

# Future Trustee Programme Pack 2025/26

## Welcome

I am delighted that you are considering applying for Back Up's Future Trustee Programme. This programme has been created for people with spinal cord injury who are interested in becoming a trustee in the future, but who may not yet have had the opportunity to gain the experience, confidence or knowledge needed to take on a board role.

The programme runs for 12 months and gives participants the chance to observe Back Up Board meetings, observe a board meeting at another charity, learn about charity governance, receive support from an experienced trustee mentor, access training and contribute to a governance project that strengthens how Back Up listens to and involves people affected by spinal cord injury.

You do not need previous trustee experience, a university degree or a professional background in governance. We are looking for people with lived experience of spinal cord injury who are curious, thoughtful, committed to Back Up's values and interested in understanding how good governance can help a charity make better decisions for the people it exists to support.

We particularly welcome applications from people whose voices are under-represented in charity governance, including younger people, people from Black and minority ethnic communities, and people with higher-level injuries.

Through the programme you will be supported to:

- understand what trustees do and how charity boards make decisions
- build confidence in reading board papers, asking questions and contributing to discussion
- learn more about Back Up's strategy, services, finances, risks and governance
- work on a practical governance project, strengthening the link between the Board and people with spinal cord injury whose voices aren't typically heard at a governance level
- explore whether trusteeship is something you may want to pursue in the future, at Back Up or another charity.

If you still have questions after reading this pack, please do get in touch. Abigail Lock, our CEO, is happy to have an informal conversation about the programme and whether it may be right for you.

Back Up's Board is strongest when it reflects the community we serve. The Future Trustee Programme is one way we are investing in that future: creating more routes into governance, supporting people with spinal cord injury to build their confidence, and making sure lived experience continues to shape Back Up's decisions at the highest level.

Yours sincerely,

Damian Riley

Chair of Trustees.



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## Information about spinal cord injury and why we exist

Your brain and spinal cord are vital for controlling your bodily functions. The spinal cord is responsible for communicating two-way messages to and from the brain to all parts of the body – your muscles, organs and your skin. We are able to feel pain and move our arms or legs because of these messages or impulses.

If the spinal cord is damaged or injured, some of the messages or impulses may be ‘interrupted’. This can lead to partial or total loss of feeling or movement in parts of your body – including your limbs and your internal organs.

Most spinal cord injuries cause loss of movement and feeling in the parts of the body below the level of the injury. If you damage or break your spinal cord close to your neck, this will cause paralysis in a larger part of the body than damage to your spinal cord lower down your back. As well as the physical impact of a spinal cord injury, there are also emotional and psychological effects on the person concerned – and their family.

### Statistics

- There are an estimated 105,000 people in the UK living with a spinal cord injury
- Each year over 4,700 people are newly injured.
- Every two hours, someone’s life will change forever in the UK because of being spinal cord injured
- Less than a third of people with a spinal cord injury are in employment

In the coming years we believe that there will be a greater need for our services due to;

- local authority funding cuts
- demand for specialist NHS rehabilitation services outstripping supply
- shorter spinal cord injury rehabilitation
- difficulty accessing specialist spinal cord injury rehabilitation (especially for children and people with a spinal cord injury not caused by accidents)

These factors all affect people’s wellbeing, their need to maximise their independence, and their ability to participate in normal everyday activities and roles. People with a spinal cord injury have high support needs around employment, and pressure on them to be working is increasing.

Read more about spinal cord injury [on our website](#).



# Our Vision, Mission and Values

## Our Vision

Our vision is a world where people with spinal cord injury can reach their full potential.

## Our Mission

Our mission is to deliver services that build confidence, independence and inspire people affected by spinal cord injury to transform their lives.

## Our Values

### We embrace challenge

- Challenge is central to our learning and growth; it helps us gain knowledge and skills. By finding ways to overcome challenge and move forward we gain a sense of achievement, supporting us to realise our full potential.

### We have fun

- We believe that having fun allows us to connect with others, whilst opening up opportunities to develop, achieve and get the most out of life, showing that there is a positive future after spinal cord injury.

### We build inclusive communities:

- We achieve more for people affected by spinal cord injury when we work together. We are collaborative and inclusive in our approach. We embrace diversity, working with and supporting individuals, groups, and the wider spinal cord injury community, bringing people together.

### We are ambitious for each other:

- We are driven by the needs of people with a spinal cord injury and their families. We are passionate, striving to be the best. We set high standards, and we work hard to reach them. We are proactive, push boundaries, try new approaches and we learn quickly. We recognise that failure doesn't have to equal loss, rather an opportunity for growth. We listen to what people affected by spinal cord injury want and we seek innovative responses based on their feedback.

