

Winter 2025

Headway News



The magazine of Headway - the brain injury association



Congratulations to all our wonderful finalists!



the brain injury association



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Welcome

Welcome to the Winter 2025 edition of Headway News, an edition packed with stories that celebrate ability, honour dedication, and offer support through the season's challenges.

On page 5, we explore how to navigate the festive season with a brain injury. From sensory overload to navigating traditions, our brain injury community shares practical tips and reflections on coping with Christmas, reminding us that rest, planning, and self-compassion are powerful gifts.

Turn to page 6 for a vibrant celebration of ability at the ABI Games 2025, where participants from across the UK came together to showcase their talents in sport, creativity, and life skills. It's a joyful reminder that recovery is not just about overcoming limitations but embracing what makes each person unique.

On page 10, we speak with Sir John Hayes MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Acquired Brain Injury. His insights into policy, rehabilitation, and lived experience



Colin
Morris

highlight the importance of advocacy and the vital role Headway plays in shaping national conversations.

Finally, from pages 16 to 20, we proudly introduce the finalists of the Headway Annual Awards. These inspiring individuals - survivors, carers, volunteers and staff- embody courage, compassion and commitment. Their stories are a testament to what can be achieved with support and determination.

We hope you enjoy this edition.

Colin Morris
Director of Communications



the brain injury association

Who we are

Headway is the leading UK-wide charity that supports people to rebuild their lives after brain injury through the provision of information and support services across the UK. To find out more, visit www.headway.org.uk or you can call the freephone helpline on 0808 800 2244 if you need support.

Go digital!

Subscribe to our monthly Headway News Bitesize email at:
headway.org.uk/join-our-mailing-list

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Advertising:

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Fundraising:

community@headway.org.uk

Volunteer!

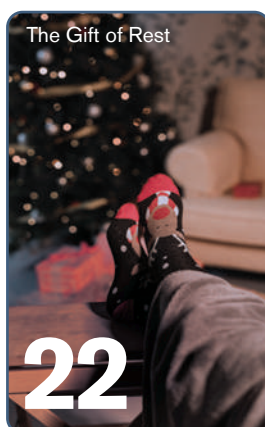
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Headway's Helpline

The Headway helpline is a free, confidential service available to anyone with a question about brain injury - from survivors and carers to students and professionals.

Run by a team of trained nurses and non-clinical staff with expertise in supporting people with brain injury, Headway's helpline aims to provide information on all aspects of acquired brain injury including symptoms, rehabilitation and practical problems. The team can also send out printed copies of factsheets, as well as helping you to find your local Headway group or branch.

The festive season can sometimes raise extra questions or concerns, but the helpline team is always just a call or email away- ready to listen, answer your queries, and provide the support you need.

The helpline is open between 9am and 5pm from Monday to Friday. This year, the helpline will close on Christmas Eve (December 24) and reopen on January 2, 2026.

Tel: 0808 800 2244

Email: helpline@headway.org.uk



Your views

How to cope with Christmas

With the 'big day' fast upon us, you might be thinking about gift lists, social plans, or getting ahead on the Christmas prep.


While the festive season can be exciting, it also brings pressure - the planning, preparation and expectations can take a huge amount of time and energy.

For people with a brain injury, it can be particularly challenging. The noise, crowds, changes in routine and sensory overload can quickly become overwhelming.

For some, this might be your first Christmas since your brain injury.


For others, it's a time of year that brings extra challenges.

We asked our community, what helps them get through the Christmas season as a brain injury survivor?




"Before my brain injury in 2018 I used to do everything - cards, presents etc. Now, we don't do any of it. My husband is a fantastic cook. He loves the food, it's a win-win. Christmas is just one other hurdle. I still have to take it one day at a time. We usually fall asleep by nine. It continues to be a process. The decline in cognitive, and now mobility loss, is impacting, so adding a stressor like social expectation is a no, no."

- Gail




"I buy gifts throughout the year and keep a list of what the gift is and who it's for on my phone. My mum has a book she has filled in every Christmas since I was born - it really helps. I can tick off each person once the gift is wrapped."

- Jo



"I book into a nice hotel, just local, usually for about four nights and get waited on; big deep baths with frequent visits to the bar and films galore, sat on my bed eating treats....seriously, this is what I do and no Christmas stress!"

- Mark



"Wrap as you buy. Tree up one day, decorating another day. Plan and prepare anything in advance. Small chunks on separate days. Online shopping. Access mobility aids."

- Lorna

Celebrating ability at The ABI Games™ 2025

Returning for a third year, Headway Worcestershire proudly hosted the national ABI Games™ on 20th August 2025 at the University of Worcester Sports Arena.

Welcoming adults from across the UK living with acquired brain injuries (ABI), the Games offered more than just friendly competition. With four diverse categories - Physical Activities, Creative Expression, Cognitive Skills, and Life Skills - there truly was something for everyone.

From walking tennis to dominoes, pottery to preserve-making, participants embraced the chance to try new things, connect with others, and be celebrated for who they are. For those unable to attend in person, the Creative Expression and Life Skills categories were also open to remote entries, making this a truly inclusive national event.

Headway groups travelled from across the country to take part, uniting participants, carers, volunteers, and supporters under one roof. Over 70 volunteers helped make the day a success, alongside key partners such as the LTA and Irwin Mitchell.

"I can't believe how well it's actually gone," said Emma Hamel, Development Manager at Headway Worcestershire. "We've had some incredibly happy people taking part. It's just gone absolutely brilliantly."

The venue was alive with laughter and creativity - boccia, bowls, and walking football played out alongside art, photography, cake tasting, and cognitive challenges like chess, quizzes, and Uno.

"What I love about the ABI Games," Emma added, "is that it's not just sport. It's very much all-inclusive, people choose what they want to do. Some go for creative, others for life skills or sport. It just shows that everybody can be part of something."

For Mandie Fitzgerald, CEO of Headway Worcestershire, the event is a strong reminder of what the community can achieve.

"It's not about disability - it's about ability. That's what the ABI Games are here to celebrate."

"No acquired brain injury is the same journey," she continued. "It's so unique and diverse for each individual. But it's always about what people can do - and this event is about celebrating that."



The Games also served to raise awareness about the often-invisible challenges people face. While participants may shine on the day, many will experience days of recovery after.

"Fatigue is massive," Mandie explained. "Yes, today they're fine to take part, but tomorrow or next week they could be in bed. That's the part people don't always see."

"The awarding is quite nice," said Emma. "It's not about points. If they see someone's putting in great effort, they'll get a certificate. That means a lot."

With so many heartfelt moments, from personal breakthroughs to supportive cheering crowds, the impact went far beyond the arena.

"Everybody's story is so unique," Mandie reflected. "And the carers and support workers - you could see how proud they were. It's humbling."

With demand growing and feedback glowing, organisers are already thinking about what's next.

"We've probably outgrown the arena in some ways," said Mandie. "They want badminton, archery... But people also like to know what to expect, so keeping the format familiar is key."

