



CREATIVE LIFE

ISSUE 43 – 2025



The Fire of Poetry

Celebrating people pursuing their passions

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Happy Birthday Grove Court!

Would you like to appear in this magazine?

Email: communications@creativesupport.co.uk and send in your story!

Hello from **Anna**



Hello and welcome to issue 43 of Creative Life!

This is the last issue of 2025 and what a way to wrap up the year. This magazine is full to the brim of stories featuring people we support achieving their dreams and making the world a better place. It was amazing to see what people in the Creative Support community are passionate about, including Lisa from Blackburn helping improve experiences for people in hospital and Ann-Marie playing an important role in an NHS short film about STOMP (Stopping Over Medication of People with a learning disability and autistic people). We are so proud and inspired to see people using their voice to make a positive impact in the community and across the country.

You will also hear about our wonderful service Grove Court in Doncaster turning 10 with an amazing party, and this year's Black History Month celebrations, including an event in Manchester with inspirational speakers and an important message.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Creative Life, and I want to wish you a very happy Christmas and a wonderful New Year.

Anna Lunts, Chief Executive

A Word From Our Contributors



Ann-Marie

"I wanted to share my holiday story to inspire people to chase their dreams and show that nothing is out of reach. Everyone should have the opportunity to visit the places they want to."

Michael

"I was delighted when 'Creative Life' magazine expressed an interest in my writing. It's refreshing to know there are still readers out there who take time finding out about creative writers. I hope the article will inspire and encourage readers to ignite that creative spark found in us all. Writing is most therapeutic and rewarding."



Ethan

"Getting to perform at the Be Free festival was a real pleasure, as is being in this issue of the magazine! I hope reading my interview helps you think about poetry in a new way!"



We would love to hear what you think of this issue!
If you'd like to get in touch, please email: communications@creativesupport.co.uk

YOUR ANIMAL STORIES

We wanted to hear about your pets and furry friends stories for this edition of Creative Life. If you've been down on the farm or playing with your pets, we'd love to hear all about it for our next magazine!

Send your stories to: communications@creativesupport.co.uk



A Giant-Sized Day Out

Adam and Sue from Bromsgrove had a fantastic day at the Three Counties Showground in Malvern. They loved watching the agricultural shows, tasting delicious food, and meeting the farm animals. Nothing beat the 'Giant Vegetables' competition, however, with marrows, pumpkins, and squash nearly three times the size of their heads! Adam kindly made sure everyone was enjoying themselves, while Sue adored stroking a soft brown-and-white pony. What a delightful day out!



A Hoot at Hoo Zoo

Folks from Telford had a wild time at Hoo Zoo and Dinosaur World, exploring interactive walk-throughs and learning about animals from rare owls to sheep in a peaceful 'retirement paddock.' After lunch, they admired sunbathing lemurs and friendly meerkats. "The meerkats and wallabies were cute," said Mark.

Colin enjoyed "seeing the birds and spending time with everyone," while Sarah loved the caracal and serval – her favourite animals. Martin summed it up perfectly: "We all had such a lovely time."





Sheep Walking in Scunthorpe

Simon, James, Kevin, and Alan from Scunthorpe enjoyed a memorable trip to a local farm, spending time with cows and sheep up close. They discovered that the cows' favourite treat is rich tea biscuits, feeding them straight from their hands. Everyone laughed when they met a cow called Jodie and a sheep named Karen – the same names as the staff! Later, they walked the sheep through the fields on leads, swapping sheep on the way back. The farmer kindly let them take home some wool to make Santa's beard on Christmas cards. Kevin said, "I had a really good time and wanted to bring home Lola, the littlest sheep!"

A Purrrfect Match

Shane from Warrington has adopted a beautiful cat named Vienna! Inspired by her gentle nature and the bond they've built, Shane and Senior Support Worker Lindsey wrote a touching poem titled "Vienna's Journey So Far."

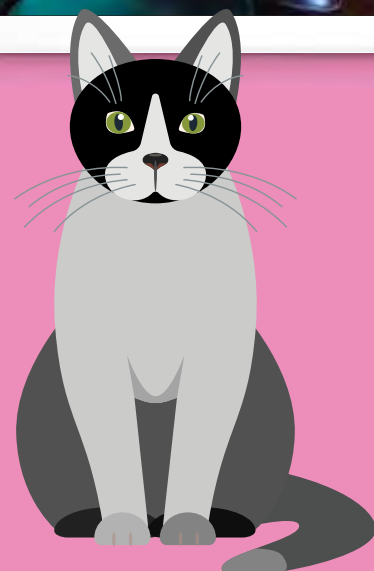
Here's a snippet:

No need for words, no grand hello,
Just patient hands and voices low.
Shane waited kindly, gave her space,
And slowly, trust began to trace.
Then came the nights, the gentle bed,
Where dreams and purrs and peace
were spread.



