

Transforming Lives Strategy Review

Goal	2025 Year Aims	Progress Over Strategy
<p>Living Confidently: people with a spinal cord injury have the confidence and practical skills to get the most out of life</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>At the outset of Back Up's Transforming Lives Strategy, we believed 2,500 people sustained or were diagnosed with a spinal cord injury every year, in the UK. In 19/20, we registered 873 people affected by spinal cord injury. In 24/25, we registered 1458 people, a 67% increase.</p> <p>Throughout the course of the strategy, Back Up has significantly expanded both the depth and breadth of its support services. As a result, the total number of people we support each year has grown by 76%, increasing from 1,658 to 2,921 individuals in 24/25. We have achieved this growth even with the impact of the pandemic stopping our ability to engage within hospital settings for more than a year.</p> <p>In 19/20, we had one team member in Scotland, while the rest of our outreach team was based in South East England. We now have team members based across the UK, including two team members in Wales and one in Northern Ireland. We have dedicated team members linked to every spinal cord injury centre.</p> <p>The challenge to reach everyone affected by spinal cord injury is much bigger than originally thought. The NHS released new data showing that over 4,700 people sustained a spinal cord injury in 24/25. That's one person every two hours. This is made significantly harder as almost four out of five people do not get to specialist spinal cord injury centres.</p>
	<p>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 wherever they may be in the UK.</p>	<p>In 19/20, Back Up had no digital courses. Over the course of our Transforming Lives strategy, we have developed a wide range of digital tools and online offers, all of which are designed to support our in-person courses and give people more options to engage with Back Up. This includes: The Back Up Lounge, our support group where no spinal cord injury topic is off limits; The Back Up Bug, our friendly chatbot; What Next?, our course for people in the first 12 months after injury; and our Wheelchair Skills App.</p> <p>We have also introduced a translation service to help ensure that people who do not have English as their first language can fully engage.</p>
	<p>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.</p>	<p>Over the course of our Transforming Lives Strategy, we have evolved the support that we are providing to people who want to get back to work or volunteering. This includes developing a targeted programme for people who are unable to or unwilling to go back to their pre-injury job.</p> <p>We have deepened our relationships with corporate organisations looking to support more people with disabilities in their workforce and have successfully trialled work placements.</p> <p>We have also reached Disability Confident Employer Status and are working towards Leader status.</p> <p>We were delighted to win the Sunday Times Spotlight Award for Best Place to Work for Disabled People.</p>

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<p>Thriving at any Age: all people with a spinal cord injury are able to reach their full potential.</p>	<p>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 to help them live well. 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.</p>	<p>Following our work to develop a Children and Young Person's Spinal Cord Injury Pathway, we have introduced an accredited Information, Advice, and Guidance Service to support parents and young people to access the support they need, at the right time, whether it be from the NHS, schools, colleges, or other organisations.</p>
	<p>By 2025, we will ensure our support will be 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 have increased our resources for people who are ageing with spinal cord injury and have established a course for newly injured people who have sustained a spinal cord injury later in life.</p>	<p>Our three year pilot with NHS England (Aug 21 - July 24) enabled us to develop our understanding of the true impact of our services. Whilst each individual is different, we now have a better understanding of which combination of services can have the most impact at the right time.</p> <p>Throughout the course of our Transforming Lives Strategy, we have laid the groundwork to transform our underpinning data and systems infrastructure.</p>
	<p>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.</p>	<p>No other charity in the UK provides dedicated services for children and young people with a spinal cord injury.</p> <p>Over the course of our Transforming Lives Strategy, we have reviewed and relaunched key sources of information, advice, and guidance for children and young people, their parents, and professionals.</p>