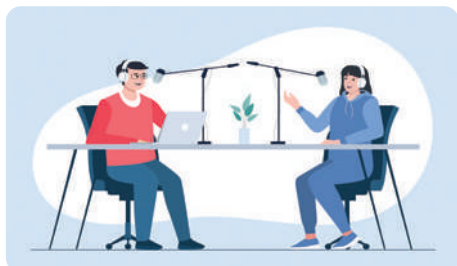
The Games are held every two years, and organisers are committed to keeping the inclusive, empowering spirit at the heart of every future event.

"I'm really proud that we created this," Mandie added. "I want it to grow bigger, better, and more chocolatey forever."

Channel 5 captured the magic of the day in a news segment, which you can find on the official ABI Games website.

More than a day of fun, the ABI Games gave people space to be seen, supported, and proud of what they've achieved. Every participant received a certificate, medal, and hat, with prizes awarded for effort, not just results.

Headpods returns with deeper stories, expert voices, and truths about life after brain injury



The acclaimed podcast series *Headpods* from Headway Norfolk and Waveney is back with its third season, offering even more powerful storytelling, expert insight, and connection for anyone affected by brain injury.

Presented by Emma Martins and produced in partnership with the University of East Anglia media studies team, *Headpods* delivers a deeply personal perspective on living with brain injury.

After surviving a life-altering brain injury caused by a viral infection, Emma, a

former television producer, turned her recovery journey into a platform for others. Her empathy and lived experience shape every episode, creating a safe space for honest conversations and shared understanding.

Season 3 introduces a new format that pairs personal stories with professional insights, offering listeners a fuller picture of life after brain injury. Highlights include:

- **Terry's Story:** Living with aphasia after a stroke, alongside expert input from lecturer in speech and language therapy Elissa Manzi.
- **David's Journey:** Regaining independence through driving, with support from East Anglian DriveAbility.
- **Lisa's Recovery:** Returning to work after injury, with commentary from cognitive researcher Dr. Stephanie Rossit.
- **Legal Perspectives:** Colin Cook of Hatch Brenner discusses advocacy

and compensation with a special focus on complex cases involving brain injuries.

- **Medical Insight:** Consultant in rehabilitation medicine, Dr. Harilal shares his clinical and trustee experience.
- **Emma's Full Circle:** A moving finale featuring Emma's mother and support worker - they reflect on their roles in Emma's recovery and the emotional impact of brain injury, not just on the survivor but on friends and family members too.

Whether you're newly navigating brain injury or have lived with its effects for years, *Headpods* offers education and solidarity. Tune in to *Headpods* and discover why storytelling is one of the most powerful tools for healing.

Headpods was kindly sponsored by Hatch Brenner Solicitors.

<https://headway-nw.org.uk/resources/podcasts/headpods-series-3>

Comic Creation Sparks Creativity at Headway Suffolk

At Headway Suffolk, creativity and rehabilitation have come together in a unique and inspiring way.

Brendan, a service user and brain injury survivor, recently created a comic book that has captured the imagination of staff and clients alike. It all began with a beach party, where Brendan took photos and later transformed them into a comic-style story. Impressed by his creativity, staff encouraged him to develop a full comic book, with support from the occupational therapist and other team members.

The project quickly became a collaborative effort. Fellow clients contributed captions, turning the comic into a shared rehabilitation activity that fostered teamwork, communication, and artistic expression. Using photo-to-comic software, the team brought real moments to life in cartoon form, adding a playful twist - part of the fun is guessing who's who in the illustrations!

The comic has received glowing feedback from everyone who's seen it, and the initiative has now expanded. Clients are working on comics for each department, showcasing Headway Suffolk's services in a fresh, engaging way.



Bev Thomas

– Headway York tribute

It is with great sadness that Headway York share some very sad news.



Headway York Chairperson Beverley 'Bev' Thomas passed away on September 1, following a short but aggressive and terminal illness.

Bev was a longstanding and committed volunteer of Headway York for 17 years and was instrumental in keeping the branch going through both the good times and the more challenging.

She was the first point of call for new enquiries and attended many of the socials.

She was always up for giving things a go and members remember her infectious smile and the fun they had, particularly at bowling and crazy golf!

Bev was keen to make sure that everyone felt welcome and was always there to support those that had sustained a brain injury, especially anyone experiencing loneliness, having had the same experience herself.

Headway York are going to miss Bev enormously. Love and support

goes to her partner, Alex, and her family and close friends.



1st Anniversary celebrations for North East Fife



Headway North East Fife celebrated their first year as a Headway branch in style in September – with a party!

Set up by Graham Geddes and Roy Verner to support brain injury survivors, their families and carers in the St Andrews and North East Fife area, the branch has increased their support from monthly to fortnightly activity sessions at their new venue at St Andrew's Community Hospital.

Their first anniversary party was held at Craigtoun Country Park where branch

members and volunteers were joined by friends and supporters, as well as a piper and local singer who provided entertainment.

Chairperson Graham was inspired to set up the branch after attending Headway Perth and Kinross as a volunteer. He knew there was a need for a similar support group in the St Andrews area and so, together with committee members and support from Maria Burnett, Network Support Coordinator at Headway UK, the branch was formed.

Graham said: "I can't believe we're one year old already- it feels like only yesterday we launched!

"I am so very proud of all our members. I have watched them all grow as individuals within this last year during our fortnightly meetings.

"Thank you to everyone who attended our first anniversary birthday party to mark the special occasion."



Maria Burnett, Network Support Coordinator for Scotland, said: "North East Fife is a large area which had a large gap in support for people affected by brain injury, but when I met Graham and Roy at a brain injury conference, I knew I had found the solution.

"Graham is passionate about providing support for those with brain injury, and is always full of ideas, going much more than the extra mile! With Roy and Jean's support the area now has a successful, welcoming, and thriving branch, where people can be themselves in a safe environment. Nothing is insurmountable and they are a credit to Headway on what can be achieved."



“Headway changes lives”

Speaking with brain injury survivor and Parliamentary Champion Sir John Hayes MP



Sir John Hayes MP has been a long-standing friend and supporter of Headway. As one of our Parliamentary Champions, he regularly speaks up for people living with brain injuries in Parliament, working closely with us to advocate for much-needed change. First elected in 1997, he's been an MP for almost 30 years and now sits as a backbencher outside of Government.

Most recently, he became Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Acquired Brain Injury - a cross-party group of MPs committed to raising awareness and pushing for better support. Under his chairmanship, the group has secured a parliamentary debate on brain injury and hosted events in Westminster, giving survivors a voice at the heart of government.

Speaking of his work with the APPG, Sir John said: “We’ve developed an important report, which makes a series of recommendations. If I were to sum them up – they’re about a step-change in how brain injury is regarded in public policy.”

The APPG’s recommendations include a statutory right to neurorehabilitation, a funding mechanism for community rehab services, and better use of data. These recommendations are being communicated to key government strategies, including the NHS 10-year plan and the Department of Health and Social Care’s ABI Action Plan.

But Sir John is clear this is not just a health issue. “We need a cross-departmental approach across government,” he says, pointing to the justice, education, and wider social impacts of brain injury. “And we’ve just decided to take that forward by means of tabling parliamentary questions and requesting a meeting with the Secretary of State and Ministers of State to directly make those recommendations.”



While the UK Government develops its plans, Headway continues to deliver vital reablement services in communities across the UK. Sir John is clear about the essential role our local charities play. "The public sector needs to work with the charitable sector," he says. "There's nothing wrong with that, but it deserves the support in doing so." His words land with weight. In just the past two years, six Headway charities have been forced to close their doors for good.

