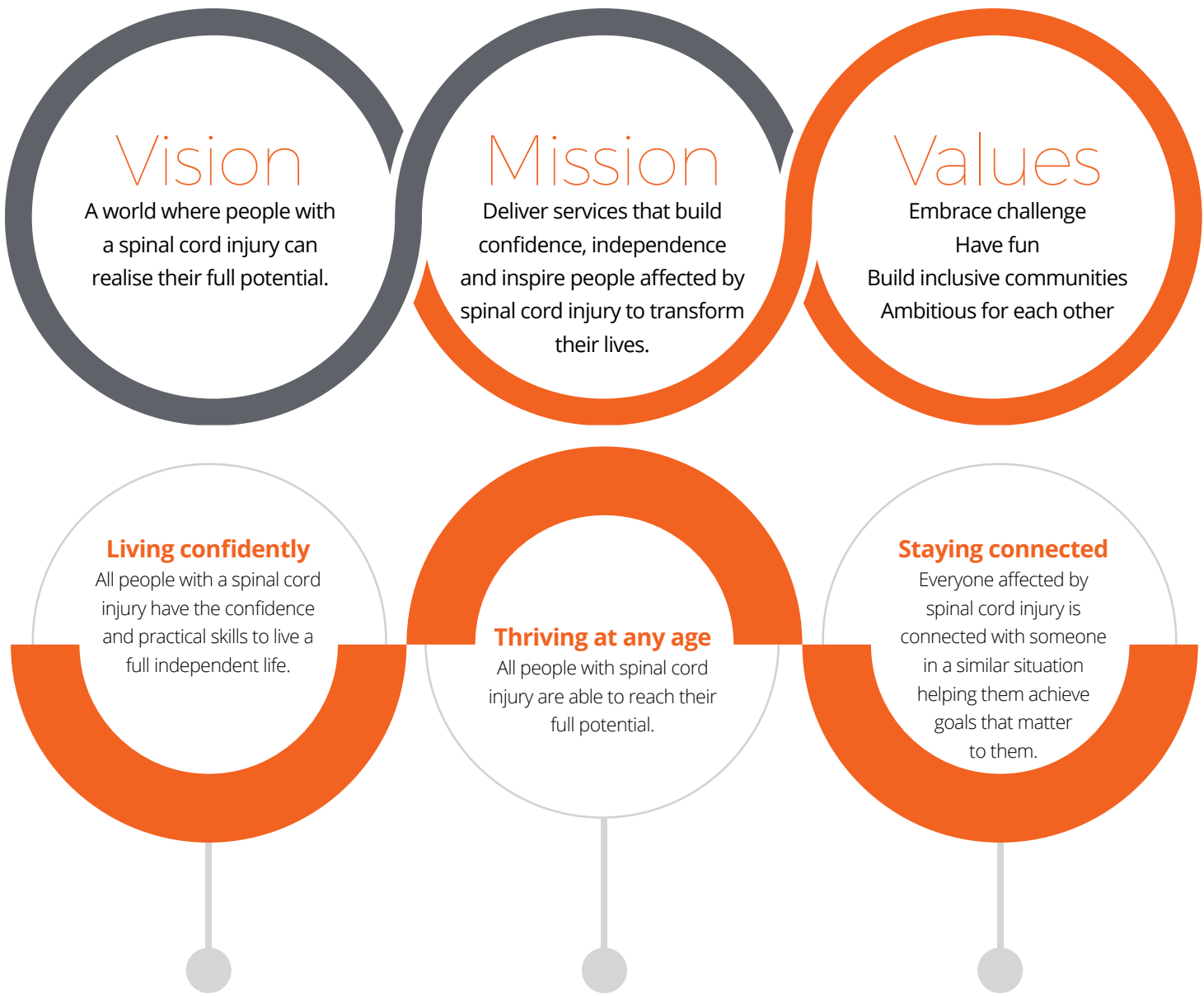




back up
transforming lives after spinal cord injury

Impact report 2022/23



Components of success

- Being peer driven
- Growing fundraising to meet our ambition
- Developing and empowering our people
- Being inclusive
- Harnessing technology
- Driving efficiency and effectiveness
- Volunteers at our heart
- Compelling communications
- Committed to collaboration
- Open and accountable



Welcome



One of Back Up's key values is building inclusive communities. We know that people affected by spinal cord injury can truly thrive when they have the chance to connect with others in a similar situation.

