residents, farmers, and rural businesses to share information and stay connected.

261



**Members - a 10% increase from 2025**

**UTASS Rural-Watch**  
Residents & Police working together



These groups allow members to quickly circulate information about suspicious activity, crime incidents, and other issues affecting rural communities. The effectiveness is largely driven by the vigilance of its members and the speed at which 'live-time' information can be communicated across the groups.

Durham Constabulary continued to work closely with the Rural-Watch WhatsApp groups, recognising the value they bring to rural policing. Information shared by members has contributed to a range of positive outcomes, including the recovery of stolen property, the location of missing persons, and the progression of police investigations that have resulted in offender arrests.

The groups play an important preventative role. By improving awareness of rural crime issues and encouraging the sharing of information, Rural-Watch helps strengthen community resilience and acts as a deterrent to those who may seek to target rural communities.

The model continued to be replicated both across our County, and also neighbouring areas, with the assistance of our Rural-Watch Coordinators, funding for which has been supported by Joy Allen, Police and Crime Commissioner for Durham (Durham PCC)

Emma, who established the original group, remains actively involved, and is now also a member of the Safer Countryside Rural Strategy group. Throughout 2025 she attended quarterly meetings at Police Headquarters in Durham. Through this role, she helps ensure that the concerns and issues affecting communities in Teesdale and Weardale are represented and heard.

UTASS has been pleased to support **Teesdale & Weardale RuralWatch** working in partnership with the group, assisting them in identifying and securing a range of funding opportunities, and made use of UTASS facilities to host regular meetings, including their Annual General Meeting.

**I promote the Durham Rural Watch Coordinators as an example of national best practice, and commend the Durham PCC for having the foresight to see the importance of these roles in tackling rural crime.**

- Superintendent Andy Huddleston,  
National Rural Crime Unit &  
National Construction and  
Agricultural Theft team

**75%**  
of users said  
**UTASS helped them to feel more involved in the future of the Community.**

# Working Together



**Let's Learn Moor** took place at Coldberry and we were again invited to take part. This annual event, which has seen more than 13,500 primary school children visit one of many events since the project launched in 2017, brings children from both urban and rural schools together in outdoor 'classrooms' in upland environments across the UK to learn from those dedicated to preserving them. We joined forces with Jemma from **Bowlees Education Farm** and engaged with over 300 children over two days. The event took place in July, but thankfully the unfortunate weather didn't dampen enthusiasm. Jo & Emma spoke about the importance of the countryside code, and how to safely enjoy the outdoors and upland area, before Jemma stole the show with her sheep and lambs. Events like these are a fantastic opportunity to inspire young minds – and their educators – about the importance of the Countryside Code and upland farming.



## Middleton Christmas Lights committee and volunteers again worked alongside Emma and Jo for the 13<sup>th</sup> **Middleton Mart Christmas Fair**.

 Sara Davies  
★ Favorites · November 30, 2025 ·  
📍 Opalite · Taylor Swift · 🎵

Sunday Vibes....  
Our usual Sunday morning ritual watching the bairns at the football - my mam brought me an early Christmas present - she was at the Middleton in Teesdale Christmas craft fair yesterday and bought that lovely hand-knitted hat and neck scarf set! I bloody love it and love it even more that someone lovingly knit it and has a small business doing craft fairs!...



... 60 stallholders attended, showcasing a fantastic selection of local goods, giving visitors the perfect opportunity to 'shop local' finding that perfect gift for any member of the family - Even if your daughter is Dragons Den star Sara Davies!



Thankfully, the dire weather forecast didn't put off the hundreds of visitors who supported the event. The Teesdale Scout troupe once again kept everyone fed and watered while Mr & Mrs Claus, assisted by some helpful elves, again welcomed families into their cosy grotto, creating an unforgettable 'Santa Experience.'