He explains that while the NHS handles the immediate trauma after a brain injury, the challenges continue at home and that community-based support provided by local Headways are vital. "It's what comes after that... that's where the process becomes more subtle because it deals with the aftermath of trauma", he said. Recovery from brain injury, he adds, is rarely straightforward. The effects are often lifelong and need the right support.

What about planned reforms to welfare support, which have caused anxiety for many survivors? Sir John is critical of government cuts in relation to any negative impact on brain injury survivors who genuinely need a financial safety net. He said: "What we mustn't have is a welfare system that is too simplistic, too crude to respect and respond to those complexities."

He believes vocational rehabilitation from brain injury is about more than learning new skills. It's about perspective and rebuilding confidence. "Part of Headway's role, as well as helping people to improve their skills, their competencies," he says. "It's also about helping with their mindsets, coming to terms with an injury."

Sir John reflects on his own experience of brain injury as a young man. It didn't stop him from pursuing his childhood goal of becoming an MP - an ambition he's held since the age of seven! But he knows how differently things could have turned out and how the experience has shaped his outlook on life.

"When your life's threatened as mine was, that could have very easily killed me or left me profoundly disabled, I had a huge gratitude, sense of relief and delight in life."

"Headway changes lives," for those in their darkest times, he concludes, praising the "experience, expertise, dedication and commitment" of charity staff and volunteers across the UK.

"Headway brings light to that darkness through the skills and commitment which is at its heart", he adds.

Ask your MP to become a Headway parliamentary champion

Headway's Parliamentary Champions have committed to work alongside us to increase understanding of brain injury and lobby for policy and legislative change to make the country a better place for those living with acquired brain injury.

Since the 2024 election, we've doubled our number of Champions. The more dedicated politicians we have, the louder a voice we have in parliament. Write to your MP (or other parliamentarians) directly using writetothem.com. Please contact richard.wood@headway.org.uk, if you need any support with this.



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***RUNNING** for George*



Friend conquers Alpine Marathon, raising £12k for Headway

London runner Ben Derrick took on a gruelling mountain marathon in honour of his childhood friend who sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI), raising over £12,000 for Headway UK in the process.



Ben, 26, from Islington, ran the Jungfrau Marathon in Switzerland on September 6, in homage to his childhood friend George Clarke, who sustained a TBI last year when he was hit by a car while holidaying in Greece.

George, also 26, from Chelsea, was in a coma for two weeks and spent two and a half months in hospital recovering, undergoing regular physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy.

The collision also left George – who now supports Headway UK to utilise AI in their work – with a shattered left kneecap, which required a full knee reconstruction.

Ben's Jungfrau Marathon endeavour saw him pushed to his limits as he took on the

26.2 mile run while ascending 6,407 feet (1,953 m) through the Swiss Alps – the equivalent of one and a half times the size of the UK's tallest mountain, Ben Nevis.

Ben's epic fundraiser is not only testament to the power of friendship but will support dozens of others across the UK affected by brain injury as he raised an incredible £12,238 for Headway UK.

Ben said: "The run was incredible, with some of the most spectacular views I've ever seen.

"The sheer number of runners surprised me, but it created a brilliant atmosphere – with moments to chat, share the journey, and soak up everyone's positivity.

"We wound into the Lauterbrunnen Valley surrounded by waterfalls, rivers, and the looming mountains I'd soon be climbing.

"The support from locals was unforgettable: bells ringing, Bernese horns echoing, and children lining the route with hands outstretched for high fives."

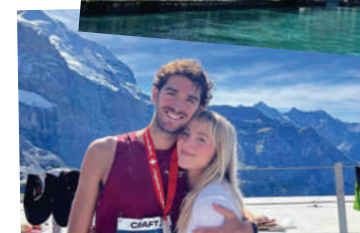
Ben said the last 5km of the run was "brutal", with altitude, fatigue and a knee injury taking its toll.

"Crossing the line brought immense relief," he said.

"And a touch of sadness that the challenge was over.

"I finished mid table out of just over 4000 people, which although initially disappointing after all my training, but with my knee and London being an incomparable training environment, I am happy with the result!

"This was a team effort from everyone who donated. Together, we've smashed the fundraising target for Headway – something I can hardly believe. Thank you all, from the bottom of my heart."



MEET HEADWAY'S CHRISTMAS CARD COMPETITION WINNERS 2025!

This holiday season, Headway's collection of beautifully crafted Christmas cards is doing more than spreading festive cheer – they're sharing powerful stories of recovery and creativity.

This year we're proud to showcase FOUR winners in our Christmas Card competition. Each card features a wonderful festive scene designed by a talented artist and brain injury survivor.

WINNER!
Jenny Hyslop
Brain Injury Survivor



Jenny Hyslop is a brain injury survivor who finds healing, joy, and therapeutic comfort through painting. Created using watercolours, her Christmas Post Box design reflects her love for family and her passion for art.

Jenny, 54, from Devon, lives with a grade 3 Anaplastic Astrocytoma. Diagnosed in 2021, she has undergone three surgeries, as well as chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Jenny said: "Currently the tumour is stable. Art and painting have always been a hobby of mine but since my diagnosis I've been able to put more time to creating artwork and this also is a therapy to me.

"For my Christmas Post Box card, I got the idea from a photo of my niece and nephew. I like the traditional look."

Jenny has used the Headway website to find out information about driving licences. She is also a Brain Injury Identity Card holder.

She said: "The ID card is helpful as I can show the card if I get confused in certain situations to help explain my brain injury and symptoms."

WINNER!
Grace Porter
Brain Injury Survivor



Headway East Lothian SCIO service user Grace Porter used paints to create her colourful Snowperson design, reflecting the evolving nature of gender identity.

Grace, 72, sustained an anoxic brain injury as a result of a cardiac arrest and has issues with her word finding, concentration, information processing and fatigue.

Painting helps her manage her conditions, and she now shares her love of art by leading group lessons at her local Headway group.

Headway has supported Grace for around 10 years, providing a safe space where she can express her feelings and receive support from her peers.

Grace has used her ID card to help her navigate systems such as public transport and public spaces when she can have difficulty expressing herself clearly.

She is a keen learner and is always willing to try new things and take part in new activities.

Grace is looking forward to celebrating Christmas with her beloved Maine Coon cat Sapphire.



WINNER!
Phillipa Ward
Brain Injury
Survivor



After her brain injury, Phillipa Ward, from Leicester, found joy and expression through watercolours. Her Christmas Cactus design reflects the challenges, humour, and uniqueness of seeing the world a little differently.

Phillipa, 47, lives with a congenital heart defect and has undergone multiple heart surgeries, leading to her brain being starved of oxygen at times.

Phillipa uses a website prompt to help generate ideas for her artwork. When designing her festive card, the prompt given was "Christmas Cactus".

"I looked up photos online for reference, but it gave me pink flowered plants", she said.

"I was surprised. Although they were Christmas cacti, I'd not expected those pictures.

"My brain injury means I don't always think the same way as other people; in my mind all I saw were fun novelty cacti dressed up for Christmas with their wobbly eyes and Santa hats, so I painted that instead.

