

Spring Edition March 2025

Issue Number 84

Coalition News



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Nikki's Letter

Dear members,

Yay, Spring has arrived - a beautiful time of year, where birds sing, flowers grow and the days become longer.

Unfortunately this Spring has also brought with it a Government Spring statement that proposes changes and cuts to many of the welfare benefits. We'll be working with you over the coming weeks to draft a response to the government consultation to make sure your voices are heard.

In better news, we launched our wellbeing events at the start of this year. I had the pleasure of attending the event at Watt's Gallery. The weather wasn't too pleasant but the tour, the company and the cake more than made up for it. Please do join us for our next event, if you are unsure and would like to chat it through with somebody, please let us know, we can help. More on these events in this issue.

The Tech Team have now completed their work in Runnymede. The team delivered a hugely successful project. During the project we received 47 referrals, with 40 participants meeting the eligibility criteria and actively engaging in the programme. This project has made a huge difference to these residents. We have received fantastic feedback, with some of the people using their new skills to access the NHS app, while others have used their skills to seek employment. A big thank you to Runnymede Borough Council for supporting this work.

The involvement team have been out and about all over the county conducting access reviews in countryside locations. Work is now taking place in a few of the places we have visited. We'll be giving an update on these projects in the next issue.

The mental health team have been involved with a few big projects on top of running the Independent Mental Health Network (IMHN). They have been working with our partners on shaping a Mental Health strategy while also developing a strategy for the IMHN.

Finally, please take a look at the article on two of our lovely members winning an award at Runnymede civic awards. We're so proud of them. They, like many of our members are so dedicated to supporting their local community and The Coalition. We really couldn't do everything we do without you, so a heartfelt thank you from me to all of you.

Hopefully, I'll see you out and about at one of our events soon. Nikki, CEO

News



Commemorating the 80th anniversary of the British-based United States Army Air Force B-17G (Flying Fortress).

The aircraft tragically crashed onto Reigate Hill, Surrey, on the 19th March 1945. Nikki, Yasmin and a few of our members that have been involved with the access reviews at Reigate Hill were invited along to the memorial event.

Spring Statement Government Welfare cuts

Cuts to welfare benefits has hit the headlines in recent weeks. Although at the time of writing, we don't really know the full impact yet, we do know that this will impact lots of Disabled people, people living with long term health conditions and their families.

We will do everything we can to support our community and campaign for a fairer outcome for our Coalition and Independent Mental Health Network members.

We're currently reading and digesting the full green paper that the government issued on the proposed changes. We're going to work with our campaign's committee to develop a response to the government consultation over the coming weeks.

Involvement Update



The photo above is of our very lovely involvement team. Starting from the left: Katy, Pam, Megan, Yasmin and Alex.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan - We have been working with Surrey Countryside Access Forum on a response to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Yasmin also submitted a response on behalf of the Coalition which highlighted the need for the Involvement of The Coalition and others regarding Active Travel Schemes and to make the interactive map accessible to all.

Electric Vehicle EV Charging Bays - We held a meeting with some of our members and Surrey County Council and Connected Kerb regarding the design of EV Charging bays which are currently inaccessible to most Disabled people. One member raised that Motability are encouraging Disabled people to sign up for electric vehicles which will exacerbate the inaccessibility of the EV chargers further. We're going to write to Motability and express our concerns and continue to work with Surrey County Council.

Bus Driver Disability Awareness Videos: We are working with Surrey County Council to film some bus driver disability awareness videos. We're busy organising the dates for the filming and ensuring as many of our members that use the buses are included as possible. These videos will be used for bus driver training nationally so we will have some film stars among our membership soon!



Newlands Corner

We have been working hard to improve the accessibility at Newlands Corner. There is now a wonderful boardwalk which leads you round the magnificent ancient Yew trees but there is a stretch of path that leads to the Yew trees which is currently inaccessible. Surrey County Council are reviewing if there's a way to improve the accessibility of the path. Hopefully this will mean that more people can enjoy the peacefulness of the Yew Trees.