No matter circumstances, background, or level of injury, our community is a positive and uplifting space for everyone affected by spinal cord injury.

This Impact Report is an annual publication which celebrates the work Back Up has done over the past year. It also showcases the stories of people who have found vital support from the Back Up community, making use of our life-changing services and realising their full potential.

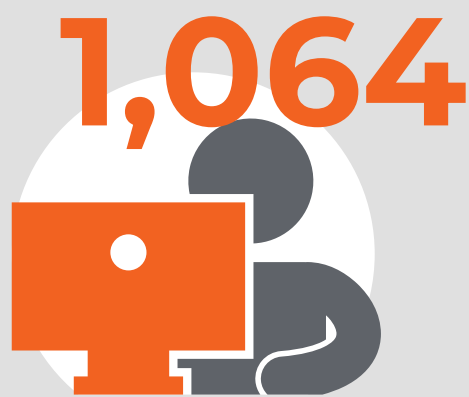
True to our Transforming Lives strategy, in this year's impact report we have stories which bring to life the goals of Back Up: Staying Connected, Thriving at Any Age, and Living Confidently. Read on to hear from individuals who found support on our adventurous Multi Activity Courses, attended our employment-focused Back to Work course, and from those who found a lifeline through our family support service.

Of course, none of the work we do at Back Up would be possible without support from our dedicated fundraisers and volunteers. Back Up was founded by volunteers, and their tireless efforts remain at the heart of our work. Whether you've supported our services as a volunteer, made a donation, took on a thrilling fundraising challenge or attended one of our special events, thank you for making what we do possible.

This publication is testimony to the real impact Back Up has on the lives of people affected by spinal cord injury. Read on and join us as we work to support even more people in the future.

Abigail Lock | CEO

The impact of Back Up's work in 2022/23



Our online support group, the Back Up Lounge, was attended **1,064 times**.



229 family members accessed our family support services. **96%** of family members felt more supported after joining our family support events.



482 education interventions plus **378 general children and young people interventions** (including the information and guidance service) have been successfully delivered.



203 people were supported through our mentoring service. **84%** reporting an increase in at least five of seven positive coping strategies.



Our range of in-person and online services have been accessed **19,253 times** in 2022/23.



510 people attended our Wheelchair Skills Training sessions, with **98%** of participants learning more skills and feeling more confident using a wheelchair.



80 people attended our virtual What Next? and Skills for Work course and careers fair event.



145 children and young people have been supported across all services. **100%** of the children and young people Back Up have worked with say they are now feeling happier at school.



Joe

Living confidently

I have had a spinal cord injury since 2011. I broke my back in a horse riding accident while working at a summer camp in America, leading to a C8 – T1 complete injury.

The aftermath of my injury was pretty hard to take. I just could not believe what had happened. I was 19 at the time and my first thoughts were 'how are you going to live your life?' I ended up being very ill for a while after my injury. I was in a coma for three weeks, and was sick with pneumonia and a collapsed lung.

It's safe to say that for most of my life after my injury, employment was not something I worried about. In fact, it was hardly on my mind because there was so much else to focus on. I was more concerned about things like trying to find an accessible place to live. I was just trying to get through life one day at a time.

In hindsight I wished that I had tried getting back into work sooner after my injury, as it would have been good for my mental health. Up until recently I was struggling with my self-confidence, which made looking for work much more difficult. By the time I decided to start applying for jobs I really felt knocked back when I was rejected following my first few interviews.

I found myself thinking I should have started applying for jobs much sooner. But one day I saw an email from Back Up about their Back to Work Careers Fair. My dad encouraged me to go on it, and I'm very glad I did.

I came away from this careers fair with the knowledge and confidence needed to get back into the workplace after spinal cord injury. At the careers fair we had the chance to try CV writing workshops, hear talks from professionals, and connect with recruiters. Through this, I got a lot of advice about working in an office as a wheelchair user from people who had been there as well.