All Things Wild

Joe said, "I had the most amazing day out with my key worker James, when we visited the All Things Wild animal park. I saw the dinosaurs and lots of different animals that I had not seen before, there were farm animals and meerkats. We also had a lovely meal whilst we were there. My favourite bit though was playing in the dinosaur eggs."





Ann-Marie Takes Action

Ann-Marie from Stockton is an unstoppable force. In 2025, she played an important role in an award-winning short film by NHS England for its campaign 'Stopping over-medication of people with a learning disability and autistic people' (STOMP).

STOMP is on a mission to stop people with a learning disability and autistic people experiencing unpleasant side effects from medications they have been prescribed but don't need. STOMP reached out to Ann-Marie, and others across Durham and Teesside, to create a short film that empowers people to speak up about their medication when something feels wrong.

After years of being on medication that "made life dull and boring", Ann-Marie spoke about her worries in a medication review with her pharmacist. It changed everything. She said, "My previous medication made me grouchy

and angry and it got me down. The review I had with the pharmacist made me feel empowered to change my medication. They asked me how I was feeling and if there had been any changes in my mood."

"The help I got made me feel happier in myself and better about the future, so my pharmacist asked me if I wanted to get involved in creating a film to help others. If this review could make a difference in my life, I thought it could make a difference in others' lives too."

Ann-Marie played an integral role in the film, from writing her own script to role-playing in a mock medication review. The film has won several awards and reached hundreds of people who've now gone for medication reviews and seen positive changes in their lives.

Ann-Marie couldn't be prouder about the

impact the film has had. She said, "It went really well. It was good writing our own scripts, and filming in the GP surgery was a great experience. My sister is proud of me. People on the high street recognise me. I was even in Teesside Live for the first time!"

"It'll be great to share Ann-Marie's video with Creative Support and other health and social care providers. It's such an empowering project."

Nicole Richardson, Development Officer

Beyond STOMP, Ann-Marie has used her passion for advocacy to raise awareness for other important causes. A few years ago, she created a video for Stockton Police to reduce bullying against people with learning disabilities. She won't stop here.

"I want to change people's lives," said Ann-Marie. "I'm still going to STOMP meetings, and they'll let me know what the next project will be. Being part of STOMP has been brilliant. I love using my voice to help others. Since my medication review, I've got my confidence back. I can be me, and that's all I want. I feel amazing. It's unbelievable how much my life has changed for the better."



Over the past year since changing her medication, Ann-Marie has been busy living her best life and doing all the things that matter to her. She said:

"Changing my medication has built up my confidence and helped me be more myself so I can get involved in activities. I like coming to the craft group on a Tuesday at the Creative Support North East office. It gets me out the house and I get to do what I enjoy, from colouring and painting to making things. I like going on days out with my friends and Creative Support too - I have been to Eden Camp and Beamish recently. I also like going to Creative Voices and speaking out for myself. I had a magical experience on my Disney Dream Cruise, my favourite one yet. I love singing and I am going to keep on singing whenever I can."

Your community is so proud of you, Ann-Marie. Never stop reaching for the stars!

At Creative Support, all staff learn about STOMP in The Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training which aims to ensure the health and social care workforce have the right skills to provide safe, compassionate and informed care to people with learning disabilities and autistic people. If you'd like to learn more about this training, please email training@creativesupport.co.uk





Over 80 staff members and people we support from both Grove Court and other services across Doncaster and Leeds entered the garden under a golden balloon arch to enjoy DJ sets, face painting, tombola, games, and even the chance to hold exotic animals.

A large photo display highlighted happy memories shared at Grove Court, while also honouring those we have lost and continue to miss. We spoke to staff, people we support and family members who are part of this community about their journeys and the memories they've made.



Arnold

When Arnold moved into Grove Court 10 years ago, his only dream was to feel safe. With love and kindness from the people around him, he

felt safe and began to have new dreams, like flying in a plane.

"I went up in the air with Creative Support. I'd never been on a plane before. It was great."



Sharen

Sharen, who moved in 10 years ago, feels excited for her next chapter in her flat at Grove Court, which has just been refurbished.

"I feel safe and supported here. I love living with Lizzie and Karen who are my friends."



Robert

Robert is an inspirational person who has lived at Grove Court for 8 years.

"I've learned a lot here and will miss it. I got an award for volunteering and was invited to the Creative Support Gala in June. I've made connections. I've achieved things."

Jane, mum of Owen, Amy and Robert who all live at Grove Court is so proud and happy that her family has shared many memories at Grove Court. She said, "Ten years of Grove

Grove Court, one of our supported living services in Doncaster, celebrated its 10th anniversary this year with a fabulous garden party.