The day, as always, culminated with the annual switch-on event. Despite the torrential rain, people still gathered to enjoy mulled wine, mince pies, and hot sandwiches were enjoyed, while the Silver Band and choir led the carols, before the Carnival Queen, Tilly Manser, switched on the lights, marking the beginning of the festive season.

**68%**   
users said  
**UTASS helps them  
join in with things in  
the local area.**



# Working Together

In 2025, Claire took the reins as coordinator of our **oil buying group**. As popular as ever, the group gained 39 new members throughout the year. Meaning there are



**In 2025, the group bought 376,500 litres of oil.**

now almost 440 households and businesses benefitting from discounted oil prices, saving between 2.6p and 5.5p a litre. Prices dipped in the middle of the year, before increasing again at the end of 2025.



**This year, our oil buying group saved it's members £21,132**

Throughout 2025, UTASS **volunteers** continued to play an essential role in supporting and strengthening the community through a wide range of activities, events, and initiatives.

Volunteers remained at the heart of this work, generously giving their time, skills, and energy to support the organisation and the people it serves. Over the course of the year, they contributed many hours assisting with a diverse range of tasks and activities. This included driving the UTASS minibus to enable community trips and transport for local residents, helping people remain connected and able to take part in local activities.



**68 volunteers supported our work in 2024**

Volunteers also helped deliver the UTASS Community Newsletter each month, ensuring that residents across the dale remain informed about local news, opportunities, and the support services available to them. In addition, volunteers represented UTASS at local agricultural shows and community events, helping to raise awareness of the organisation's work and strengthen connections within the rural community.

Their commitment and dedication has been invaluable. Their willingness to lend a hand whenever needed plays a vital role in the activities and services we provide.

In recognition of their incredible contribution, a **volunteer celebration** was held in March. Volunteers were invited to enjoy a special lunch provided by Samuel James Deli, offering an opportunity for UTASS to thank them for their time, commitment, and continued support. Events such as this are an important



**Volunteer time during 2025 is valued at £65,786.13**

way to acknowledge the vital role volunteers play; without their generosity and community spirit, much of UTASS's work would simply not be possible.



# Bringing People Together



During 2025, **Chat & Craft** continued to grow and thrive, welcoming 17 new members over the course of the year. Attendance reflected a strong sense of community and commitment, with participants travelling not only from the local area but also from Alston and Darlington.

17



**new members  
in 2025**



830+

**Teacakes**

**were enjoyed at Chat  
& Craft sessions in  
2025!**

Individuals from Scotland and Dorset even planned visits to coincide with holidays or family time, highlighting the value and appeal of the sessions.

The social aspect of the programme remained central to its success. Sessions provided a welcoming, relaxed environment where members could connect, create and unwind together. This was reflected in the consumption of over 835 teacakes throughout the year.

**“Tuesdays chat and craft is my time, a chance to unwind with a cuppa, teacake and try new crafts. Over the past year I have enjoyed making this time for me, it a great friendly group”** - Participant

A diverse programme of sessions were delivered in 2025.

Key projects included the Land of Lead and Silver Project in partnership with the North Pennines, alongside stained glass work and The Reimagine Project at The Bowes Museum, involving collaborative work to recreate three gallery spaces, with a particular focus on the life and legacy of Josephine Bowes, offering participants meaningful engagement with local heritage and museum practice.

The programme was enriched by the involvement of a wide range of skilled artists and makers. These included Mud and More (Suzanne Thomas), Teesdale Felt (Claire Priestley), Julieanne Brough, Sarah Orme, Womble Witchcraft (Janine Bailey), June Wainwright, Eden Stained Glass, and many others, each contributing specialist knowledge and creative inspiration.

Through both sessions Gina continued to maintain a strong bond with many who attended, enabling her to support them in various other ways whenever they needed.



**“I really enjoy chat and craft sessions - it allows me to stay independent and socialise with my friends and meet new ones.”** - Participant



# Bringing People Together

We organised three **theatre trips** this year. Group members enjoyed *Calamity Jane* and *Tina Turner the Musical* at Sunderland and *Miss Saigon* at Newcastle Theatre Royal. These trips were highly appreciated by our members, with transport provided too.