I now work for accessible bathroom specialist, Fine & Able. We get a lot of calls from newly injured people, and we help them create accessible bathrooms that don't look clinical.

I didn't really know what to expect when I started working there, but it's a joy to work with such lovely people, and being able to use my lived experience as a wheelchair user to help our customers create bathrooms that are stylish and user-friendly is really fulfilling for me.

Thanks to Back Up, I made the connections that were necessary for my new position! I would certainly recommend their services.

Sophie

Staying connected

Before the pandemic myself and my husband Kay were living a very happy, very active life. We'd try to find any excuse to travel the world and escape the British weather, and we'd play tennis and go to the gym together throughout the week. We'd also just renovated our home, and we were about to embark on planning our next project before Covid hit.

It was a normal night in lockdown, staying in and watching a film on Netflix just like the rest of the country. Kay went up to the bathroom to brush his teeth, but suddenly he felt dizzy. He tried calling me for help, and ended up falling head-first into the door handle. In an instant, he could no longer move anything. He'd injured his spinal cord on the C4/C5 level.

After Kay's injury, the hardest thing for me was being apart from him. I didn't see my husband for six months because hospital visits were not allowed during the pandemic. When lockdown was lifted, I still had to keep two metres away from him. I couldn't even hold his hand – we were, in effect, still separated.

Thankfully, there was a silver lining to be found. As I had a lot of time on my hands to keep researching support after spinal cord injury, I ended up discovering Back Up.

The charity's digital services were super helpful. I started taking part in the Back Up Lounge, an online space for people affected by spinal cord injury. At the time, life was chaotic. Planning for Kay's return from hospital after six months and adapting the house, I was feeling lost – but the Back Up Lounge community helped us deal with things, one day at a time.

Since then, I've kept regularly attending the Back Up Lounge. Over time I've learned that the biggest piece of advice I discovered here was to look after myself. In the early days I thought I was a bit of a Wonder Woman. I eventually found myself taking on too much and running out of steam. Having a community of family members of other people with a spinal cord injury makes you feel a lot better.

Now, life is good. My husband has returned to work, we've rejoined our tennis club, and had our first meal out again as a family since Kay's injury – which are huge milestones for us.

I think anyone in the situation I was in should get in touch with Back Up. Nobody can do this alone, you need to be able to share your worries with people who are going through the same thing. Help is there for you.



Jo

Thriving at any age

I believe that I am very fortunate. I had a good life, and I still do really, but in different ways. My spinal cord injury made it feel like my life was narrowed enormously and stripped me of my independence.

I sustained a C5/C6 incomplete spinal cord injury while on holiday. After we returned to the UK, I spent six months in hospital. Although they had a very good programme of education for newly injured people, it still doesn't prepare you for life after discharge. I wanted to learn more practical skills for living independently after spinal cord injury. That's why I applied to go on the Back Up ski karting course.

Through Back Up, I learned that my love of skiing did not go away after my injury. I went in expecting to have fun and learn new skills – and this course surpassed all my expectations enormously. I'd never in my wildest dreams thought that I could ski independently again.

There was such a camaraderie between all of us on the course. We were all from different walks of life, different ages, and different injuries. Everyone had the right attitude. There were no barriers, we all got along.

One of the big things I learned on this course was to challenge myself and not accept the status quo, even in ways which may seem tiny.

A good example was when I tried using non-adaptive cutlery for the first time on the course. I never thought about challenging myself in that small way before. Now I am able to eat without using any adaptive cutlery. Tiny steps become long strides.

Since attending this course, I feel much more alive and open to the opportunities out there. It's shown me that having the chance to travel abroad with my family is still possible as a wheelchair user. I'd have absolutely no qualms in recommending Back Up and really encourage people to be brave enough to sign up for a course like the one I went on.





Pia

Thriving at any age

Prior to my injury, I was in my first year of studying Economics and Management at King's. I was really enjoying my course, as well as extra-curricular activities like netball, and I was also hoping to take on internships at leading financial institutions. But my studies were put on hold for a year after I sustained my spinal cord injury.

Towards the end of a netball practice session my arms felt really heavy. I didn't think much of it as I'd had a busy week, but when I returned to my accommodation the symptoms began to worsen. I rushed to hospital and the situation got worse – within a few days, I was struggling with my breathing. Eventually it was discovered this all came from a viral infection, which had damaged my spinal cord.