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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	<p>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</p>	<p>Over the course of the Transforming Lives Strategy, we introduced 'Mentorloop' to enable us to scale our mentoring service. This platform allows mentors and mentees to communicate directly.</p> <p>We were delighted to win the Mentoring Awards 'Most Impactful Mentoring Programme' for three years running; 2022, 2023, and 2024. We also received the Scottish Mentoring Network Quality Award 2024.</p> <p>In 19/20, we matched 102 people with a trained mentor.</p> <p>In 24/25, we matched 201 people with a trained mentor. Whilst we have doubled the number of people receiving mentoring, we have maintained the quality of the service, with 96% of mentees achieving their personal aim.</p> <p>We have also introduced Back Up Connect, a service that connects people affected by spinal cord injury for one-off conversations. This acts as a gateway service to mentoring. In total, we established 397 connections in 24/25.</p>
	<p>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.</p>	<p>Over the course of the Transforming Lives Strategy, we have introduced a completely new approach to working with family members.</p> <p>As well as family mentoring, family days, the What Next? online course to support family members in the early days post injury, dedicated Back Up Lounge spaces for family members, we now offer Family Plans where family members highlight their goals and we work with them to show all that is possible.</p> <p>In 19/20, we delivered 10 relatives days and engaged 69 family members. Over the course of the strategy, we have seen a 187% increase in the number of family members engaged.</p>
	<p>By 2025, we will be integrated into the NHS's spinal services rehabilitation pathway in order 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.</p>	<p>When we embarked on our Transforming Lives Strategy, Back Up had no NHS or statutory funding. Through the course of the strategy, Back Up secured and delivered four separate NHS agreements, each enabling us to work more closely with professionals and, ultimately, deliver for people with a spinal cord injury.</p> <p>We now have outreach team members linked to each of the UK's spinal cord injury centres, allowing for closer working relationships.</p>

Components of Success

Being Peer Driven

The majority of our team either have, or are affected by, spinal cord injury. This lived experience shapes every service we offer and our approach. We will continue to engage with people affected by spinal cord injury about what matters to them so that we can ensure that Back Up provides the right support at the right time.

Growing Fundraising to Meet our Ambition

Our strategy is ambitious. To achieve our goals, we will need to significantly increase our investment in our charitable objectives. We will implement a sustainable fundraising plan that adds £1 million to our income per year by 2025. By making better use of our data, we will gain new insight into our donors and improve our donor journey. We will diversify our income streams offering flexible ways for people to support us.

Developing and Empowering our People

We will embrace a learning culture to increase knowledge and performance. We will do this through peer-to-peer learning experiences, encouraging staff development through innovative working practices and creative thinking. We will align our staff development plans with our strategy and business plans to ensure our staff have the skills and tools they need. We will learn openly from mistakes, celebrate success and apply these principles to our wider volunteer team and board of trustees. We will actively continue to ensure that wellbeing is central.

Harnessing Technology

Using new technology, we will innovate to increase impact, by creating digital versions of our key services so we will be able to reach more people virtually. These will complement our face-to-face services and increase our insight of the changing needs of our service users. We will build on learnings from virtual events to offer a mix of ways people can engage with Back Up and pilot the use of new platforms to drive competitive fundraising in challenge events.

Being Inclusive

We want Back Up to be a place where everyone feels welcome. We will do more to reach a diverse range of people affected by spinal cord injury and ensure that we are more reflective of the population we serve. This will be reflected in the stories, images and video we use for communications and marketing, as well as in our partnerships and volunteer recruitment. Our newly established Diversity and Inclusion Group will work to remove barriers which prevent people from engaging with Back Up. Our board will continue to have at least 50% representation of people affected by spinal cord injury. We will continue to ensure our calendar of fundraising and services events are inclusive for all those we serve.

Progress Over Strategy

The Back Up team has grown from 31 team members to over 60. The majority of our services team are directly affected by spinal cord injury. As we have grown, we have continued our commitment to ensuring that lived experience shapes our service, offer, and approach.

We ended the 19/20 financial year with a total gross income of £1.6 million. Due to the hard work of our team and our brilliant supporters we end the 24/25 financial year with an income of £3.5 million.

We see our donors and funders as partners in the possible and work hard to maintain existing relationships.

In order to reach the ambition we set ourselves at the start of our strategy, (to have an income of £2.6 million by 2025) we needed new partnerships. For the first time we developed a statutory income stream. We also developed vital new funding partnerships, such as with Motability Foundation, who share Back Up's commitment to increasing skills, knowledge, and confidence for independence.

Funding from the Welsh Lottery has, for the first time, allowed us to ensure parity of service offering within Wales.

One-off support as The October Club's Charity of the Year 24/25 allowed us to create a step change and invest in our infrastructure.

Over the course of the strategy, we introduced a new approach to managing performance which places an emphasis on learning. This is a combination of self taught, learning from each other, and formal training. All team members have been offered DiSC profiles — personalised reports outlining behavioural traits. These enable us to better understand team dynamics.