"Now it's finished I think it's a good analogy for brain injuries. People keep their distance a little because, like a cactus, sometimes I come across as a little prickly. Fatigue can make my eyes a bit wobbly, and multicoloured flashy lights bring sensory overload. The wires remind me of all the complexities of life that feel like they tangle me at times in confusion, yet overall there's a sense of fun.

"You might stand alone in your own little pot, but life can be fun when you learn a new way - which is where Headway leads the way."

Phillipa has utilised Headway's website, publications and factsheets and is a Brain Injury ID card holder.

"Headways factsheets are my ongoing brain care; the place we can find answers and tips to help cope better.

"I learned through the factsheets about 'errorless learning'. The pictures of the 'real' Christmas cactus might have looked overwhelmingly difficult to me, but this is my Christmas cactus, my way, and that's ok."



WINNER!
Karen Warner
Brain Injury
Survivor



Headway Shropshire service user Karen Warner used watercolours to create her bright, Christmassy design, featuring Santa and some of his energetic reindeers.

If she could have used sequins and buttons she would have as Karen is a fan of everything that sparkles!

Karen attends Headway Shropshire's Community Wellbeing Centre one day a week.

She says it means a lot to her to be able to connect with others who share a similar experience. Karen loves expanding her social circle and connecting with new people.

It's not too late to get your Headway Christmas cards!

Simply scan the QR code below or visit our website to buy any of our winners designs and more. Every purchase made helps improve life after brain injury.



Meet your finalists



Alex Richardson Achiever of the Year Award

Sponsored by Slater & Gordon

This award celebrates the outstanding determination, strength, and courage of brain injury survivors.



David White

Newport Wales

"David is a true inspiration and role model. I couldn't be prouder of him."

(Stacey Davies, David's partner)



In September 2020, David had a fall after a paint balling day with friends, causing part of the right side of his skull to break. He was placed in a medically induced coma and spent eight weeks in hospital, undergoing two surgeries and a titanium plate placed in his skull.

After four months receiving rehabilitation, David was keen to connect with other survivors, share his experience and volunteer his time.

David created NeuroBuds, a supportive community for both brain and spinal patients, which shares regular stories, Infograms and signposts people to services.

He volunteers at his local neuro rehabilitation ward and is also a regular member of Headway Cardiff and South East Wales.

David was nominated for the accolade by his proud partner of two years, Stacey Davies, who says he "faces challenges head on, with a smile on his face, and is always wanting to help others."

Lorna Collins

Amersham,
Buckinghamshire

"Being recognised for what I have done with and after my brain injury turns the immense trauma into something life-affirming and positive."

(Lorna Collins)



Multidisciplinary artist Lorna sustained a TBI when she fell from her horse and landed on her head aged 18.

An artist, writer, filmmaker, and arts educator and researcher, Lorna actively advocates for brain injury survivors and raises awareness with her work, A Creative Transformation - a research project and practical service for people with brain injuries, centred around the art of creativity.

She has worked with several Headway centres across the UK, developing creative opportunities for brain injury survivors.

Lorna also helped front Headway UK's annual ABI Week campaign in May, with this year's theme 'On a good day' highlighting the fluctuating nature of brain injury.

Lorna was put forward for the award by several people, with nominators commenting on her "courage, strength and determination in working to help others with lived experience of brain injury."

Samuel Robinson

Hertfordshire

"I feel very lucky for the continual support and encouragement I receive from Headway and my family."

(Samuel Robinson)



Photographer and keen horticulturist Sam was diagnosed with a large craniopharyngioma aged 15. He underwent extensive surgery followed by six weeks radiotherapy.

Following further brain surgery and radiotherapy, Sam had a stroke, which caused significant left-sided weakness, speech impairment, and cognitive issues.

Despite setbacks and time away from education, Sam completed an honours degree in Biomedical Science from Newcastle University.

Sam has been involved with Headway for nearly 20 years, actively advocating for the charity and helping to raise awareness of life after brain injury.

Sam helped Headway Cambridgeshire (now Headway Cambridge & Peterborough) secure £25,000 in funding, part of which was selling a calendar of his photography, with all proceeds going to the charity.

The Annual Awards is the biggest event in Headway's calendar, marking its 25th year.

It's a day for celebrating dedication, growth and outstanding achievements of brain injury survivors, carers, volunteers, and others in the Headway community across the United Kingdom.

Each finalist, chosen by a selection panel, will be invited with a guest to a glittering luncheon at The Royal Lancaster in London on Friday 12 December 2025.

Here we introduce the 15 inspirational finalists across our five categories, honouring exceptional commitment throughout the Headway community.



Carer of the Year Award

This award celebrates the outstanding care and support given to someone with a brain injury.

Jo Bacon

Cambridge

"I feel so flattered and privileged to have been nominated for this."

(Jo Bacon)



Jo has been put forward for Carer of the Year for not only the full-time care she provided for her husband, but for also volunteering her spare time to help other brain injury survivors.

Jo's husband Michael attends Headway Cambridgeshire and Peterborough after sustaining an intracranial haemorrhage in 2018.

Car-enthusiast Michael - requires help with everyday tasks including getting dressed, being hoisted from his bed, washed, and feeding.

Jo cared for husband-of-38-years Michael on her own for over five and a half years.

She is also now volunteering her personal time to support other clients at the charity, including volunteering on a Friday afternoon during the charity's social session.

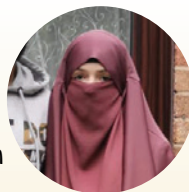
Anna Mumford, Senior Support Worker at Headway Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, put Jo forward for the award, describing her as "an amazing lady" who "always offers immense kindness".

Lorna Still

Beckton,
East London

"I was emotional when I found out I had been nominated. I'm so grateful for the support network I have."

(Lorna Still)



Wife and mum-of-six Lorna cares for husband Ali, after he sustained a brain injury during an electric bike accident in 2022, when he collided with another cyclist and landed on his head. Ali underwent a craniotomy and had half of skull on the lefthand side removed. He now lives with complex medical problems, including aphasia (a communication disorder), epilepsy, and is partially blind and deaf in the right ear.

Lorna was 16 weeks pregnant with their youngest child when Ali had his accident, giving birth whilst her husband-of-seven-years was still in hospital.

Ali attends a weekly evening session at Headway East London, where he socialises with other survivors and takes part in activities.

Lorna's friends Katie and Danielle, nominated her for the accolade for her "strength" and continually giving to others.

Volunteer of the Year Award

Sponsored by Anthony Gold Solicitors LLP

This award celebrates the outstanding contribution of an individual to Headway in their community.

AnthonyGold

Alec Williams

Cardiff, Wales

"We can always rely on him to be the first to approach new members to make sure they feel welcome and at home." (Rebecca Pearce, CEO of Headway Cardiff and South East Wales)



Brian injury survivor Alec has been nominated for Volunteer of the Year for his willingness to help others.

Alec sustained a TBI after he was assaulted outside a nightclub in June 2003 and was left on life-support.

Following his injury, Alec joined Headway Cardiff and South East Wales and has been a Support Volunteer for 20 years at the charity's weekly group session, which supports people who have the most profound disabilities as a result of their brain injuries.

In his role, Alec supports clients to socialise, take part in activities and develop and maintain skills.