After spending weeks in hospital, I was transferred to The London Spinal Cord Injury Centre in Stanmore for the start of my rehab journey. That was where I learned to walk, eat, and look after myself independently. It was like I had to learn everything again from scratch.

My injury mostly affects me when I need to do a task that requires both hands. Most of my limbs have regained some mobility, but I have lost a lot of my strength. I feel lucky that I don't experience much pain, but my main struggle is fatigue. I can end up getting spasms in my legs if I am overly tired, for example.

I wanted to get my day-to-day life back, which is why I signed up for a Back Up Multi Activity Course. I thought that if I could do more 'extreme' activities like kayaking and abseiling, then my day-to-day goals would not seem too tough.

The whole course was challenging, and it truly helped me know myself more post-injury. We did loads of interesting activities including abseiling – which was a challenge in itself as I needed to stay balanced while using both arms!

It's great that Back Up courses can give you the chance to do things independently. It made me realise I can do a lot more than I thought was possible.

One of the best parts of the Multi Activity Course was learning from others who had been injured for longer than me. I learned the importance of having a good routine. Getting up at similar times and keeping my sleep schedule regular really benefits my health. The course really helped me with this.

Most importantly I also learned that I could still have jam-packed days like before my injury! As long as I get enough rest and watch my fatigue levels, I can still make the most of the day. Back Up showed me that you can live a good quality of life and achieve all the things you want, despite having a spinal cord injury.

Will

Living confidently

I was on holiday in Turkey with my mates when I sustained my injury. I fell down some stairs and dropped onto the concrete floor below. I permanently damaged my spinal cord at the T11 level.

I had surgery the next day. When I was medically fit to fly home two weeks later, the last thing the doctor said to me was that I'd make a good recovery. I was in fairly high spirits. When I was transferred to Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham, the consultant said, "you're very unlikely to walk again". That was a tough one to hear.

The hardest part of my injury was when the continence specialist told me how to manage my bladder and bowel with intermittent catheters and bowel management. She said I'd go on to lead an independent life, but I really didn't really believe her at that point. I was horizontal. I couldn't even grab a glass of water, let alone think about living independently and confidently.

I first met Back Up when they reached out to us on the ward, telling us about their range of services. I was really interested in the Lake District Multi Activity Course. If they could help me do these cool outdoor activities like abseiling and kayaking as a wheelchair user, then I was keen to do it.

The activity course was brilliant. On the first day, I remember we went up a massive hill – never did I think I'd be able to get up a dirt track with nobody pushing me! I was surprised at how much I could do independently.

I learned so much from the other people there. To get advice from people about stuff that you wouldn't talk about necessarily with non-disabled people – sexual function, bladder and bowel stuff – that was brilliant. We also learned vital wheelchair skills, which I now use every single day. I can tackle curbs on my way to work now, completely independently.

Back Up gave me confidence that I could live confidently after spinal cord injury. Since coming back from the course I applied to become a volunteer wheelchair skills trainer. I got so much from it, the least I can do is give something back to others.

Back Up don't get the credit they deserve. The work they do is just life-changing.





Tina

Staying connected

My spinal cord injury caused a devastating knock to my confidence. After being diagnosed with Cauda Equina Syndrome in 2017, my spinal cord was damaged at the L5 – S1 level. This really affected my mobility. Although I could walk with a stick, I choose to use a wheelchair to manage pain and fatigue.

I was always an outgoing person, but that changed quickly after my injury. It meant I had to sell my horse and move house. I was so new to using my wheelchair that accessibility became a big challenge. Just going to the shops was a struggle.

I needed to regain my independence, which is why I signed up for a Back Up Multi Activity Course. I needed a chance to boost my confidence, as well as practising my wheelchair skills. This course met my expectations and beyond! I was a bit nervous beforehand, but from the moment I arrived I felt at home.

It was like Back Up was one massive family, there to support each other.

For me, the highlight of the course was taking part in the adaptive horse riding. Having the chance to ride a horse again felt fantastic. It was like I was back on my own horse again. It completely cleared my mind and made me smile.