GP Trainees Disability Awareness Training

Surrey Coalition of Disabled People offers disability awareness training to aspiring GPs. Nikki, Megan and Yasmin provided the training to a group of trainee GPs in the Guildford area, however, the star of the show was Rowley. He showed off his excellent assistance dog skills and enjoyed a tummy rub from all present afterwards! We received excellent feedback from the participants - they particularly liked the lived experience videos we used. We're now working with some of our wonderful members to make some videos around their experience of GP services for use in future trainee GP training sessions across Surrey.

Virtual Trip

On March 31st we had our latest virtual trip to Petworth House. Petworth House is a late 17th-century Grade I listed country house in the parish of Petworth, West Sussex. Petworth House is famous for its extensive art collection. It was a very interesting and educational tour of the house and like our other virtual trips it was a big success!

We're running a virtual session with Surrey Welfare Rights Unit on Wednesday 7th May to tell you more about the proposed changes to welfare benefits and answer your questions. Contact the involvement team if you'd like to join the meeting.

Exciting News, toads and tears



Nikki tells us about the Runnymede Civic Award event that was held in March.

I had the pleasure of attending the Runnymede Civic Awards at Foxhills Manor. We nominated Jonathan Fisher for the Make a Difference Award and were really excited to hear that he had been shortlisted and invited to attend the awards evening. Many of you know Jonathan, he's always very willing to help, he uses his lived experience to help others and he is a member of many different groups and organisations that make a huge difference in Surrey.

We were also thrilled to see another lovely member at the event who had been shortlisted for Sports volunteer of the year award. She has volunteered tirelessly for the Egham constellations swimming group, a not for profit Disabled swimming club.

We are over the moon to let you know that both members won their respective awards. They were both presented with an award by the Mayor of Runnymede and were invited to say a few words about their work.

Huge congratulations - you are both amazing and we're very lucky to have you as part of The Coalition.



Jonathan said 'On Tuesday evening, I won the "Making a Difference", Runnymede Civic Award as part of a ceremony at Foxhills Country Club. Nikki and my P.A. Andrea came along as one of so many lovely community minded residents. The venue was packed with a wide age range of volunteers who make Runnymede such a great place to live'

The whole event was a tear jerker, not a dry eye in the room. I was struck by how much people do for their communities and just how many people care to make such a huge difference. At a time when there's so much negative news, it was lovely to hear the good heart warming stories.

And for those of you wondering why toads is in the title of this article, there's an organisation in Runnymede that save the toads. If there are any toads on the road, they will pick them up and take them to safer surroundings. Now, how lovely is that!

Technology Update



Tech Angel Volunteers

Three new Tech Angel volunteers started in January and we have two more joining us soon!

We're so grateful and appreciative of all of our wonderful volunteers. We plan regular events to meet with our volunteers to chat to them and thank them for their wonderful support. We took a group of Tech Angel volunteers to Wisley Glow in December, it was a beautiful evening and enjoyed by all.

We're excited to share that the Tech Angel project is now back in Woking. We've had a huge number of referrals received in the first few weeks really showing how much the service is needed! We were also excited to be featured in Will Forster's (Woking MP) Newsletter that went out end of February, promoting the fact that Tech Angels is back in Woking.

Our tech team have even had a trip to parliament this quarter! Our Tech Lead, Sylwia travelled to the House of Lords for an event about Assistive Technology and how it can help Disabled people enter the job market and maintain employment.

Mental Health Update

Thriving Together

We are thrilled to launch our exciting new physical activity project, generously funded by The National Lottery. This initiative aims to enhance the lives of individuals with disabilities, long-term health and mental health conditions by promoting physical activity and fostering social connections. We hope to create a thriving community that supports and empowers each other.

Our new project will offer regular informal meet-ups, providing a welcoming space for people to share their experiences, engage in physical activities, and feel more connected.

Research shows that regular physical activity can reduce the risk of depression by an impressive 30%. With this in mind, we are dedicated to creating a diverse range of activities to benefit our members' mental and physical health. From accessible yoga sessions and arts and crafts activities to walks in nature, our events will encourage participants to get active and enjoy the benefits of the great outdoors.