One recent scenario saw Alec spring into action to help a fellow client after he became concerned about the client's no-show at the centre.

Alec agreed to check in on him on his way home with another service user, and after managing to gain access to the client's flat, they found him collapsed on the bathroom floor.

Alec waited with him for the ambulance, and he and wife Laila regularly visited him in hospital, taking care of his washing and working with Headway Cardiff and South East Wales to ensure a smooth discharge back home with the support required.

Graham Geddes

Fife, Scotland

"I was really shocked when I heard I was a finalist! It really means a lot to me."

(Graham Geddes)



Graham set up volunteer-led branch Headway North East Fife in September 2024, to provide information, support and companionship to brain injury survivors across the St Andrews and wider North East Fife area.

Graham started out as a volunteer at Headway Perth and Kinross and was inspired to set up the North East Fife branch after noticing a gap in available and accessible support in the area.

Graham was put forward for the award by two members, Karen Wallace and Donalda Annan.

Karen said: "Graham has our branch at heart in every way possible. From providing information, planning sessions and activities, and raising the branch's profile to supporting more people affected by brain injury in the area - nothing is too much trouble for him."

Donalda added: "He has done amazingly well at setting up Headway North East Fife and ensuring there is a service for survivors like myself in the area."

Rachel Lees

Newcastle Upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear

"It is so lovely to feel valued and I am honoured to have even been nominated for this award!"

(Rachel Lees)



Occupational therapist Rachel has been a committed member of Headway Tyneside for 13 years.

Here she is not only as a trustee, clinical advisory team member, and safeguarding lead, but also a regular group leader, volunteering to deliver evening social group sessions for members.

Rachel, who supports clients with her work at Neural Pathways, was instrumental in setting up Headway Tyneside's weekly Tuesday Night Social Group 13 years ago, a group that the charity runs, in collaboration with the NHS.

In her trustee role at the charity, Rachel brings to committee meetings her in-depth knowledge of Headway Tyneside members, and their responses to the activities and initiatives that they offer.

Jo Wallis, Specialist Clinical Lead at Headway Tyneside, put Rachel forward for the award, and said she is always available on the end of the phone, offering a listening ear.

Stephen McAleese Outstanding Contribution to Headway Award

This award celebrates the outstanding contributions to the work of Headway made by survivors, carers, volunteers and supporters over an extended period.

Christine Wells

Scunthorpe

"Chris has worked tirelessly over the last 30 years and made such a difference to so many individuals."

(Julie Parker, Chair of Headway Partnership North Yorkshire and Humber)

Christine became a founding member of Headway Scunthorpe and North Lincolnshire in 1998 after seeing the demand for additional support for brain injury survivors, their family, friends and carers in the area.

Chris retired from her health role eight years ago, but still continued with the branch across various areas, including using her OT skills to support people, organising meetings and ensuring the branch maintained funds by holding events, coffee mornings, afternoon teas, summer fetes, and hosting raffles and tombolas.

Chris has also been an active member of the Humber and North Yorkshire ABI Network, attending meetings and day conferences, promoting Headway and the resources it can offer both locally and nationally.

Julie Parker, Occupational Therapist and Chair of Headway Partnership North Yorkshire and Humber, nominated Chris for her compassion and client-centred work.

Julie said: "Chris has ensured that members of Headway Scunthorpe and North Lincolnshire receive the services they need to help them face life after brain injury, and made sure they did not feel alone."



David & Christine Wilsons

Barrow-in-Furness

"Christine and David are the essence of volunteer exemplars."

(Glenys Marriott, chairperson of Headway South Cumbria)

David and Christine are Fundraising Officers at Headway South Cumbria.

The pair have been committee members at the branch for over 14 years, after their son Chris sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI) following a brutal attack while on holiday in 2010.

At Headway South Cumbria, David and Christine offer individual support for members and organise fundraising events, coffee mornings and craft fairs.

They contribute to leading the Barrow-based group and organising attendance at Look Ahead in the North (LAN)- an annual residential weekend, for members of the Headway groups and branches in the North East and Cumbria.

Christine's artistic skills are always put to good use during craft projects and activities, while David is key to the success of the hydrotherapy group.

And together they make Headway South Cumbria's Christmas party a huge success, with David dressing up to become Father Christmas!

The duo were nominated by Glenys Marriott, chairperson of Headway South Cumbria, who said the couple 'go over and above everyone's expectations.'



John Caulfield

County Durham

"I am humbled that people have taken the time to nominate me for this award."

(John Caulfield)

John has been a carer for his son John Junior since 2004, when he sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI) aged 18 following an horrific road traffic accident.

Following John Junior's TBI, John and wife Angela were involved with the steering group to set up a support group which eventually became Headway County Durham.

Since then, John has been a volunteer, committee member, trustee and driving force at Headway County Durham, arranging and attending regular monthly drop-in services and advocating for brain injury survivors and their families.

He is also heavily involved in the running of the 'Look Ahead in the North' residential weekend at the Calvert Trust, Northumberland, where survivors, family members, carers and volunteers enjoy a fun filled weekend of outdoor activities and workshops.

Warren Maxwell, John's former colleague, nominated John for the accolade.

Warren said: "From representing survivors at meetings with social care professionals, doctors, and lawyers to manning stands raising the profile of Headway, John is never without a cheerful outlook and sensible suggestions."



The Headway Extra Mile Award

Sponsored by Irwin Mitchell

This award celebrates the achievements and dedication of Headway staff in supporting brain injury survivors and their families and carers.



Kim Hunter

Washington,
Tyne and Wear



"It's fantastic to be nominated in the first place, and I feel really privileged."

(Kim Hunter)

Kim, Business and Community Development Manager at Headway Wearside, started her career in the charity sector in 1989 and set up a brain injury group in 2006. She then began volunteering at Headway Wearside in 2009 when they launched.

In 2012, Kim, was appointed to the position of Business and Community Development Manager, and has been integral in organising events, therapies, activities, Christmas meals, lunch clubs, fundraising and events.

During the COVID pandemic, Headway Wearside operated remotely throughout, with Kim organising food parcels and activity packs for Headway members across Sunderland and surrounding areas, in a bid to combat social isolation.

Kim was also recently involved in a large fundraiser at shipping container village STACK Seaburn, in Sunderland, where over £4,000 was raised for the charity.

Kim was put forward for the award by Headway Wearside Chair, Paul Brown.

He said: "Kim is an unsung hero who goes above and beyond for members."

Samantha Ashcroft

Blackpool, Lancashire



"To find out I'd not only been nominated but reached the final left me truly speechless."

(Samantha Ashcroft)

Samantha joined Headway Blackpool in 2007 following the tragic loss of a close friend, Andrew, who passed away due to complications from a brain injury.

When Andrew's parents founded Headway Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde, they called on Sam to help manage the charity and coordinate activities.

Sam is a font of knowledge when it comes to the benefits system, and actively seeks out the latest training, guidance, and developments in brain injury care.

When Headway Salford, Trafford and North Manchester faced great difficulty in 2010, Sam turned the charity around by recruiting a new Board of Trustees, organising regular day-centre activities for members, and raising the charity's profile, with a new website, regular social media updates and annual fundraising events.