On this course I really improved my wheelchair skills. I can now get up and down curbs, push backwards, and negotiate anything you may find in your local high street. I'm making sure to practice my wheelchair skills at home with a spotter behind me whenever I get the chance.

I'm determined to keep persevering! If there's a barrier I can't get past, I'm going to challenge it.

Following her experiences on the Back Up Over 50s Multi Activity Course, Tina decided to give something back and stay connected with our community by taking on our toughest challenge – The Push. Alongside a team of friends and supporters, Tina raced 12 other wheelchair users up and down the tallest mountain in Wales. Overall this challenge raised over £100,000. We simply could not provide our vital services without the support of fundraisers like Tina!

Natalie

Volunteers at our heart

I work in Digital Marketing and Communications for Wellspect – a medical device company which make catheter and bowel care products. Outside of work, I very much like spending my time in the mountains. Growing up in Sweden, it's almost a given that you enjoy winter sports.

That's why I volunteered to be a corporate buddy on the Back Up Ski Karting course. It combined a lot of things I found interesting on both a professional and personal level.

As a corporate buddy, you volunteer your time on the course to help out wherever you can. Whether it's by providing an extra pair of hands to help carry luggage, or by simply being a happy and encouraging attitude! Being such a hands-on role, it really added to the experience for me.

It's a bit cliché to say, but the Back Up Ski Karting Course is absolutely life-changing.

It was very moving to hear from the participants about how liberating it felt to be on the slopes. For some participants it was the first time they had been abroad since sustaining their injuries. You could see throughout the week how their confidence increased. By the end of the week people were skiing independently, and some even tackling jumps by themselves.

I would 100% recommend volunteering as a corporate buddy with Back Up to anyone, without a doubt. It felt so empowering to see everyone come together, encouraging each other to do things they did not think would be possible after spinal cord injury.





Plans for the future

We are now over halfway through delivering our Transforming Lives Strategy, that we launched in April 2021. We're incredibly proud to have achieved many of the milestones that were laid out against our three strategic goals - Living Confidently, Thriving at any Age, and Staying Connected - we know we still have more work to do so we can be there for even more people affected by spinal cord injury.

Central to one of our core aims is to reach and support as many newly injured people in the UK as possible. We're reaching more and more communities through our increased regional presence, and now have dedicated team members in Wales, the West Midlands and Northern Ireland. In the next 12 months we aim to have a dedicated member of the Back Up team in every UK region, allowing us to better reach people outside of specialist spinal centres.

We are also expanding the support that we are providing to family members as we know the impact that spinal cord injury has on the whole family.

With rapid changes happening to digital communications every day, we will be looking at how we can better harness technology to stay ahead of the curve, and reach and support even more people affected by spinal cord injury.

The demand for Back Up's services continues to rise. We know the difference that Back Up makes and we're passionate about what we do. This is why we will strive to meet the growing and urgent needs of people affected by spinal cord injury.

These are just some of the things that we will be focusing on over the next year. We hope you can see from reading the stories the impact our vital services have made to people's lives.

Overall, in order to deliver all of the plans outlined within the transforming lives strategy, Back Up will continue to grow fundraising in a sustainable way. If you've never supported Back Up before, we'd love for you to join us as we work towards achieving our vision of a world where people with a spinal cord injury can realise their full potential.

The difference our volunteers make

Volunteers have always been, and will always be, at the heart of everything we do. The contribution of our passionate volunteers is felt at all levels of the charity. Our vital work is made possible by their commitment and support.

Last year, we estimate that our volunteers contributed the following hours to our work:



Volunteer mentors spent **3,376 hours** making positive changes to the lives of others.



Office volunteers gave **1,567** hours of their time to provide fundraising and administrative support.



Our family volunteers dedicated **115 hours** to supporting family members of people with a spinal cord injury.

In total, we estimate that our amazing volunteers contributed around **22,961 hours** to our work this year. This works out at around **957 days'** worth of time. We are extremely thankful for the brilliant pro-bono support offered to us and for all the valued contributions our volunteers make.



The volunteers which support our life-changing courses dedicated **10,712 hours** to building our course participants' confidence and independence.