In January, we held our first meet-up at Redhill YMCA, where participants tried their hand at badminton, boccia, and other sports in a friendly, supportive environment. This was followed by a February visit to the Watts Arts Gallery in Guildford, where a group of 20 people enjoyed the Flower Fairy exhibition and a guided tour of the art gallery. One attendee remarked, **“Great to meet with friends in the appreciation of wonderful art. Felt uplifted at the end of the event”**.

Our project aims to run for a year, with monthly meet-ups featuring a mix of active, arts, and wellbeing activities. By providing these free sessions, we hope to alleviate some of the challenges our members face, particularly during the cost of living crisis. We believe that by coming together, we can reduce loneliness and promote overall wellbeing.

We invite all Coalition members to join us for our upcoming meet-ups. Stay tuned to our Weekly Update for details of our events and join us in building an active and connected community.

Introducing Silverwood Mental Health Hospital

Silverwood opened in February, replacing the now closed Abraham Cowley Unit (ACU) in Chertsey. Silverwood provides a supportive environment with four wards, each with 16 ensuite rooms, lounges, gardens, and a woodland area for supervised walks and aims to offer high-quality mental health services to Surrey residents.

Our Coalition Mental Health team has been working closely with the Silverwood team throughout the last two years to embed peoples feedback into the development of the new service. In January, our staff helped to conduct building tours with members who had been involved in the design process and attended a sleepover at the hospital to ensure everything is working as it should before patients moved in. The projects co-design with people with lived experience have been crucial in preparing the facility and the team hope to submit this project for the Design in Mental Health Awards for the second consecutive year.



WEEKLY EVENTS

DAY	TIME	ACTIVITY
Every Monday	11am - 12pm	Virtual Café and craft discussion group
Every Tuesday	4pm - 5pm	Glee Club
Every other Wednesday	2:30pm - 3:30pm	Peer Support Group
Every Thursday	2:30pm - 3:30pm	Quiz
Every Friday	11:30am - 12:30pm	Virtual Café and Get More Active discussion group

Dates for your Diary

Our activities are online by Zoom unless otherwise stated i.e. Hybrid/ In-person

The links to attend online are available from our website, The Weekly Update (newsletter) and by contacting the Involvement team.

If you would like more information about The Coalition's events, please e-mail involvement@surreycoalition.org.uk, call 01483 456 558 or SMS: 07908 671 402

EVENTS APRIL

DATE	TIME	ACTIVITY
Tuesday 1st April	1pm - 2:30pm	FoCUS East & Mid Surrey Community Group Online
Wednesday 2nd April	1pm - 2:30pm	FoCUS South West Surrey Community Group In person @ Guildford Baptist Church
Thursday 3rd April	1pm - 2:30pm	FoCUS West Surrey & NE Hants Community Group Online
Monday 7th April	1pm - 2:30pm	FoCUS North West Surrey Community Group In Person @ The Hythe Centre, Chertsey
Wednesday 16th April	10am - 11am	Northwest Surrey Mental Health group Online
Thursday 17 th April	10 - 11am	East & Mid Surrey Mental Health group Online

EVENTS MAY

DATE	TIME	ACTIVITY
Wednesday 7th May	2pm - 4pm	FoCUS Committee meeting In Person @ SABP HQ, Leatherhead
Friday 16th May	1pm - 4pm	Sailing @ Papercourt, Ripley In person
Friday 30th May	1pm - 3pm	IMHN Coordinating Meeting Online

EVENTS JUNE

DATE	TIME	ACTIVITY
Thursday 5th June	12:30pm - 2pm	FoCUS Southwest Surrey, West Surrey & NE Hants Community Group In Person @ Guildford Baptist Church
Tuesday 10th June	12:30pm - 2pm	FoCUS Northwest, East and Mid Surrey Community Group In person @ Unifer House Chertsey
Wednesday 18th June	10am - 11am	North West Surrey Mental Health Group Online
Thursday 19th June	10am - 11am	East & Mid Surrey Mental Health Group Online



We always love to hear from you!

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