Kat Whitemoss, Communications Manager for Headway Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde and Headway Salford, Trafford and North Manchester, nominated Sam for the award, and said: "Thanks to Sam's efforts, countless lives have been touched, and the quality of life for many has been significantly improved."

Tracie Finnegan

Worcester



"Thank you to my CEO Mandie Fitzgerald for the nomination- it means the world."

(Tracie Finnegan)

Tracie has been an integral part of Headway Worcestershire since 2002, when she joined as an Outreach Support Worker.

She progressed into a managerial role soon after, and in 2006 she stepped into the position of Deputy Director as maternity cover.

Her impact in this role was so significant that, even after the original post-holder returned, Tracie's contribution was recognised as exceptional. As a result, her position was extended in 2007 and made permanent in 2008.

Mandie Fitzgerald, CEO at Headway Worcestershire, nominated Tracie for the accolade, sponsored by Irwin Mitchell, and said she is "always leading from the front".

Mandie said: "Tracie's selflessness and dedication go far beyond her job description, and her actions speak volumes about her character and commitment to the people we serve."

Supporting relationships after brain injury

Promising results from therapy study

As part of Headway's commitment to supporting research, we were proud to promote a recent study led by Associate Professor Gerry Riley at the University of Birmingham. The study, titled *Continuity Therapy for Couples Living with Brain Injury*, ran from April 2023 to March 2025 and focused on developing a therapeutic intervention aimed at strengthening relationships impacted by brain injury.

Brain injury can place immense strain on marriages and partnerships, yet NHS services often lack targeted therapies to address these challenges. Continuity therapy was designed to fill this gap by helping couples reflect on their relationship before and after the injury, identify areas of change, and work together to rebuild connection and resilience.

Associate Professor and lead researcher Gerry Riley explains: "Continuity Therapy is about helping couples to repair the damage caused to their relationship by the brain injury, and to see the positives in their relationship and their life together."

Sixteen couples participated in the study, receiving around ten one-hour sessions over three months. The therapy encouraged couples to explore communication, shared activities, and emotional connection, while also helping them reframe their experience - highlighting personal and relational strengths that have endured or grown since the injury.

The results were encouraging. On average, the couples showed large improvements in their relationship, and moderate improvements in their mental wellbeing and encouragingly, these improvements were still there three months later.

Participants rated the therapy highly for usefulness, with many offering heartfelt feedback. One participant shared: "Really glad that we took part. What it has achieved is fantastic - the therapy has helped. It probably stopped me from getting a divorce."

However, the study also highlighted challenges. Not all couples experienced substantial benefits, with timing and difficulty in implementing changes cited as barriers. Feedback led to refinements in the

therapy, including clearer goals and reduced repetition.

Professor Riley said: "These initial results are exciting because a strong relationship is so important to people's happiness and to how well they deal with the challenges of living with brain injury."

Given the promising outcomes, the next step is a randomised controlled trial to rigorously evaluate the therapy's effectiveness. Headway remains committed to supporting such research, ensuring that individuals and families affected by brain injury have access to evidence-based, specialised support.

To prepare for the trial, the researchers have set up an online survey about how NHS services support relationships after brain injury. If you are interested in taking part you can follow the link via the QR code and your insights will help identify gaps and inform the development of more effective, relationship-focused care.





THE GIFT OF REST

WHY SLOWING DOWN MATTERS AT CHRISTMAS

For many, Christmas conjures images of twinkling lights, bustling shops, and packed calendars.

But for those living with a brain injury, the festive season can feel more like a marathon than a celebration. Amid the noise, expectations, and sensory overload, one gift stands out as truly transformative: the gift of rest.

Brain injuries often come with invisible challenges - fatigue, cognitive strain, and sensory sensitivity - that can be exacerbated by the pace and pressure of the holidays. While others may thrive on the excitement, those with brain injuries often need to approach the season differently, prioritising rest not as a luxury, but as a necessity.

Rest isn't just about sleep. It's about creating space to recharge mentally and emotionally.

Here are five ways to slow down at Christmas and New Year – and still enjoy it!

- 1. Plan rest days into the calendar:** Schedule quiet days between events to recharge. Treat rest as a non-negotiable part of the holiday.
- 2. Simplify traditions:** Focus on a few meaningful activities rather than trying to do everything. This could be enjoying a hot chocolate with a loved one, a gentle walk in nature or getting crafty at home and making decorations. Less truly can be more.
- 3. Communicate needs clearly:** Let loved ones know what helps; whether it's shorter visits, quieter settings, or flexible plans.

4. Limit screen time and noise:

Reduce stimulation by turning off background noise and limiting time on devices. If watching a Christmas movie or listening to festive music, be present and focus on one thing at a time.

5. Give yourself permission to say no:

It's okay to skip events or traditions that feel too demanding - your well-being comes first.

So this year, consider giving yourself, or someone you love, the gift of rest. It's a powerful act of self-care, a way to reclaim the season, and a reminder that peace and presence are just as festive as glitter and gatherings.

Sometimes the most meaningful moments come not from doing more, but from doing less.

**Your gift this
Christmas means we
can be there for families
affected by brain injury,
every step of the way.**

Headway UK is a charity none of us ever expect to need, because brain injury is one of those things you never think will happen to you, or someone you love. And yet it does – every 90 seconds, in fact.

I really am so thankful to Headway UK – through it all, knowing they're there has been a total lifesaver, for both Phil's recovery and my emotional health. They've given us the tools to move forward. We set goals and break them down into small – sometimes tiny – realistic steps, cracking on with quiet determination.

It's only because of kind donations from people like you that families like mine get the help they need to keep going. Because when something so unexpected, so frightening happens, the expert advice and compassionate support Headway UK gives is invaluable.

So however much you can give this Christmas, please know you'll be making the biggest difference.

Rachel



The first Christmas after Phil's accident.

**Christmas
Appeal 2025**

£22 could fund a call to Headway UK's free, nurse-led helpline, enabling families to receive specialist support at any stage of brain injury.

£44 could provide five brain injury survivors with Headway Brain Injury Identity Cards, giving them access to the right support in social situations.

£88 could fund the production of information booklets for 50 people, giving families the information they need to navigate life after brain injury.

£228 – the average grant from our emergency fund – could cover travel and accommodation expenses, allowing loved ones to be together at the most critical moments of injury.



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REGULATOR**



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HERE**

CHRISTMAS CLEAR-OUT: TOP TIPS

A post-Christmas clear-out is a great way to reset and start the New Year feeling lighter and more organised.

Here are some top tips to help you declutter your wardrobe and home effectively.

Wardrobe decluttering tips:

1. Use the 'One-Year Rule': If you haven't worn it in the past year, chances are you won't wear it again. It could be time to let it go.
2. Sort by category: Tackle one category at a time (e.g. shoes, coats, jumpers) rather than your whole wardrobe at once.

3. Try the Hanger Trick: Turn all your hangers backwards. After wearing an item, hang it the right way. After a few months, donate anything still facing the wrong way.
4. Create a 'Maybe' box: If you're unsure about certain items, put them in a box and revisit in three months. If you haven't missed them, donate them to a Headway UK shop near you.
5. Be honest about fit and style: Keep what fits you now and makes you feel confident, not what you hope to wear someday.