Our fundraising volunteers gave **1,452 hours** to planning our special events, sourcing prizes for events, and supporting our work.



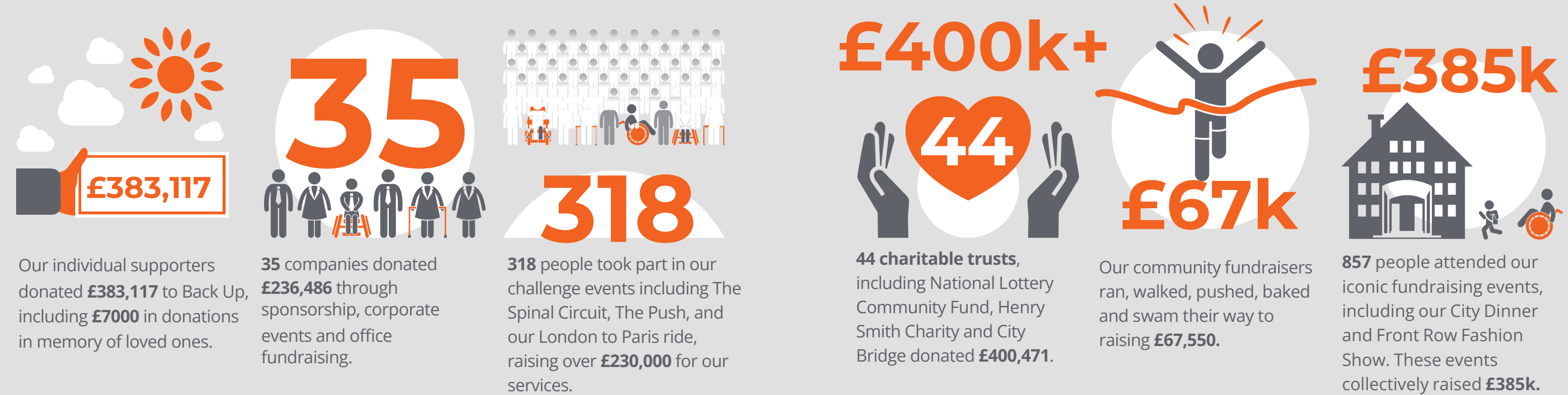
Our youth advisers and education advocates gave **277 hours** of their time to support children and young people with a spinal cord injury through mentoring, and our Youth Break Out Lounge.



Our trustees dedicated **546 hours** to governing Back Up and shaping the charity's future.