“Thank you for organising the theatre outings. It’s fabulous to be taken to see shows while they’re on tour in the North-East.” - June Kneller

“How would we cope without UTASS? We are so lucky to have you and to know you’re not on your own.”

- Louie Wallace



The monthly **CREE lunches** at Barnard Castle Mart, Middleton Mart and St John’s Chapel continue to be well attended. The meals, prepared by Rosemary Thompson, remained a monthly highlight for many. Sadly, in December, Rosemary decided to hang up her apron, having served a 2-course meal to over 50 men every month since October 2010. Rosie, who volunteered her time over the years to help Rosemary, also stepped down.

In an emotional farewell, both ladies were presented with gifts at the annual joint Christmas meal at the Moorcock.



“I’ve thoroughly enjoyed every minute, the men have been very easy to please and they have all been true gentlemen. I am going to miss them all.”

- Rosemary Thompson

We organised a variety of **ladies outings** this year, including an afternoon matinee at Darlington to see *Spitfire Girls*, and a visit to Larch Cottage Garden Centre near Penrith. As a Christmas special, our group headed up to Corbridge to see the Christmas Tree Festival.

Many thanks must go to our volunteer drivers; we couldn’t run these trips without you!

**40%** 

said services & opportunities at UTASS helped them to feel better off financially.



# Bringing People Together

In 2025, eighteen **Shopping trips** took place, with our most popular trips being Lanchester Garden Centre, Dalton Park, Northallerton and Teesside Park. Other trips to Thorpe Farm, Strikes Garden Centre, Richmond, Raby Castle and Linzford Garden Centre. As always, we extend our heartfelt thanks to our dedicated volunteer drivers - without them these shopping trips would not have been possible.



**Move it or Lose it** made the most of the Blue Room at UTASS - a fitness class for seniors, designed to help you improve flexibility, aerobic health, balance and strength - with 42 sessions held since February. Starting off with just four members, and finishing the year with an average of fifteen!



**Highlights Rural Touring** scheme delivers an affordable programme of theatre for all ages, bringing high-quality performances to rural communities like ours. In November, we had the pleasure of hosting 'Singing Bones', a musical, storytelling trio from Cumbria. 'Singing Bones', set in the Cumbrian hills, was a soulful meditation on the beautiful and fragile natural world which surrounds us, with storyteller Jessie McMeekin and Cumbrian musicians JP Worsfold and Anne-Marie Sanderson, playing guitar & cello.

In May 2025, our Volunteer Coordinator, Becca launched a new **Men's Pie Club**. Held fortnightly, the sessions bring men together to make their own pies, tuck into them, and get to know new friends over a bit of craic. Now led by one of our volunteers, Alan, the group sees an average attendance of eight per session. From classic Steak & Ale to Fruity Lamb, and more recently, quiche lorraine's - there's something for everyone!

## Men's Pie Club





# Bringing People Together



Once a month, on a Friday afternoon, UTASS hosted the **Music and Memories** session, led by Mike Bettison and his Ukulele. An hour's sing-a-long session was enjoyed by a group of over 10 residents from two care homes in Barnard Castle, local residents from the surrounding area, family members and volunteers. Afterwards, a natter over a cup of tea and a slice of cake was

enjoyed by all. The role of the volunteers who drove the UTASS bus, helped with the setting up and clearing away was much appreciated by everyone and helped make the sessions a pleasant and enjoyable afternoon.

**46%**



**of users said social isolation caused them stress.**



**280+**

**Pie & Peas served in 2025.**

**Pie and peas** sessions continued on Mondays throughout the year welcoming 6 new members, with some travelling from as far as Staindrop

and Barnard Castle to join us. Gina creates a warm, welcoming vibe, making it a great chance to reconnect with friends or meet new faces while enjoying a variety of table games. The fun continues with a delicious hot lunch and a soothing cup of tea - over 280 pies were enjoyed!