Home decluttering tips:

1. Start small: Begin with a single drawer or shelf. Small wins build momentum!
2. Use the 'Four-Box Method': Label boxes: Keep, Donate, Recycle, Bin. Every item must go into one.
3. Declutter decorations: Post-Christmas is the perfect time to sort through holiday décor. Keep only what you love and use, or will re-use.
4. Set a timer: Work in 20 - 30 minute bursts to avoid feeling overwhelmed or doing too much at once. You'll be surprised how much you can do in a short time!

Shop with heart

Headway UK launches online Vinted account

Vinted

Supporting Headway's shops has never been easier with the launch of Headway's online Vinted account.

For those who enjoy shopping second-hand and who wish to support Headway's retail offering but perhaps don't live close to a Headway UK shop, now you can support the charity from anywhere in the UK, and in the comfort of your home.

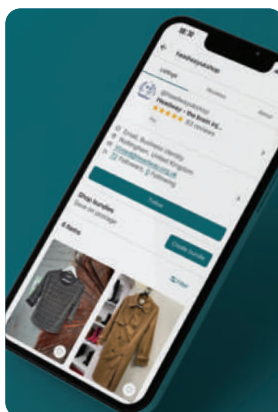
Whether you're hunting for a fashion bargain or looking to shop more sustainably, Headway's Vinted offers a curated selection of quality pre-loved clothing and accessories - all while helping to fund vital support for people affected by brain injury.

David Byrne, Head of Retail, said: "We're delighted that our Vinted account is up

and running, with quality items listed from brands you know and love including Asos, Nike, Superdry, Boohoo and PrettyLittleThing.

"With the festive season well and truly upon us, we're encouraging shoppers to browse our Vinted account to snap up a bargain for a Christmas night out, or a sustainable gift for a loved one.

"Shopping with us on Vinted not only brings holiday cheer but also supports our important charity work."



Here's how to start shopping for good:

- Download the Vinted app – available on iOS, Android, or visit buff.ly/ddHCmZ1
- Search for "HeadwayUKShop" in the app's search bar
- Browse listings – discover stylish second-hand finds
- Buy securely - Vinted's payment and shipping options make it easy
- Support a great cause – every purchase helps Headway continue its life-changing work

So why not treat yourself and make a difference at the same time? Your next wardrobe win could help change someone's life.

A day to remember: Headway Charity Golf Day raises over £17,500

Headway's Charity Golf Day in September saw 18 teams tee off for a good cause - raising over £17,500 in the process.

It's the second time the charity has hosted the event, which offers golfers of all levels an opportunity to come together, enjoy a day on the greens, and make a big difference to the lives of brain injury survivors.

Held at Carden Park Hotel and Golf Resort in Cheshire, this year's fundraising event raised an incredible £17,500 - a phenomenal amount that will go directly toward improving the lives of brain injury survivors.

After a top day on the green, attendees were treated to an inspiration talk by brain injury survivor and advocate Bruce Powell, all the way from Australia.

Bruce's talk was followed by dinner, a raffle and auction, with top prizes up for grabs including a Porsche driving experience at Silverstone!

Congratulations to David May, Jon Blythe, Lee Burns and Roy Wood, who took first place on the day, earning 101 points to win the competition.

Coming in second place were Jonathan Betts, Matthew Gibbons, Ian Sutton and Quentin Smith with 93 points.

Claire Kelly, Corporate Fundraising Manager at Headway UK, said: "A huge heartfelt thank you to everyone who took part, sponsored us and donated auction and golf prizes for our annual Charity Golf Day.

"We're especially grateful to our amazing sponsors: Irwin Mitchell, Step Ahead Support, CFG Law, and Lime Trees Care Group. Your support made this event possible, and we couldn't have done it without you.

"A big thank you also to Carden Park Hotel for hosting us so beautifully, and to Bruce Powell, who travelled all the way from Australia to share his powerful story of living with brain injury.

"This year's event was truly unforgettable — and we're already planning for an even bigger and better day in 2026."

Don't miss out next time — register your interest today: <https://buff.ly/O1URz0D>

Thank you to our fantastic prize donors!

- Carden Park Golf club
- Porsche Driving Experience, donated by Lime Trees Care Group
- Shrewsbury Golf Club
- Leigh Golf Club
- Longridge Golf Club, Preston
- Marc Darcy Menswear
- Ashton under Lyme Golf Club
- King Street Town House
- Mellor Golf Club, Stockport
- Worsely Park Marriott golf club
- Hotel Football
- Stock Exchange Hotel



RUN 48 **MILES IN OCTOBER**

Go the distance for people recovering from concussion

In 2025 we added virtual challenges – sometimes better known as Facebook challenges – to our fundraising calendar. This Autumn we were thrilled to launch our latest virtual challenge- **Run 48 Miles in October.**

Why 48 Miles?

Run48 highlighted the critical importance of the first 48 hours after suffering a concussion.

Over 1 million people visit A&E with a head injury each year – 95% are concussions, also known as a mild traumatic brain injury.

The number 48 represents the crucial period after a concussion when rest and protection are most vital and can make a significant difference in recovery outcomes. Through this initiative, we hoped to raise awareness of the seriousness of concussions, while empowering people to take action and raise vital funds.

For concussion care that starts at home. Your support helps people take the right steps in those initial 48 hours.

How did the challenge work?

Throughout October, participants were invited to run a total of 48 miles – one for every hour of the crucial 48-hour window following a concussion.

Whether a seasoned runner or just starting out, this challenge was designed to be flexible and inclusive. Participants could run at their own pace, in their own time, and wherever suits them best.

Participants signed up via the Run 48 challenge page, tracked their miles throughout October and asked friends, family, and colleagues to support them with donations.

Everyone who joined received a free beanie hat and invitation into the private Facebook Group to share running and fundraising tips, and to be part of the challenge's community. There were further prizes along the way for the top fundraisers too!

Whether you run solo or as part of a team, every step you take helps improve life after brain injury.

A huge thank you!

At the time of writing, Run48 had 1211 fundraisers running up a total of well over £15,000 to support our services. We want to say a huge thank you to each of you, and congratulations on what you have achieved through this challenge!

Why a virtual challenge?

Virtual fundraising challenges offer flexible, accessible activities that have helped us to reach new audiences, raise vital funds, and build stronger communities.

Participants can take part in the challenge from anywhere, at any



time, and tailor it to suit their own pace and ability – whether it's a daily walk, a weekend run, or a month-long fitness goal.

Despite being remote, virtual challenges foster a strong sense of connection. Social media plays a key role, allowing participants to share progress, celebrate milestones, and encourage others. This creates a ripple effect – turning individual efforts into a collective movement.

What's next?

Walk 90km in February is back for 2026! Keep an eye on our website and social media channels for more details – and get ready to walk with us in 2026!

Charles Dale **BIKE SHED**



It was a star-studded celebration in September for renowned actor Charles Dale, who marked the completion of his 3,200-mile fundraising motorcycle challenge with a special event.

Charles embarked on a mission to visit 100 biker cafés within a month to raise money and awareness for Headway UK and Brain Tumour Research, in honour of his friend Shaun Griffiths, who passed away from a bleed on the brain after a fall.