Court! Where has the time gone? My daughter Amy was one of the first to arrive and it was her first experience of supported living. Did she settle in and enjoy it? She certainly did!

“A while later, her brother Owen moved in to share the apartment with her – what a dynamic duo! How are things ten years on? Grove Court has been a life-changer. All three have grown into adults who have an amazing social life. ‘Any excuse for a party’ seems to be the motto, and let’s not forget all the Grove Court garden parties!”

Another Robert, who communicates non-verbally, moved in eight years ago. His mother, Ivy, is delighted to see Robert doing the things that matter to him. She said, “Grove Court is truly the first place I can say that Robert feels looked after. Robert likes riding out in his mobility car and he likes his musical toys. When my husband and I go,

I know Robert will have found a home where he is happy.”

Registered Manager Neve Lindley said, “When I first started here 10 years ago, I was a Support Worker. Now I’ve worked my way up to manager, this place is close to my heart. We just became a big team.”

Senior Operational Manager Abigail Gelder said, “Grove Court is a really special place. The goals and outcomes achieved over the past 10 years have been so special to witness and I feel honoured to have been part of the journey.”

Service Director Leanne Paterson fondly remembers that very first day opening Grove Court. She said, “Even now, I remember it so clearly. It was all hands-on-deck as we helped 16 people we support move into Grove Court just before Christmas. People are living their best lives and it’s so heart-warming to see how far the service has come – here’s to the next ten! Well done to Neve and everyone at Grove court – you all make me extremely proud.”



Big smiles all round for the birthday celebrations



The FIRE of Poetry



Ethan setting the stage alight

Our Communications Team first met Ethan back in May while exhibiting their poetry at Creative Together, our co-production centre in Manchester. Since then, they have gone on to perform on stage at Creative Together's Be Free Festival in July as well as our AGM in September.

Our Comms Officer Grae was lucky enough to catch them backstage for a chat after their amazing set at the Be Free festival which brings together underrepresented voices. They spoke about the core of their poetry, and the fire and passion that burn within them.

Hello, Ethan. It's wonderful to step into your dressing room at 53two Theatre in Manchester. Can you tell us more about your performances at the Be Free festival this weekend?

The first set on the Friday was focused around my neurodivergent experiences, specifically the challenges of living with autism and masking. One poem, 'Pierrot', I wrote for Creative Together's 'Life is a Circus' exhibition back in May. It was great to finally do this as a performance piece. It explores the challenges

that come with masking and how it takes a lot of energy for me to live day-to-day.

The second set is more about what I've been through as a result of depression, anxiety, trauma, neurodivergence and physical disability. I speak about how despite my struggles, there's a fire in me. This is the thinking behind my stage name, 'Emberhearted'. The fire in me is sparking and sputtering at times, but it stays lit.

It's amazing to hear you talk more about the significance of your stage name, 'Emberhearted'. What keeps that fire inside you lit?

Writing poetry is a very cathartic exercise for me – it's the process of taking negative emotions and making something of them. It doesn't take the negative emotions away, but there is value in writing them down and reaching other people. A lot of my poems do not have happy endings and might be about problems with gender identity, sleep or grief, but the fact they exist is a positive thing. They exist to show people that I'm still here.

My poems also bring visibility to my struggles. It's a bugbear when people tell me: 'there's no such thing as normal.' It's well-intentioned, but it doesn't validate the experience of someone who knows they are different. I'm proud to be an eccentric, and show this in my poetry. I wouldn't want to be anyone else.

I hear you're a bit of a celebrity in Chelmsford, hosting a spoken word night called 'Waxes Lyrical'. Is your aim to inspire other people to keep their fires lit too?

I'm very proud I have been given the opportunity to run a poetry open mic, and I'm proud of the community that has sprung up around it – it's a very welcoming and accepting community that does hold that space for people wanting to express their struggles and joy, just like Creative Together does with the Be Free festival.

What are your hopes and dreams for the future, Ethan?

I'd like to create a zine or pamphlet, and get more performances under my belt. Then I can share that pamphlet or zine with people at the events. After that, I would probably consider publishing a collection of poetry.

Everyone in Essex and Chelmsford always talks about the very famous and influential punk poet John Cooper Clarke. My long-term goal is for people to think of my name too, when they think of him. I made a step towards this when I was performing at Creative Together. I even got a favourable comparison to him from someone in the audience. I guess I'm coming for his spot... in maybe 10 or 15 years!

It has been an absolute pleasure to hear your poetry journey. I can tell you're going to be a sensation.

Thank you. It's been a pleasure to be here at Creative Together, as a performer and as an audience member. I've loved being a part of this and I'm very proud.