*“Back Up has always had the ability and passion to challenge and change, not just the public’s perception of what can be achieved after a spinal cord injury, but the person and their family who is directly affected. We continuously adapt and change our services as we see people’s rehabilitation and community support reduced over the years. However, the way we deliver our services stays the same and rooted in our values.”* **Abigail Lock, CEO**



## About us

### The charity:

At Back Up, we inspire people affected by spinal cord injury to get the most out of life. Last year we reached 2,799 people with our award-winning services that are designed and delivered by people affected by spinal cord injury. The enthusiastic, inclusive and supportive spirit of our very skilled staff ensure excellence in the services we deliver.

We offer wheelchair skills training, an accredited mentoring service, life skills and activity courses, support returning to work or education as well as support to family members of people with spinal cord injury. Our services are available to people with all levels of spinal cord injury and their loved ones. Find out more about the support we can offer on [our website](#).

### Our approach:

We know that people affected by spinal cord injury are best placed to know what they need and how to support others in a similar situation. People affected by spinal cord injury are involved throughout Back Up, delivering our services and forming a significant proportion of our staff, volunteers and board of trustees (we always aim for at least 50% of board members to be spinal cord injured.)

We pride ourselves in being innovative and creative to ensure people affected by spinal cord injury drive our strategy and services. Consultation happens at every stage of decision-making, from establishing need, to designing and developing the services, to delivery and then review and recommendations.

In 2024 Back-Up won The Sunday Times Spotlight Award for the Best Place to work for Disabled People. We also have Disability Confident Leader status.

### Peer support:

At Back Up, peer support has always been a central part of our work. Many of our staff and volunteers, and also our trustees, are affected by spinal cord injury. They regularly draw on their experiences in the delivery of their jobs. Indeed, we have many staff and volunteer opportunities that are only open to people with lived experience of spinal cord injury because of the specific skillset they require.

Many of the people we support remark that having the chance to speak to others in a similar situation makes a huge difference to their emotional and physical wellbeing. For some, Back Up's services offer the first chance to speak to someone else who understands life with a spinal cord injury. This supportive network can play a vital role in getting back up to living life to the full.



## Our strategy

Our Limitless Ambition Strategy was launched in April 2025. Over 500 people helped us create our strategy and carve out the three goals which matter to those we support.

**Living confidently** – empowering people with a spinal cord injury with the confidence, knowledge and practical skills to live a full and independent life.

**Everyone thriving** – ensuring all individuals affected by spinal cord injury can reach their full potential.

**Meaningful connection** – creating opportunities for people affected by spinal cord injury to connect with others in similar situations to achieve their goals.

We now know that over 4,700 people are newly injured each year across the UK. We are focused on how we can ensure that we have the greatest impact on the largest number of people possible.

More information can be found by reading our [Limitless Ambition](#) strategy and [our impact and annual reports](#).



**“Becoming a mentor and realising that I have the ability to make a difference to somebody’s life has been a completely positive experience.”**

(Mentor)



# Back Up Strategy 2025-2030

## Vision

A world where people with spinal cord injury can reach their full potential.

## Mission

Deliver services that build confidence, independence and inspire people affected by spinal cord injury to transform their lives.

## Values and Behaviours

Embrace challenge

**Bold, Adaptable**

Have fun

**Positive, Motivational**

Build inclusive communities

**Open, Friendly**

Ambitious for each other

**Expert, Strive for Better**

### Living Confidently:

empowering people with a spinal cord injury with the confidence, knowledge and practical skills to live a full and independent life.

### Everyone Thriving:

ensuring all individuals affected by spinal cord injury can reach their full potential.

### Meaningful Connections:

creating opportunities for people affected by spinal cord injury to connect with others in similar situations to achieve their goals.

## Our Foundations

- Lived Understanding
- Growing Income to Meet our Ambition
- Being Data-led
- Driving Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Developing and Empowering our People
- Powered by Volunteers
- Being Inclusive
- Compelling Communications
- Committed to Collaboration
- Well-run, Sustainable Organisation



## About the Future Trustee Programme

The Future Trustee Programme is a year-long development opportunity for people with spinal cord injury who are interested in charity governance and may want to become trustees in the future.

The programme is designed to create a clearer pathway into trusteeship. It combines observation of Back Up's Board, the opportunity to observe a board meeting at another charity, mentoring, training and a practical governance project, so participants can learn what trusteeship involves in a supported and accessible way.

### The purpose of the programme:

The programme has three main aims:

- To equip participants with the knowledge, skills and confidence to consider future trustee roles
- To strengthen representation in charity governance by supporting more people with spinal cord injury into board-level roles
- To help Back Up develop stronger routes for lived experience and under-represented perspectives to inform Board decision making
- To give participants experience of different board environments by enabling them to observe a board meeting at another charity.

### What you will gain:

- A practical understanding of what trustees do and how boards work
- Experience of observing Back Up Board meetings and, where possible, a board meeting at another charity, so you can see different approaches to governance in practice
- Support from an experienced trustee mentor who can help you reflect on what you are learning
- Access to training on governance, legal responsibilities, finance, strategy and risk
- Confidence in reading board papers, asking questions and contributing in meetings
- The opportunity to work on a governance project that makes a practical contribution to Back Up's governance and how lived experience informs Board decision making
- A clearer sense of whether trusteeship is something you would like to pursue in the future.