Throughout the course of the strategy, we have had all staff away days at least twice a year. Our end of year reviews allow a period of reflection on what works well and what we would like to change for the future. Back Up Think Space is the start of our planning cycle, enabling every member of the staff team to engage in our strategy, budgeting, and planning. These sessions also enable us to learn from others, this includes other charities, volunteers, NHS professionals, and people who have used our services.

In 19/20, we had no digital services. We have invested significantly in our digital offer which has been designed to complement our in-person services. This allows us to reach more people than ever before.

It is not just our external offer that has seen transformation, we have undertaken an organisation-wide review of all our systems and are on a journey that will see us continue to transform the way we use data, enabling us to better support those affected by spinal cord injury and be more responsive to our donor base.

Our staff led Diversity and Inclusion Group plays a key part in helping Back Up be a place where everyone feels welcome. Staff can feed in, shape key policies, and influence our approach to recruitment and selection.

Our Diversity and Inclusion Group has been particularly focused on ensuring that our services are welcoming to, and inclusive of, people with higher-level injuries and those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

We have introduced a translation service.

We work hard to ensure a broad spectrum of experience is represented within the stories we share.

Our Future Trustee Programme supports board diversity, ensuring key voices, such as young people with a spinal cord injury and individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, are part of our decision-making process.

Components of Success

Driving Efficiency and Effectiveness

We will continuously look for ways to become more efficient so that we can reach more people and have an even greater impact. We will improve the quality and understanding of our data to support our fundraising and to ensure we maximise the impact of our services. We will drive down our ratio of charitable to non-charitable spend from 65:35 to 70:30.

Volunteers at our Heart

Back Up was founded by volunteers and volunteering remains at the heart of everything we do. The contribution of our team of over 400 volunteers is felt throughout the whole organisation in all aspects of our work. We will find more ways for our volunteers to get involved across all departments, and strengthen the journey from service user to volunteer, ensuring volunteers are supported with the training and resources they need to succeed.

Compelling Communications

Engaging and targeted communications tell the stories of those we support and help to raise national brand awareness. We will focus on our digital and social media presence, encourage user generated content and initiate high-profile PR campaigns which positively challenge the perceptions of all that is possible with a spinal cord injury.

Committed to Collaboration

We will learn from others and work with partners to develop our services. By introducing share and learn sessions we will learn from other organisations about their experience of what works. By working more closely with other charities, the spinal cord injury centres and other organisations which can help us achieve our mission we will reduce duplication of effort and be able to target resources where needed.

Open and Accountable

We will be transparent, measurable and accountable in all that we do. We will embrace our values in our day-to-day work, and keep the needs of people affected by spinal cord injury central to all we do.

Progress Over Strategy

Over the course of the strategy, we recognised that the charitable to non-charitable spend ratio was a blunt tool which often does not give an accurate picture of what is truly effective. For example, our challenge fundraiser, The Push, where teams, including one person who uses a wheelchair, climb Yr Wyddfa (Snowden) may cost more than other fundraisers which have lower ratios, but they cannot compete on the truly life changing impact this event has. Our focus throughout the strategy has been what can we do to maximise return for people affected by spinal cord injury.

Simply put, Back Up couldn't deliver without support from dedicated volunteers across the UK. In 19/20 we had around 400 active service volunteers. Over the course of the strategy, we have grown the number of services volunteers to 475 and created new volunteer roles. Ensuring our volunteers have the right training and support is key, and we have maintained our focus on volunteer development.

Stories are central to Back Up's work. Over the course of our Transforming Lives strategy, we have continued to share real life stories, creating films and podcasts all of which are designed to encourage and inspire others who are adjusting to life following spinal cord injury.

We have increased the range of digital assets and ways that people can engage with us. We have encouraged our partners within the NHS to make use of digital assets, such as our What Next? course content and Wheelchair Skills App.

Over the course of the strategy, we have continued to work in collaboration with organisations that share our vision. From delivering wheelchair skills sessions in Horatio's Garden to working with Spinal Research to bring together a coalition of charities to obtain and share crucial data on the number of people with spinal cord injury in the UK. We also look for ways to avoid duplication, such as sharing some administrative functions with Aspire.

Partner charities and other organisations support our engagement with people who use our services. We are clear on what we do, and crucially, clear on what we do not do, which allows us to signpost individuals to other charities and organisations if they are better placed to offer support.

As well as our annual audit, over the course of the strategy we invited the NCVO to undertake an independent governance review which found: *'governance and leadership at Back Up is strong. There is an experienced and committed board, working with a competent CEO and SMT.'* (January 2023)