*Follow Ethan's poetry on Instagram:
@emberhearted*

Get involved with Creative Together's events on Instagram: @creativetogether_mcr

This is the thinking behind my stage name, 'Emberhearted'. The fire in me is sparking and sputtering at times, but it stays lit.



Ethan and Creative Together Centre's Zoe ahead of their amazing performance



Safe with Gemma



Gemma who we support in Wellingborough plays an important role in helping her housemates feel safe. As her service's 'Meet & Greeter', she asks visitors to show their ID, sign in and provide a reason for visiting before welcoming them in with her warm smile.

Registered Manager Sandra Rogers asked Gemma if she'd enjoy taking on this responsibility, since she is so good with people and likes supporting the team. Sandra said, "It made sense to choose Gemma. She knows the fire drill, she's very clued up."

Gemma said, "In my house, we are all vulnerable people with different needs. It's important there is someone on the door to challenge anyone we don't know. It was completely my choice to do Meet & Greet and when I first started, I didn't feel nervous, it just came naturally."

Once the visitors have made it past the

doormat, Gemma makes them a cup of tea if she has time and asks them how they are. More often than not, her role goes smoothly, but it is not without an occasional challenge.

"A few times, I've had to refuse entry, or confirm with the managers. I'm a very welcoming person so I'm learning skills around creating boundaries," said Gemma.

"My role keeps us safe and for this reason I feel proud to do it."

"Earlier this year, I played a big part in inviting CQC into the property. Of course, I asked them for their ID before I told them all about my time here, and how the staff are fantastic – which they really are. When the service received a 'Good' rating, I was proud to have been a part of that."

Alongside her Meet & Greet role, Gemma works to support others in the community. She is a befriender in a local residential home which offers care for people who may have dementia.

"This role also makes me feel very proud. I love talking to people, especially Graham who is blind. I put my hand on his to let him know I'm there and then we play games. Many people can get lonely, so I want to help them feel hopeful."

At the Creative Support Gala back in June 2025, Gemma won a Creative Stars award for her acts of kindness.

"The Gala was just amazing," smiled Gemma, "I went with Sandra and we had a great time. I received a Creative Stars certificate for caring for others. In the future, I would like to continue making spaces feel safe and I'm proud that my role supports Sandra and the team who care about us very much too."

If Gemma's story has inspired you and you'd like take on a role in your service, Gemma is happy to talk to you about her experience. Email communications@creativesupport.co.uk to get in touch.

Novel way of writing



Michael in Blackburn is a talented writer who has taken part in Blackburn Social Inclusion Hub since he joined in 2011. He has dedicated decades to his craft and has published not just one, but two incredible novels about the dark and gritty underbelly of human nature.

"I was always really interested in literature and books," Michael began. "I was born with a speech impediment, and was always quiet and introspective in company because of it. I felt the best way to express myself was through the written word. I've been writing for about 30 years now."

"I joined the Blackburn writer's circle and other writing groups and met lots of people through it. I started out writing short stories and then reading my work out for people- the biggest compliment anyone can give you is someone reading your work. When people give you helpful advice, it really incentivises you to write more."

"Everyone has a book or a project inside of them."

After many years of refining and honing his writing ability, Michael published his first book in 2019. "It took me ten years to write," Michael explained. "I struggled putting together some parts, but I really enjoyed writing it. It became a hobby, and it really kept me going until I knew it was finished."

"'A Formula in Conversion' used experiences I've had in my life in hospital, and was a way for me to write about my own story. I've always wanted to incorporate spirituality and religion too as I've always been interested in theology, like Martin Luther who had some fascinating ideas. The novel has an 80's perspective and is very rooted in the human experience."

Following Michael's first novel, there was clearly more than one book inside his brain,

and he began work on 'The Road Less Travelled' which was published in September 2025. This gritty novel follows the story of a woman in London who navigates the perilous life of the city's underworld as a sex worker.

"I just thought, women who work [as sex workers] are generally forgotten about, but I wanted to make sure they weren't. I think a lot of things are forgotten about and need highlighting. We don't realise that our prejudice starts slowly. Some of the characters are likeable even though they're bad people, then you also have good people who do bad things."

With his second book recently published, Michael shows no signs of slowing down his writing. "My best piece of advice would be to join a group and meet like-minded people. If you have a desire to do something, find a local group and get started. The thing to remember about writers especially is that it's not a career opportunity; they felt the urge to write and so they did. As the saying goes, success is not the secret to happiness, happiness is the secret of success."