No booking is needed; just drop in and join the fun.

Everyone's welcome—the more, the merrier!



**43%**

**of users said lack of time off work caused them to feel worried or stressed -**

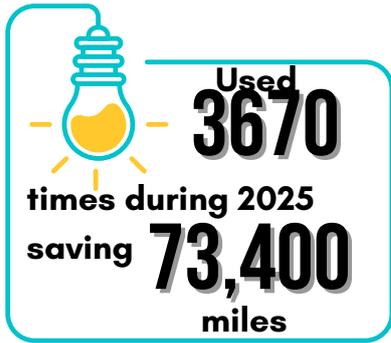
**76% of them were farmers.**

Weekly **wellness walks** also took place throughout the year, with a group of eight regular walkers participating. Sue, a local first responder, and Wendy, a volunteer at the Community Gym in Middleton, continued to lead the sessions.



They introduced a new structure, splitting the group to allow those who find longer distances challenging to enjoy a more relaxed, easy-paced walk. Sue, who has also been a volunteer minibus driver at UTASS for several years, often took the groups further up the dale, providing a refreshing change of scenery.

# Access to Services

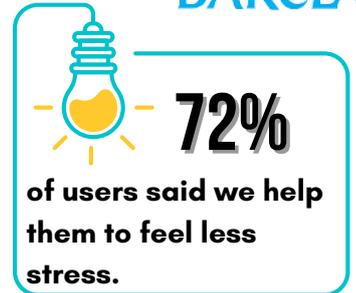


The twice-weekly **Post office** sessions continue to be a lifeline for local residents, with the impact of the loss of our Barclays branch back in 2023 still being felt.



Provided by Barnard Castle Post Office, the service continues to offer a vast range of services to the community, saving many residents the 20-mile round trip to the main branch in Barnard Castle.

Back in 2023, **Barclays** moved to UTASS as a 'Barclays Hub', on Tuesdays and Fridays. The cashless service provided invaluable advice, help with CHAPS and BACS payments and digital support. Sadly, in December, Barclays decided not to continue operating a banking hub in the village, making Bishop Auckland the nearest branch - a 42 mile round trip!



UTASS continued to host **Citizens Advice** support throughout the year. A regular drop-in session was held on Monday mornings, alongside additional appointments arranged for those with more urgent needs.

During the year, 23 cases were supported, covering a wide range of issues including benefits and Universal Credit, debt and housing matters, as well as utilities and consumer concerns.

Paul continues in his role as a fantastic and dedicated volunteer, helping to deliver this important local service. Through his commitment, he has become a familiar and trusted presence for Citizen's Advice at UTASS.



It was great to have **PACT Meetings** return to the UTASS calendar in December, providing an opportunity for local residents, community groups, and police representatives to come together and discuss issues affecting the area. The plan is for PACT meetings at UTASS to continue

on a monthly basis throughout 2026, helping to maintain regular communication and strengthen the partnership between the community and local policing teams.



**'Out of Hours' assistance** remains one of our core and most vital services, providing support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. At any time of day or night, our emergency telephone number is available and can be contacted by call or text.

Increasingly, people are also reaching out for help through our website and social media platforms, ensuring that support can be accessed in a way that suits their needs.





# Access to Services

Throughout 2025, we continued working with partners and organisations to deliver informational events, helping ensure that people living and working in the Dales could access the opportunities and support available to them. These events included two Techy Tea Parties, ran by **Digital Durham** where attendees received assistance with digital and connectivity challenges. On the theme of tech, towards the end of the year we were also joined by Charles from **Age UK** every fortnight who also offers tech support and advice on a drop-in basis, with many coming back for further advice as they progress with their knowledge.

