

Review of 2021/22

Goal

Objectives

21/22 Outcomes

By 2025 we will reach all newly injured people in the UK, including all children and young people. By providing support from the beginning of the adjustment process we can make sure people have the skills and confidence they need to live life independently.

By 2025 we will be more inclusive, expanding the number and range of our transformative courses, online resources and services for people who cannot access specialist support in spinal centres – making them accessible throughout the UK.

By 2025 we will be leaders in supporting people with a spinal cord injury in getting back to work and volunteering, working collaboratively with businesses, the NHS and other organisations where we can achieve more together to provide opportunities.

Our ability to reach all newly injured people has been significantly impacted by ongoing covid-19 restrictions preventing access to clinical settings. For a second year running, some spinal cord injury centres have allowed no external visitors.

Despite these challenges we registered more than 700 people affected by spinal cord injury. We've found innovative and fun ways to reach people. Our Heels for Wheels campaign enlisted support of 67 celebrities to raise money and awareness of spinal cord injury. This achieved an amazing 146.7k twitter impressions over the eleven day campaign period.

The number of times our services were accessed exceeded our expectations. Through developing online courses and digital engagement tools, we've strived to reach new people in new ways. Our services have been accessed over 13,000 times.

We know that there are many more people that need our support. Going forward the easing of covid-19 restrictions and a greater focus on regional delivery will help us meet this aim.

"I don't think I've ever been part of an organisation with such a positive upbeat vibe. I love how we are all working with one goal in mind, to improve the lives of those affected by spinal cord injury"

Resources such as the Back Up Lounge, What Next? course, Back Up Bug chatbot, our Wheelchair Skills App and videos, alongside our traditional face-to-face services, have been a lifeline to many.

In 21/22 we developed two key skills-based virtual courses; What Next? and Skills for Work, delivering both courses on three separate occasions. Virtual courses will become a permanent part of our service offer, enabling us to increase our reach to those not accessing spinal cord injury centres. They allow us to continue supporting people in the early days post discharge.

With the easing of restrictions, we were delighted to re-start our face-to-face courses. In 21/22 we delivered five of our life changing courses including our Colorado Sit Ski Course.

"Going into the What Next? course I felt small. Now I feel like giant – I can take on the world."

We made a great start to achieving leadership in this area. Our Skills for Work Course, delivered over two days, helps participants hone their CVs and job applications. The courses include interview practice with professionals from corporate supporters, helping equip participants with a practical understanding of how to succeed in real-life interviews. Participants also learn from the lived experiences of the course facilitators who have a spinal cord injury, other guest speakers, and each other. An impressive 87% of people attending our Skills for Work courses accomplished their vocational goal of either work or volunteering within six months of attending.

This year we introduced our online vocation toolkit, which shares the lived experience of those who have returned to work after spinal cord injury. The toolkit touches on important topics such as how to manage health alongside working, how to disclose a disability to an employer, and how to find a new career path. Since the toolkit was launched in October 2021, it's been visited 1,193 times, and the videos have been watched over 1,850 times. We also planned our first ever careers fair.

"I found the Careers Fair made me excited for the future, and really gave me the opportunity to think about the sort of career I want. I learnt about what support I can access, to help me along the way to securing permanent employment"

Living confidently: people with a spinal cord injury have the confidence and practical skills to get the most out of life

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Thriving at any age:
all people with a spinal cord injury are able to reach their full potential

By 2025 we will provide specialist advice and information to children, young people and their parents in order for them to access care, equipment and social support. We will work with the NHS to ensure that all children and young people with spinal cord injury receive the treatment that they deserve through the established Children and Young Person's pathway.

By 2025 we will ensure our support is targeted at times of greatest need, helping people affected by spinal cord injury overcome barriers they may face in their education, career, family life, hobbies and social life, so that they can live the life they want. We will increase our resources for people who are ageing with spinal cord injury and establish a course for newly injured people who sustain a spinal cord injury later in life.

By 2025 we will provide support to every child and young person with a spinal cord injury who wants our help to ensure that they are fully included in their education and that their voice is heard in this process. We will be there for any teacher, school, college or university that needs our support around inclusion and meeting the needs of a child or young person with a spinal cord injury, to ensure they have a positive education experience.

We have made significant progress towards achieving our aim. Working closely with the NHS we have developed plans and secured funding for a Paediatric Information Advice and Guidance role.

Starting in 22/23 this accredited role will be there right at the start, providing specialist advice and guidance to newly injured children, young people, and their parents when they don't know where to turn. We want to ensure they receive the support they need and are entitled to.

"My son has gone from not wanting to have a life to seeing a more positive version of what his life can be. I don't think any other service can offer what Back Up has offered. Just when we needed it most Back Up was there."