To find out more about Michael's book, visit: www.amazon.co.uk/FORMULA-CONVERSION-There-None-Those/dp/1696201101



BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2025



STAND IN POWER

This year, the theme for Black History Month was 'Standing Firm in Power and Pride.' It's a time to honour the strength and courage of Black people past and present, and encourages people to be proud of their heritage.

The EDI Team at Creative Support sat down with Black people we support and staff at services across Manchester and Salford to learn more about their cultural identity. We talked about traditions, food and inspiring Black figures, and reflected on what Black History Month means today.

"Black History Month represents being proud of our identity, who we are as people and how far we have come," said Ntkozo, someone we support. "It's like a symbol of progress, of everything we've been through, and a chance to look at us now."

We've captured these conversations in a Power and Pride documentary, available to watch now on YouTube.

At Creative Support, we take pride in our commitment to celebrating Black history and identity all year round. This year marks five years since we published our Manifesto for Action, a commitment to embedding anti-racism across all parts of the organisation. We're so proud of all the amazing work we've been able to achieve - from introducing anti-racism training for staff and people we support, to hosting events and celebrations for all to attend. It's great to see the positive impact of becoming an even more culturally inclusive organisation. We've written a Power and Pride publication which showcases these

achievements and outlines our aims and intentions for the future. You can read it by scanning the QR code below.



As part of our Black History Month celebrations, we also hosted an event at Band on the Wall in Manchester as a chance to premier the documentary, and bring people together to celebrate.



Almost 100 people joined us for an afternoon filled with music, food, creative workshops, film screenings, inspiring speeches, and Black joy. From designing beautiful jewellery and painting Adinkra symbols from Ghana, everyone quickly got stuck in to creative workshops.

Attendees enjoyed a delicious bowl of jollof rice, a traditional West African dish, served with a side of chicken prepared by Jeanne, Support Worker in Salford. Dessert featured ginger

cake and toto cake; Jamaican favourites. "It's such a joyful event, so I wanted to contribute my chicken with my special seasoning," said Jeanne.

The room was buzzing as John, Acting Support Coordinator in Manchester delivered a sensational bongo performance, followed by

"Black History Month represents being proud of our identity, who we are as people and how far we have come." Ntkozo, someone we support

ING FIRM ER & PRIDE



Love, a Support Worker in Salford, who wowed the crowd with a traditional Nigerian dance which got everyone up on stage!

Members of Creative Together attended and had a wonderful time. They said:

“I think that was the best Creative Support event I’ve ever been to!”

“I thought it was fun, it was inspiring listening and watching the performances. The confidence of the performers was inspiring. It was also multi-sensory, there were bits and pieces going on that were good for everyone. The biggest thing I learnt was about how people overcome adversity.”

“I really enjoyed the dancing and the joy that everyone was getting from it. The food was really good and tasty.”

Throughout the afternoon, staff delivered moving speeches, sharing personal journeys, cultural pride, and reflections on the ongoing work toward anti-racism.

Emeka, Support Worker and EDI Champion in Salford, spoke passionately about belonging: ***“In our Creative Support family, we make space for all cultures because in our community, everyone matters. When people feel seen, they shine. When people feel valued, they grow.”***





Wimbledon'ish



Game, Set and Match to Jacob

Tennis fan Aaron recently joined one of our lovely services in Telford. To help welcome him to the service, Aaron suggested a friendly competition. We had the pleasure of speaking with him about the 'Wimbledon'ish' tournament and how everyone got on in the biggest match of the season!

"We always watch Wimbledon on TV and it was such a lovely day outside. I said 'why don't we just have a game and see how it turns out?'" Aaron explained, thus 'Wimbledon'ish' was born.

"Aaron had just moved in and we were looking for something to welcome him into his new home," explained Support Worker Claire. "When he suggested the tournament, we all thought it was a great idea."

"We organised it over two weeks and chose all the tennis players together so everyone could be one of the greats. We picked all of our favourite players. Staff and other tenants were all assigned the different tennis stars, and I worked with staff to organise games when staff members were on shift. We made a scoreboard in the kitchen so everyone could see their scores."

Finally, the day everyone had been waiting for came around and Wimbledon'ish began. Of course, it wouldn't be the famous tournament without royal involvement, so the service's very own Queen Elizabeth opened the tournament. Staff member Elizabeth, who is also known as Lilibet, stayed in character all day!

To help bring the Wimbledon fantasy to life, Aaron's mum very kindly sent over treats of strawberries, cream and Shloer which everyone enjoyed on the day.

Then it came time for the first match of the season. The games came fast and furious, with everyone giving it their all. "I kept the score when I wasn't playing," said Aaron. Staff and tenants battled it out to be crowned the victor, and when it came for the final unfortunately rain stopped play! As the service didn't have the rollout roof available, they quickly changed tack and went for another accessible activity... rock, paper scissors.