We were also joined by **Create North** on four occasions as they ran a series of workshops to help with business set-up and/or growth. Two 'Making the most of Teesdale' sessions took place, which covered the arts, food & drink, hospitality and tourism sectors, which saw over 55 attendees across the two sessions. One 'Enterprising Mums' session took place, with information on how to start a new business idea, and one 'Side Hustle' session took place later in the year.

**1st Upper Teesdale Rainbows** continued to be a popular group, with 11 girls currently attending and a small waiting list of two younger girls who are not yet old enough to join. They met every Wednesday evening from 5pm-6pm at UTASS.

The group had a very busy and enjoyable year in 2025. One highlight was a visit to Bowlees Educational Farm, where the girls had the opportunity to learn about a variety of animals, including both farm and domestic pets. In May, we attended a district Beach Disco in Barnard Castle. The girls were very excited to meet other Rainbows, Brownies and Guides from across the district and enjoyed taking part in the event together.

To celebrate the end of the summer term, we were invited to Kaylee's Café and Bakery for an evening of baking, which finished with a lovely afternoon tea. It was a fantastic experience and thoroughly enjoyed by all the girls. Throughout the year, the girls have worked hard on the Rainbow programme, earning a number of interest badges. We were also delighted to present 4 Gold Awards, 5 Silver Awards and 2 Bronze Awards in recognition of their achievements.



**1st Middleton-in-Teesdale Scout Group** had another successful year for the 1st Middleton in Teesdale Scout Group. We currently have 35 young people across our three sections, aged between 6 and 14 years old. The groups have taken part in a wide range indoor and outdoor of activities: The Scouts and Cubs spent several weeks working towards their DIY badge. In the autumn, the two groups completed the Emergency Aid Level 4 badge, followed by a visit from community paramedic Sue Bainbridge. The Scouts also enjoyed a trip to South Shields where they had the opportunity to try scuba diving. The Beavers had their own adventure with a sleepover at the Hub, as well as a fascinating visit to Tees Cottage Water Pumping Station.



# Funders



Funded by  
UK Government



UKCF



As we reflect on another year at UTASS, we are once again reminded of the wide and generous community of supporters who make our work across the Durham Dales possible. We are deeply grateful to the donors, partners and funders who have supported us throughout 2025 and enabled us to continue making a meaningful difference.

We are pleased to have maintained strong relationships with many of our longstanding supporters, and we are particularly thankful to have secured new multi-year funding awards from The Ballinger Trust, Point North, and the Durham Police and Crime Commissioner's Office.



We would also like to recognise the invaluable contribution of our local community. This includes the Friends of UTASS, individuals who have made personal or legacy donations, and the many individuals, groups and organisations who have fundraised on our behalf. Your commitment and generosity play a vital role in sustaining and strengthening our services.



**Thank you to everyone who has supported UTASS this year. Your continued belief in our work enables us to do what we do, and we could not achieve our impact without you.**



Ballinger Charitable Trust

Durham Community Action

Durham County Council

Durham Dales Parish Nursing

Durham Dales Hedgerow Partnership

Durham Police & Crime Commissioner's Office

Joseph Strong Frazer Trust





# Funders



Made possible with  
**Heritage Fund**



DURHAM DALES  
PARISH NURSING



Know Your Neighbourhood Fund supported by  
UK Government

Morrison's Foundation

NFU Mutual Office Barnard Castle

Sir James Knott Trust

The Farmer Network (Defra Welfare Fund)

The National Lottery Heritage Fund via the North  
Pennines National Landscapes

Pioneering Care Partnership

Point North

The Mercers' Charitable Foundation

The National Lottery Community Fund

The Royal Countryside Fund

The R&H Woods Charitable Trust

Tyne & Wear Community Foundation

UK Community Foundations



SIR JAMES KNOTT TRUST



DURHAM  
COMMUNITY  
ACTION



Community  
Foundation



COMMUNITY  
FUND



point  
north



THE ROYAL  
COUNTRYSIDE  
FUND

# Our Staff



In 2025, our staff team continued to grow in strength as we welcomed some new faces to the team - Jo Middleton as Admin Support and latterly Training Coordinator and Sue Anderson as Local Lived Experience Lead. Sadly we also lost some colleagues as we said goodbye to Becky Land, Becca Melville, Julia Stephenson, Bob Danby, and Gladys Mugambi.