How we raised our money

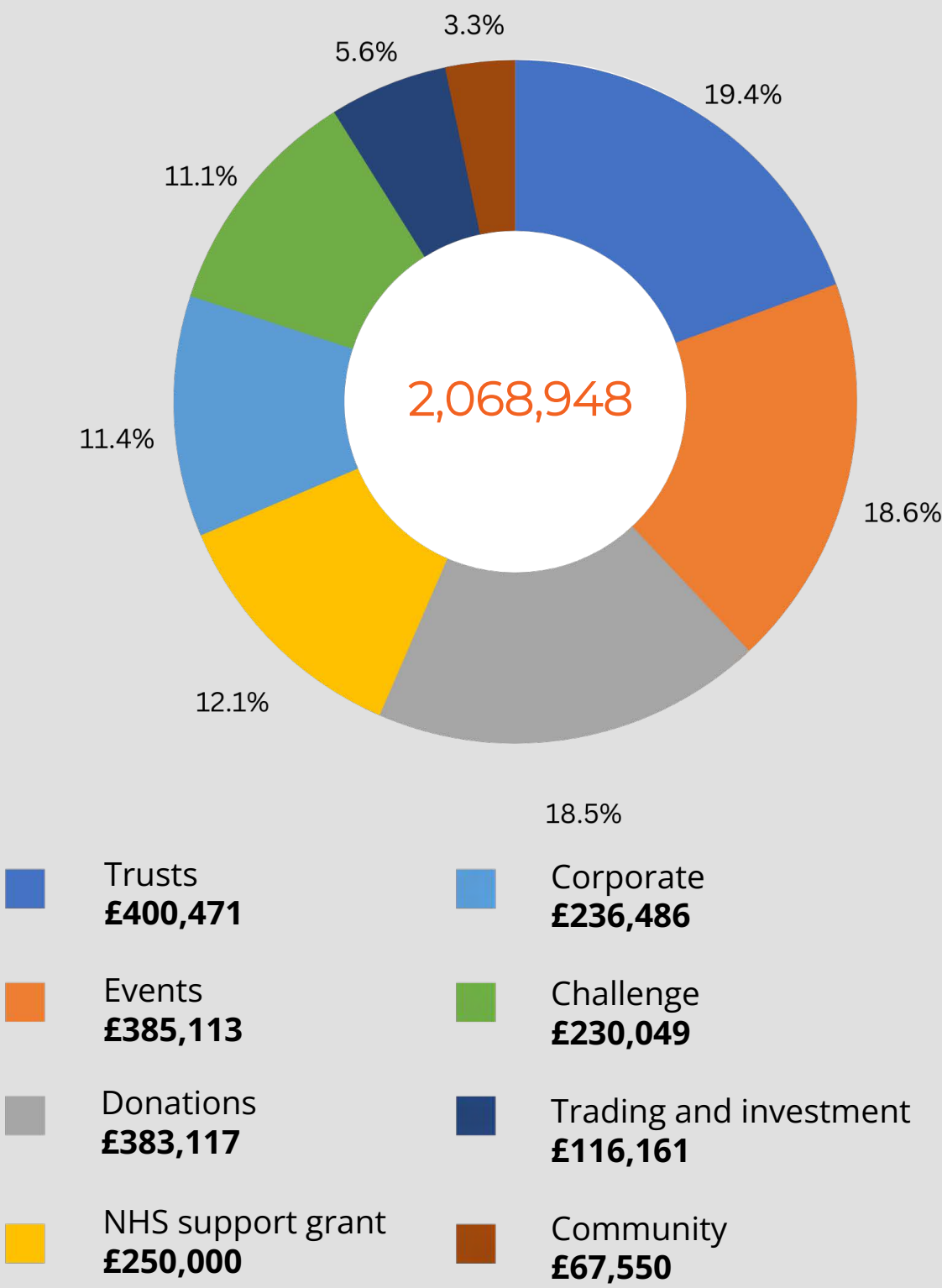
In 2022/23, we raised £2,068,948. Read on to discover some of our fundraising highlights:



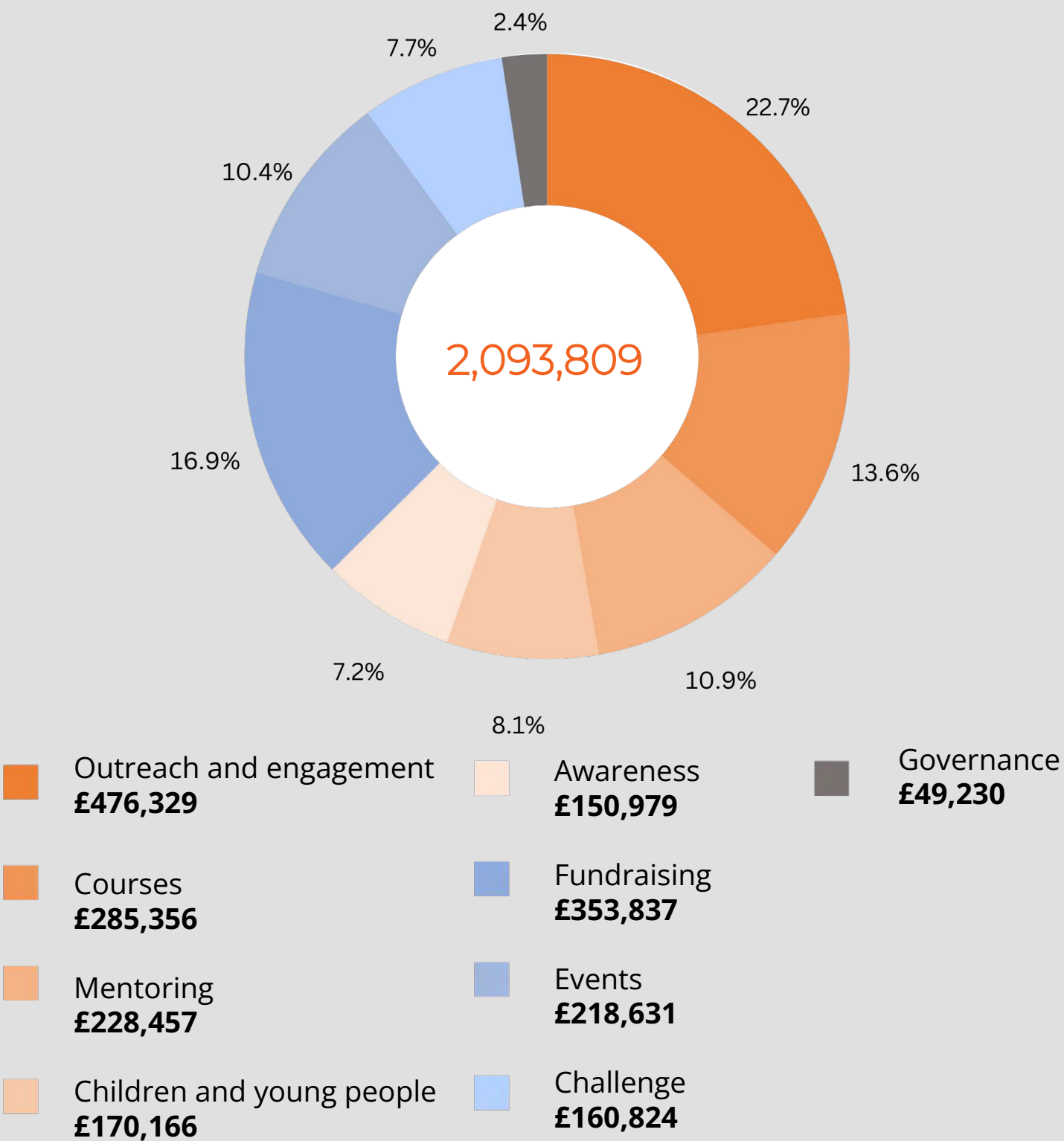
In 2022/23, we raised an incredible £2,068,948. Every donation counts – big or small, they all help us support people affected by spinal cord injury. To all the individuals and organisations who have contributed to Back Up, we would like to say a massive thank you on behalf of all those you have helped in this past year. We simply could not do what we do without you.



How we raised our money



How we spent our money



Although the majority of our income goes directly to our services, we wouldn't be able to function as a charity without spending on fundraising and governance to ensure the sustainability of our services for future generations. We recognise that going into 2023/2024 there is still a high degree of economic uncertainty which is why we have maintained our reserves policy at four months. But, more importantly, our reserves will enable us to immediately invest more in our services in the coming year to deliver the commitments we have made within our ambitious Transforming Lives Strategy.

These reserves also ensure sufficient cashflow for day-to-day activities, meet opportunities that arise over time, and mitigate any unforeseen events that could come up over the next twelve months.

We are already delivering plans which will see us reaching even more people, providing more intensive support, and expanding our services to meet demand.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thanks the individuals, organisations, corporate partners, trusts and foundations who have enabled us to support people with a spinal cord injury in 2022/23. Without your generosity our work would simply not be possible.

Trustees

Gordon Craig (Appointed on 4th May 2022)
Helen Cooke*
Mona Dhanjal** (Resigned on 19th July 2022)
David Fraser* (Resigned on 27th July 2022)
Anne Luttman-Johnson*
Christopher Morgan* (Chair of Trustees, appointed 2nd November 2022)
Ben Parker **
Martine Petetin (Resigned on 3rd May 2023)
Richard Rawstron (Treasurer)
Tom Roberts**
Rebecca Stevenson
Grace Spence Green* (Appointed on 4th May 2022)
Joanna Wright* (Chair of Trustees until 2nd November 2022)
Paul Fairhurst* (Appointed on 27th July 2022)
Louise Jolliffe* (Appointed on 26th July 2023)

* Has a spinal cord injury
** family member

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transforming lives after spinal cord injury

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We'd like to thank our amazing photographer Ash Knotek for providing the majority of the photographic images used in this impact report.