In the end, the trophy went to the one and only Coco Gauff, AKA Timmy. A huge congratulations to the first ever Wimbledon'ish champion!

Looking back, Aaron was really happy with the outcome. "I've got a saying 'I can't get up from my chair and include myself, but you can play with me.' We picked swingball so that everyone got to enjoy it and we put it near the path so people in wheelchairs could watch and access it. It was a nice way to join the service and socialise with people."

"It made me feel really happy to do this - to see everyone get up and get involved-including the staff! I wanted them to have a break from doing all of their hard work."

Thanks to the roaring success of the first Wimbledon'ish, next year they are planning on getting all the Telford services to come together for one huge tournament. Game, set and match!





Wimbledon Dreams

Charles, a person we support from Liverpool, had the lifelong goal of attending Wimbledon as one of the biggest tennis fans you could ever meet. Staff wanted Charles to live his best life, and got to work making the dream a reality. They managed to get two tickets, spots for Charles and a guest of his choosing! Staff member Stu was the lucky recipient, and the pair got to planning for their trip of a lifetime.

“We got the train down from Liverpool Lime Street to London Euston as it’s quite far away,” explained Charles. “I had my own hotel room and Stu had his own too. The hotel was gorgeous. We got up on the day and had breakfast before heading over to Wimbledon.”

“To be sitting there with Charles at No.1 court after hearing him talking about it over the years was an absolutely amazing experience.”

Stu, who is also a big tennis fan, said: “We got the tube from central London to our hotel which was quite a journey! Then we got settled in, had a walk around the area and enjoyed dinner at the hotel before getting a good night’s sleep ready for the day ahead.”

The pair arrived and the atmosphere was incredible. Of course, though the pair went to watch a game, they also happened to run across a few famous tennis faces along the way. “I saw Steffi Graf warming up!” he explained, enjoying looking at the faces in the crowd and doing some celeb spotting.

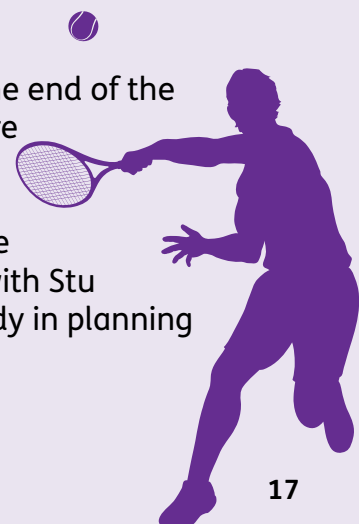
“It was a bright sunny day,” said Stu, so the pair went for a walk around the courts before settling in for their first match.



“I loved it,” said Charles, a smile in his voice. “It was electric. We watched a doubles match on the No.1 Court in great seats.”

“It was a semi-finals showdown on the court, and it was amazing to see. The pair we watched, Julian Cash and Lloyd Glasspool ended up winning the title,” said Stu. Afterwards, the pair grabbed the essential strawberries and cream before going back to the hotel to rest after such an exciting day.

Charles’ dream was better than he ever could have imagined, but that’s not the end of the story as Charles and Stu are planning on going back again in 2026. “Stu is very friendly, and I felt very safe with him so I’d like to go with Stu again,” said Charles, already in planning mode for next year.



Making a Difference with Lisa



Lisa, a member of the Blackburn Social Inclusion Service, is passionate about making a difference for people who use mental health services, especially people in hospitals. We spoke with her about

where her passion comes from, what it means to her, and her plans for the future.

“In 1998, I had my first experience on a mental health ward at hospital. It began with a series of stays at various hospitals and at each one I had a different experience, and they weren’t all positive. In that period, I stayed on 11 wards and only two actually met the standards.

Years afterwards in 2023 I sent my first email to PALS, the NHS’s Patient Advice and Liaison Service, where you’re able to tell them your lived experience so that they can make things better. I went through every staff member’s job on the ward and explained how they could improve it to the benefit of people staying there in the future. I sent another email suggesting that they make a simple discharge leaflet for patients which signposted them to relevant departments in case they needed more follow up support. I also suggested that when someone is discharged from a mental health ward, that the GP should monitor you and check in every three months for two years to help prevent you needing a hospital stay again.

PALS called me after those emails and said my ideas were brilliant. This kick-started me joining PALS and other projects and pilots, using my lived experiences to make these places better.

Now, I visit different wards and run checks which I report back to PALS. Sometimes my reports have led to investigations on the ward, ending up with them getting turned around and new managers being appointed.

One of the places I helped out at was in a bad shape. The facilities were old and a seclusion room was used as a form of punishment. I told them that they wouldn’t need the seclusion room at all if they had supportive and trained staff. As of August 2023, I’m proud to say that they hadn’t used that room in over 200 days. They changed everything about that ward, and now they use it as an example across other health partnership areas.