The majority of our team comes from the local community, meaning they often know the people we serve personally and have a strong understanding of local issues.

**Caitlin Dent**  
Admin Support

**Adele Dickeson**  
Youth Support

**Claire Stoddart**  
Admin Support

**Julia Stephenson**  
Training Co-ordinator



**Charlotte Fletcher**  
Admin Support & Agricultural Secretary

**Gina Richardson**  
Youth Team Lead, Community  
Engagement & Peer Support

**Richard Betton**  
Farmers Liaison Worker

**Grace Crawford**  
Funding & Strategic Development Officer



# Our Staff

## **Anne Scott**

Finance & Admin Support

## **Bob Danby**

Manager, Treasurer  
& Company Secretary

## **Suzanne Wallace**

Time Together Teesdale  
Co-ordinator

## **Alli Brown**

Finance Officer

## **Gladys Mugambi**

Parish Nurse

## **Emma Spry**

Manager, Treasurer &  
Company Secretary

## **Jo Middleton**

Training Coordinator  
& Admin Support

## **Becca Melville**

Volunteer Coordinator & Admin Support  
Worker

## **Becky Land**

Local Lived Experience Lead

## **Melanie Lee**

Resilience Support & Youth Support

## **June Wainwright**

Resilience Support

## **Sue Anderson**

Local Lived Experience Lead



# Our Trustees & Governance



UTASS is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee, governed by a Memorandum and Articles of Association adopted in December 2006.

The organisation operates under the oversight of a board of 11 trustees, each selected from diverse professional backgrounds to bring a wide range of skills and expertise to the table. Trustees are appointed through an ordinary resolution in line with the provisions set out in the Articles of Association.



**Bob Danby**  
Retired



**Caroline Colling**  
Farmer

The UTASS Financial Policy outlines the procedures and controls in place to ensure protection against fraud, error, and non-compliance with Charity Law. Reports detailing financial activities, including spending, current account and savings balances, as well as investment values are presented at each trustee meeting.

In accordance with Charity Law, the organisation's accounts are reviewed by an independent examiner with relevant qualifications.



**Martin Peat**  
Veterinary Surgeon

The trustees have established a policy of maintaining free reserves to cover between 6 and 12 months of normal operating costs, which ranges from £230,000 to £460,000.

All trustees are highly committed to their roles, with excellent attendance at meetings. None of the trustees receive any remuneration or expenses for their services.



**Allan Hobson**  
Fire Service



**Sarah Elton**  
Civil Servant



**Philip Lamb**  
Accountant



**Fay Hutchinson**  
Citizens Advice  
Technical Debt  
Supervisor & Farmer



# Our Trustees & Governance



**Steve Lumb**  
Retired GP

Six trustee meetings are scheduled annually, though additional meetings are held as needed.

In 2025, eight meetings were held, along with the Annual General Meeting.

The majority of meetings are held in person, with Zoom available for those unable to attend in person.

Trustee attendance at meetings is strong, with 70% of trustees participating consistently.

A personnel committee, composed of Richard Matthews, Phillip Lamb, and Amanda Simpson, oversees staffing matters. Additionally, other working groups are formed as needed for specific tasks or initiatives.

At the 2025 Annual General Meeting, Professor Sarah Elton and Fay Hutchinson both stepped down. The trustees extend their heartfelt thanks to Sarah and Fay for their dedication, support, and valuable contributions throughout their tenure.

Bob Danby and Martin Peat both joined the at the AGM, with Allan Hobson being co-opted onto the board in May.