We have spent time this year further developing our approach to measuring our impact, piloting the use of pre and post engagement measures that will help us understand not just the impact of individual services – but the whole experience of combined support from Back Up. We will use our findings to further refine our services and our approach in 2022/23.

We remain committed to developing support for those ageing with a spinal cord injury; be that through information, our courses, mentoring, or our online support. We have spent this year looking to better understand how we can help, and we aim to make real progress in this area next year.

"I honestly don't know where I would be if I didn't find the support that Back Up offered me. The support has helped me to deal with all the anger and frustrations that I felt at the time."

As restrictions eased, we stepped up our education inclusion service. As such, we exceeded our target of supporting 30 young people, reaching 35 over the course of the year. An incredible 100% of those young people reported feeling happier at school, 100% of the education providers said they better understood how to include young people with a spinal cord injury, and 100% of parent/carers agreed that their young person was better included as a result of our support.

This year we also launched our new Education Inclusion Toolkit, aimed at professionals as well as parents and carers. This online resource has already been visited over 4,047 times since it launched in November.

There is more work for us to do to ensure we reach our aim and are able to support even more children and young people with a spinal cord injury. In 22/23 we are looking forward to expanding our children and young people's services.

"I've been a SENDCO for over 10 years and never supported a pupil with SCI myself. I am doing a lot of research and trying to be aware of gaps in my knowledge and to identify my blind spots - it's so good to know your expertise is there. You have been brilliant and this has been exceptionally helpful"

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Staying connected: everyone affected by spinal cord injury can connect with someone in a similar situation to themselves, to overcome challenges and achieve goals that matter to them

By 2025 we will provide more in-depth one-on-one support to those who are really struggling, increasing our capacity to mentor three times more people with a spinal cord injury and their family members. We will also establish a parent support programme and parent mentoring. This will involve sharing experiences and parents being provided with practical support to help them come to terms with what has happened, and adjust positively to life post-injury.

By 2025 we will offer the family of each newly injured person a 'family rehab service'. This begins with the acute phase through information and advice online and in-person at relatives' days, to post-discharge from the hospital, through peer mentoring and dedicated courses.

By 2025 we will be integrated into the NHS's spinal services rehabilitation pathway to increase access to the first-hand knowledge that comes from living with a spinal cord injury. We will work in partnership with the spinal centres' psychology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy professionals for in-patient support. We will work in partnership with the outreach and out-patient teams to support those with a spinal cord injury in other hospital settings, and in the community.

Back Up's mentoring service provides goal focused and tailored support to anyone affected by spinal cord injury. We match service users with trained mentors, all of whom either have a spinal cord injury themselves or are a relative of someone with a spinal cord injury. This year we supported 184 relationships, with 85% reporting an increase in at least five of seven positive coping strategies.

We have also focussed our time on developing Mentorloop, which empowers our mentors and mentees to arrange and book mentoring sessions, set goals and share resources. Mentorloop will enable us to meet growing demand for our mentoring service and achieve our aim of mentoring three times more people.

The Back Up Lounge, our online space where people affected by spinal cord injury can connect with others in a similar situation, continues to run fortnightly, offering an informal and supportive environment for injured people and their families to share experiences. More than 900 people attended the Lounge over the past year, and we continue to develop different themed break out groups based on participants' feedback.

"Mentoring has been brilliant because it's like you can talk to someone who knows what you're going through. This came out of nowhere and changed my life. I could tell him how I felt. It's nice to talk to someone who gets it."

We have been working to develop our family support service this year. With ongoing restrictions around family members accessing the spinal cord injury centres we were pleased to exceed our target of registering 120 families, reaching 130 in total. We took part in nine family support events. 98% of attendees reported feeling more supported as a result of joining.

Family members have a dedicated breakout group in the fortnightly Back Up Lounge. This is often one of the most well attended. We also supported 58 family mentoring relationships in 2021/22.

"I was just watching the video of people's experiences with Backup, which made me cry again, but in a good way. It reiterated to me how important you all are and that what you are all doing makes a huge difference to so many lives"

We have made real progress towards achieving this goal. In August 2021, we were delighted to secure a three-year agreement with NHS England for the delivery of our 'Back Up on Track' programme. This work is intended to better integrate Back Up support into the NHS spinal services rehabilitation pathway. By having a weekly presence in the centre, Back Up's outreach staff can engage with patients to develop bespoke packages of support made up of our range of services and resources. The programme is currently running in Salisbury, Stoke Mandeville, and Sheffield spinal cord injury centres with plans to expand across all centres in England over the next three years.

"Back Up is an organisation that has been happy to support and collude with my desire to overcome the odds."