Over 12 months participants will be asked to complete a governance project which will require independent research of a topic to strengthen Back Up's governance. Each project will culminate in a presentation to the Board, with practical recommendations for implementation.

This is a voluntary programme and participants are not paid, but reasonable expenses, including travel where needed, will be reimbursed in line with Back Up's expenses policy.

Completing the programme does not guarantee a trustee role. However, participants who complete the programme will be guaranteed a first-round interview when Back Up next recruits' trustees. The Chair of Trustees can also provide a testimonial if you apply for a trustee role at another charity.



## Who the programme is for

### We are looking for people who:

- Have lived experience of spinal cord injury
- Are interested in learning more about charity governance and trusteeship
- Are curious, reflective and willing to ask questions
- Can respect confidentiality and engage thoughtfully with sensitive information
- We are particularly interested in hearing from people with spinal cord injury from ethnically diverse backgrounds, younger people, people with higher levels injuries and those who may be under represented on boards.

### You do not need:

- Previous board or committee experience
- A university degree or formal governance qualification
- To feel confident about trusteeship already
- To know exactly where your interest in governance may take you.

The programme is designed to help you learn.

### Personal attributes:

- Integrity, honesty and respect for others
- A commitment to Back Up's vision, mission and values
- A willingness to listen, learn and reflect
- Confidence to contribute your perspective, with support
- Reliability and the ability to commit time to the programme
- An interest in helping Back Up strengthen the voices of people affected by spinal cord injury in governance.

### Time Commitment:

- Attend Back Up Board meetings virtually as a non-voting observer for 12 months
- Take part in a briefing before each Board meeting and a debrief afterwards
- Observe a board meeting at another charity, where this can be arranged, to broaden your understanding of how different boards work
- Meet regularly with your trustee mentor
- Conduct independent research on a governance project and help prepare recommendations for presentation to Back Up's Board
- Spend two to three hours prior to meetings, reading and absorbing information
- Follow up to meetings – reading and commenting on minutes, carrying out any agreed actions



## Requirements:

You must be...

- Over 18
- Not bankrupt
- Subject to satisfactory DBS check and references
- Not excluded by Companies House or Charity Commission
- Not bound by conflicts of interest that would be so significant as to undermine the role in general e.g. a member of a group that discriminates against people based on gender or ethnicity



## Specific responsibilities

**Programme:** Future Trustee Programme

**Supported by:** Chair of Trustees, CEO and trustee mentor

**Purpose:** To build knowledge, confidence and practical experience for people with spinal cord injury who may want to become trustees in the future.

## Summary:

Future Trustee Programme participants are not trustees and do not have legal responsibility for Back Up. Instead, they will observe, learn, ask questions and contribute to a specific governance project. This gives participants first-hand experience of how boards work while making a practical contribution to Back Up's future governance.

### Vision and Mission

- To uphold the values of the charity, undertaking the duties of trusteeship in a way that adds to public confidence and trust in the charity
- Promoting and developing the charity in order for it to grow and maintain its relevance to society
- To support decisions that are in the best interest of service users, donors, volunteers and stakeholders at all times

### Compliance, quality and effectiveness

- Strive for best practice in governance, through proactive learning and Development
- Maintain confidentiality

## Volunteering with Back Up

Back Up is committed to creating an inclusive culture that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve. We particularly welcome applications from disabled candidates and those with lived experience of spinal cord injury.

Back Up is recognised as a Disability Confident Leader (Level 3) under the government's Disability Confident Scheme.

This recognition reflects how we work as an organisation. Inclusion is not an add-on to our services. It is embedded in our culture, leadership and recruitment practices.



## Next steps

You've read the pack, and you:

1. Feel inspired by the work of Back Up
2. Have read the programme description and feel you could make a good participant

**So, it's time to apply.**

Please send your CV along with an accompanying letter of no more than two pages explaining your reasons for applying and how you meet the person specification to [HR@backuptrust.org.uk](mailto:HR@backuptrust.org.uk) Please use the subject line **Back Up Future Trustee Programme**

The deadline for completing the application is **midnight on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2026**.

- All applications will be reviewed against the role description and person specification by a small team of trustees and the CEO by 21<sup>st</sup> July 2026.
- Everyone will be contacted by email or phone with regards to the success of your application at this stage and you'll have the opportunity to get feedback if you are not successful.
- If you have been shortlisted, you'll be invited for a 45 minute online interview with a Back Up trustee and the CEO on Thursday **30<sup>th</sup> July 2026** with a second-round interview on **Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2026**. Please advise us in your application if you cannot make these dates.
- We expect you'll have more questions, and if so you can get in touch with Abigail, Back Up's CEO.

**You can contact us:**

**Abigail Lock**

Email: [Abigail@backuptrust.org.uk](mailto:Abigail@backuptrust.org.uk)

020 8875 6725

If you have any questions, please do get in contact with us.

**Good luck with your application. We look forward to hearing from you.**

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