Vice-Chair  
**Richard Matthews**  
Veterinary Surgeon



**Stephanie Markwick**  
Managing Partner



Chairman  
**Michael McGarry**  
Solicitor



**Amanda Simpson**  
Farmer

**80%**  
of users said  
they feel they have a  
say about the services  
UTASS provide.



**Carl Stephenson**  
Farmer

# Our Trustees & Governance



A summary of the financial position at the end of 2025 is shown below.

A full copy of the accounts is available by request from UTASS, and will also be available on the Charity Commission's website in due course.

## UTASS Financial Summary For the Year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025

### Income

Donations	24,348
Legacies	50,000
Grants	172,445
Income from charitable activities	373,250
Investment income	<u>23,719</u>
	<u>643,762</u>

### Expenditure

Staff costs	397,826
Project costs	100,134
Depreciation	18,475
Other costs	<u>72,466</u>
	<u>588,901</u>

Investment Gain	2,568
<b>Surplus for the year</b>	<b>57,429</b>

### Assets and liabilities at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025

Fixed assets including investments	84,377
Current assets including bank accounts	644,782
Current liabilities	<u>(28,578)</u>
Net assets	<u>700,581</u>

### Funds

Restricted funds	151,584
Reserves	269,576
Other unrestricted funds	<u>279,421</u>
Total funds	<u>700,581</u>



# The "Last Word"!

As I look back over my first year as Manager, I feel proud and privileged that I am able to step into this role and work alongside such a dedicated and caring team, supporting the farming and rural communities of Teesdale and Weardale.

The work UTASS does is grounded and quietly life-changing. It is clear to me that the reason it has stood the test of time and lasted for 25 years is because of the strength of commitment shown by our staff, our volunteers, and our trustees, and the values they strive for; compassion, resilience, and a belief in community.

This past year has been one of transition and learning, and it's astonishing to look back on everything that has been achieved – the projects we've delivered, and the people we've supported, and the partnerships we've built.

Looking ahead, rural communities and the farming sector continue to face significant and evolving challenges, from isolation and access to services to the impacts of economic and environmental change. We know there is more work to do, and UTASS remains committed to meeting those needs with care, understanding and deep-rooted passion.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our staff for their ongoing dedication, professionalism, flexibility and compassion, and for the way they have supported both the people we serve as well as one another throughout the year. It is an honour to be surrounded by people who care deeply and who know this community better than anyone.

To our volunteers, thank you! Your continued generosity of time, energy, and skills are vital contributions; the difference you make to individuals and families across our rural communities is immeasurable, and UTASS simply could not operate without your support.

I am also grateful to our trustees for their guidance, support, and governance; their commitment to UTASS, given freely and with such passion, provides a strong and steady foundation for the charity's future.

The same message extends to our patrons, funders, and supporters – past and present – whose belief in UTASS enables our work to continue. Together, we have made a lasting impact. We have the perfect foundations on which to build the next 25 years.

Looking ahead, our focus needs to ensure UTASS continues to grow sustainably, responds to the changing needs, and remains a trusted source of support for farmers and rural residents alike.



**Emma Spry**

**UTASS Manager & Company Secretary**

# Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Services

## Registered Office:

9-11 Chapel Row,  
Middleton-in-Teesdale,  
Barnard Castle,  
County Durham,  
DL12 0SN

**Telephone: 01833 641010**

**Email: info@utass.org**

**Website: www.utass.org**



**Facebook: @UtassUpperTees**



**Twitter: @UtassUpperTees**



**Instagram: @utass\_upper\_tees**

## UTASS Objects/ Mission Statement:

"To promote the benefit of the inhabitants of the community of the rural area of Upper Teesdale and the neighbourhood thereof through the advancement of education and the provision of facilities in the interest of the social welfare for the recreation and other leisure time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitants".

## UTASS Aim:

"UTASS works with and for the communities across the Durham Dales, helping people gain access to the services, advice and resources that they need so they feel supported, valued, happier and more able to cope"

**Registered Charity number: 1120120**

**Company Limited by Guarantee number: 06054331**