I was so pleased, because a lot of people on the wards aren’t able to stand up for themselves, and I felt like I was making a difference.

I would help them assess every single ward if I could. I’ve helped find good psychiatrists for wards too and help vet them, along with reading policies to make sure they’re reaching out to people who have experience of wards so they’re more informed about what matters to them. It’s also helped policy makers and healthcare professionals to get rid of jargon and make things easier for everyone to understand.

Recently I’ve been involved in a menopause project so staff feel supported. I’m also becoming a member of the Patient First Programme Board, a three year transformation initiative finishing in 2028 which aims to redesign adult inpatient pathways. The focus is on improving admission, and creating positive outcomes.”

What you need to know about Universal Credit



We have created workshops about the changes to benefits and the Government's introduction of 'Universal Credit'. This is the new benefit that people will receive, replacing Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and Housing Benefit (HB) except in certain circumstances which are detailed below.

It is important to know about this as it could affect you if you live in supported accommodation.

Please note - Housing Benefit is being replaced for most new claims. But you can still apply for Housing Benefit if:

- You are 66 or over.
- You live with a partner, and both you and your partner are 66 or over.
- You were homeless and have been placed in temporary accommodation by the council.
- You are living in sheltered housing or supported accommodation.



We created two guides to explain this change. The first guide breaks down the letter people may receive from the Government Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). It explains all the key information and defines any words which may be unfamiliar.

The second guide shows the steps to take when filling out the 'Housing' section of a Universal Credit online application.

If you would like a copy of the guides, please phone **0161 236 0829** or email **social.valueteam@creativesupport.co.uk**

We hosted several workshops and it was agreed that these were the key points to note:

"If you live in supported accommodation, Universal Credit cannot be used to pay your rent. Instead, you will continue to claim your housing costs through the local authority Housing Benefit Team."

"If you live in supported accommodation, when you apply for Universal Credit, you need to select the option 'I live in supported or sheltered housing'. Please see the guides for more details and information."

"If you do not live in a supported tenancy, you need to claim your housing costs through Universal Credit. It's possible that Universal Credit may not pay the full housing costs and you may have to pay the shortfall to your landlord."

If you have any questions please speak to the staff at your service, or contact the Social Value team by emailing socialvalue.team@creativesupport.co.uk

UC Universal Credit

Christmas Baking

With Christmas just around the corner, now is the perfect time to start thinking about getting creative so you have presents and decorations ready to go for the festive period.

Making your own presents and holiday-themed baked goods is a really fun way to enjoy the season without spending a fortune, and adding a personal touch always goes down a treat.

We would love to see what Christmassy things you get up to this year, so send in your pictures to the Communications Team via communications@creativesupport.co.uk

Gingerbread House Cookies

Gingerbread is a classic Christmas staple for many at Christmas. It combines two of our favourite things: being arty and eating biscuits – it really is a win-win! Baking your own gingerbread is a fun and pretty straightforward activity, and you can follow the steps below to make your own gingerbread house biscuits! Assembling a full gingerbread house can take a lot of time and effort, but decorating a gingerbread biscuit in the shape of a house makes it light work. You could also cut gingerbread into whatever shapes you like and decorate them with your own ideas – gingerbread is limitless!

Ingredients:

- 100g salted butter
- 3 tbsp golden syrup
- 100g dark muscovado sugar
- 1 tbsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 225g plain flour
- 50g icing sugar (for decoration)
- Any other decorations of your choosing

Step 1: Heat the butter, golden syrup and sugar in a small pan until melted, stirring occasionally. Set aside to cool slightly.

Step 2: Mix together the bicarbonate of soda,

ginger, cinnamon, and flour in a large bowl. Pour in the buttery syrup mixture and stir to combine. Then, use your hands to bring the mixture together to form a dough. You can add 1 tbsp of milk here if needed. The dough should be soft at this point, but it will firm up in the fridge.

Step 3: Put the dough on a sheet of greaseproof paper, and lay another sheet of greaseproof on top of it. Roll the dough out to a thickness of a pound coin and then place into the fridge for 1 hour.

Step 4: Heat the oven to 190°C/170°C fan/ Gas mark 5, and line a large baking tray with greaseproof paper. Take the dough out of the fridge and cut into the shape of a house with a pointy roof and a square bottom (like in the image below), or any shapes you like.

Step 5: Place the shapes with room between them on the baking tray you prepared earlier. Bake them for between 10-12 minutes and take them out of the oven. Leave them to cool completely.

Step 6: Decorating time! You can use icing sugar, chocolate, sweets, or anything you like to bring your 2D gingerbread house to life.

Step 7: Enjoy!



2026 Calendars

Our 2026 calendars are on their way to a regional office near you!

We'd like to say a huge thank you to everyone who sent in their beautiful artwork to this year's Art Competition. We are always blown away by the talent and creativity shown by people we support and staff.

The new calendar features artwork from people we support and staff from across the country for every month, which we're sure you'll love when it's up on your wall for the next year.

To request a calendar, you can ask a member of staff at your service who will have access to them from your regional office. You can also ask the Marketing team directly to request additional calendars by emailing marketing@creativesupport.co.uk



I Statement Booklets

In 2026, we're encouraging everyone to think about how Creative Support's **'I Statements'** impact them, and how they apply to your everyday life. We're excited to announce that throughout the year, we will explore each I Statement with a booklet filled with interesting prompts and activities which you can use to think about what each I Statement means to you.

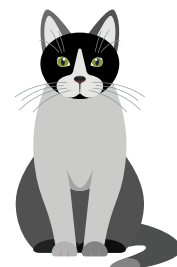
In January, keep your eyes peeled for all 9 of these beautiful journals, and let us know what you think by emailing us at marketing@creativesupport.co.uk

On the back page of each journal is a page for your artwork or creative writing about each I Statement. Send us a photo of the completed back page at the end of each month for your chance to win a We Care hoodie!

Additional copies of the I Statement booklets can be requested by emailing Marketing via marketing@creativesupport.co.uk



Word Search – Pets and animal friends!



E	N	R	Z	Q	C	S	J	I	A	G	Z	A	O	Q
M	M	Y	P	Y	B	N	M	L	Q	B	L	A	H	D
R	F	G	P	N	B	A	V	I	V	P	D	Y	U	O
Q	I	F	J	S	A	K	F	Z	F	W	Z	C	B	G
R	B	R	Z	P	R	E	I	A	M	F	S	R	T	Y
X	A	U	R	B	C	J	Y	R	O	O	E	U	L	Y
Q	Q	T	H	H	T	E	G	D	U	T	Q	H	S	T
S	C	O	E	S	I	L	I	G	S	P	K	O	A	A
Z	P	Q	D	I	M	B	P	M	E	C	Q	C	O	P
R	C	G	G	F	R	J	A	F	E	R	R	E	T	F
A	Y	X	E	D	E	H	E	S	C	G	W	Z	G	R
B	L	E	H	L	H	B	N	R	T	N	S	P	S	O
B	R	S	O	O	V	S	I	F	N	D	Y	V	L	G
I	J	E	G	G	M	O	U	C	H	I	C	K	E	N
T	S	B	I	U	O	W	G	R	A	D	K	K	M	P

Word list

CAT
CHICKEN
DOG

FERRET

FROG
GOLD FISH
GUINEA PIG

HAMSTER

HEDGEHOG
HERMIT CRAB
LIZARD

MOUSE

RABBIT
RAT
SNAKE

Some of our favourite riddles

Gerard from Stockport is a keen riddler. Have a go at some of Gerard's riddles below!

Riddle 1: What has to be broken before you can use it?

Riddle 2: What is full of holes but still holds water?

Riddle 3: What can you break, even if you never pick it up or touch it?

Riddle 4: What gets wet while drying?

Riddle 5: What can't talk but will reply when spoken to?

Riddle 6: What has many keys but can't open a single lock?

Riddle 7: What invention lets you look right through a wall?

Check out the answers on the back page!



Would you like to appear in this magazine?

Email: communications@creativesupport.co.uk and send in your story!

Spot The Difference

There are 10 differences in these two pictures, grab a pen or pencil and see how many differences you can find! If you find all 10 you could be in with the chance of winning a £10 Love2shop voucher.

Take a picture of your answers and send them to: marketing@creativesupport.co.uk

A



B



Remember to take a picture of your answers and send them to:
marketing@creativesupport.co.uk



YouTube CHANNEL

Did you know that Creative Support has its very own YouTube channel?

Our YouTube channel is full of fantastic videos of events and activities held at services across the country. Many of these lovely videos have been co-produced with people we support and feature stories, parties and talents of those who make up our Creative Support community.

Recent videos include our Black History Month film, the Creative Cooking video series featuring Denise's fluffy Yorkshire Puds, and a documentary about the wonderful Cranleigh Band.



Subscribe



With more videos coming soon, we hope you can like and subscribe to our channel by scanning the QR code, visiting youtube.com/crtvspprt or searching 'Creative Support YouTube' on your search engine.



Answers to Gerard's riddles

Answer 1: An egg
Answer 2: A sponge
Answer 3: A promise
Answer 4: A towel
Answer 5: An echo
Answer 6: A piano
Answer 7: A window



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