He completed 'Shaun's TT100' in 22 days, visiting a total of 103 cafés and raising over £7000 for the charities, as well as spreading awareness of brain injury and brain tumours.

Charles, who played Big Mac in the hit BBC hospital drama *Casualty*, was joined at the celebratory event at the iconic biking venue, The Bike Shed, in London, alongside famous faces from the biking community and supporters from both charities.

In attendance was actor and singer Alfie Boe, garden designer and TV presenter Danny Clarke, *Emmerdale* and *Casualty* actor Ian Kelsey, content creator Man Cave Moto, and Ian and Nicky Wilson, owners of the UK-based motorcycle clothing company Roadskin.

Also present was Saffron Wilson of *Motorcycle News (MCN)*, who championed Charles throughout his challenge, covering his epic adventure across a four-page spread.

Having raised more than £7,000 for the two charities, Charles said: "Seeing the devastating impact brain tumours and brain injuries have had on my friends' lives has been awful.

"I have been honoured to meet the most wonderful human beings; their generosity, emotional stories and support is breathtaking. As an avid biker, there is nothing quite like the biking community for its welcome and care."

Eden Harlow, Fundraising Coordinator, said: "It was a fantastic day celebrating Charles's incredible challenge, while supporting the vital work of Headway UK and Brain Tumour Research.



"The love and support Charles has received has been incredible."

"We were thrilled to have Alfie Boe and Ian Kelsey join us to help shine a light of Charles's achievement and help raise awareness of brain injury."

MISSION WALS WALS

Retired rugby stalwart and brain injury survivor David 'Jacko' Jackson ran not one but two marathons a day for a week to raise funds for two brain injury charities.

Jacko, who lives in North West Wales, ran the full length of Cymru, a route totalling 288 miles- the equivalent of running in a straight line from London over to Eindhoven in the Netherlands.

And if 288 miles wasn't enough, Jacko's 'Mission Wales' challenge saw him cover over 13,000 metres in elevation- the equivalent of going up Mount Snowdon 13 times.

elevation- the equivalent of going up Mount Snowdon 13 times. The 43-year-old former winger for Nottingham R.F.C - who scored 102 tries in 316 appearances for the club- retired in 2013 due to a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and seizure on the pitch.

Jacko, who now works as a breath coach with his company Pro Breathwork, raised over £2100 for Headway UK, as well as funds for Head for Change.

Mission Wales saw Jacko set off from St David's Head in Pembrokeshire on September 1, finishing up at Caernarfon Castle six days later.

"The last 20km into Caernarfon was a little bit of a struggle," he said.

"But we got there with a lot of help from a lot of friends.

"When I was on day two of the challenge, it struck me how far along the coast I'd come, and it was almost a metaphor for my experience with my brain injury.

"I looked back to where I had started and I thought just by putting one foot in front of the other continuously, look at where I've got to. I just saw my brain injury, and how far I've come."

Following Jacko's injury, he experienced symptoms including fatigue, sensitivity to light and depression, and said it was around a year before he got back to exercise and running.

He completed his first marathon in 2021, taking on bigger challenges in the years since, including an 100km mountain ultra run, Ultra-Trail Snowdonia, in May this year.

Jacko has said that Mission Wales is a 'warm-up' for an even bigger event next year, but he is keeping tight lipped over what that challenge entails.

He is keen to encourage survivors to focus on small steps that are within their control during recovery.

He said: "When you look at the entirety of the challenge ahead, it is overwhelming. But breaking it down helps.

"What can you do right now to take a step forward? Don't worry about later today, or tomorrow, but what's in your control that you can try to do that helps you take a step forward."



John Priest author



John with his book 'i4ni'

A children's author has exceeded his word count by some 73 times as he has penned his first adult fiction novel.

John Priest, a brain injury survivor from Dudley in the West Midlands, has released sci-fi dystopian thriller 'i4ni', which tells the story of an AI justice system capable of extracting memories to prove guilt.

John, 67, said: "My normal books are around 1000 words because they're children's books and 'i4ni' is 73,000 words!

"With a brain injury it's difficult. I'd sometimes start again the next morning and type something I'd typed the day before, because I'd forgotten what I'd written.

"It's taken me over three years. Hopefully people will like it."

Author John sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI) in his former career as a police officer.

John had only been in the force for 12 months when an early-morning car crash on the last hour of a seven-day shift schedule changed his life forever.

"It was an horrific accident," John said.

"I was the passenger in the patrol car, and we skidded around a bend in Birmingham.

"We smashed into a lamppost, and we didn't wear seatbelts back then, so, my head smashed the windscreen.

"I had over 200 stitches in my head. I remember looking at myself thinking it was like looking at Frankenstein's monster, I was so ugly and swollen. It no longer looked like me."

John explains he experienced a near-death experience at the time of the crash.

"I remember a brilliant white light and seeing an old man with long white hair and a long, white beard and dressed in a white gown/cloak. He smiled and shook his head, and I suddenly felt myself dropping, going downwards at speed, like falling down an elevator shaft. Another man, who looked exactly the same as the first, was at the bottom and also shook his head.

"And in that instant, I was awake."

Such was the time, surprisingly John only spent a day and half in hospital, but it was months later when John became to experience the effects of his brain injury.

He says his brain injury has affected his "entire life" as he struggles with memory, forgets dates and times, can't read timetables, and sometimes can't process conversations or interprets things differently.

John eventually found Headway, who helped him access a Brain Injury ID Card.

He added: "It was nice to find out that other people have got the same problems and that I'm not alone. That was a fantastic feeling, because I'm part of something now.

"I've been to a Headway charity shop in Harborne, which is the nearest one to us, and I might take some of my books along to donate."

You can purchase 'i4ni' at: www.johnpriest.co.uk/books/i4ni-science-fiction-dystopian-humanoid-thriller



John and wife Jeannette



John, Jeannette and family



HEADWAY TRAINING

With another year coming to a close, we are delighted to have hosted a range of training courses for those living with a brain injury, their families and professionals working within the brain injury field. Thank you to everyone who attended our sessions.

Training courses we have delivered this year have included:

Understanding MY brain injury

A 60-minute structured, conversational session created specifically for brain injury survivors, exploring the hidden effects of brain injury and the rehabilitation journey.

Effective communication strategies

For frontline staff working with brain injury survivors: learn to use simple, clear language, write concise and thoughtful emails, and practice active listening on phone calls to ensure meaningful, effective interactions with survivors.

An introduction to brain injury

Aimed at those professionals new to the world of brain injury, this session has been designed to provide awareness of the hidden effects of brain injury.

Understanding brain injury

A session designed for care professionals working with brain injury survivors, exploring the cognitive, emotional and behavioural difficulties individuals face following a brain injury and some strategies that can be implemented.

Navigating life after brain injury

This session for family members shows the cognitive, emotional and behavioural difficulties that can be present in brain injury survivors, while exploring the emotional challenges faced by family members.

Behaviours that challenge

A session looking at the leading models explaining behaviours that challenge and exploring strategies that could be implemented.

Goal setting

This training has been created to assist professionals and care staff in establishing SMART Goals for brain injury survivors, supporting them in achieving the highest quality of life possible

Brain injury solicitors training

Reviewing the concept of hidden disability and how cognitive and behavioural difficulties impact on quality of life and care support needed.

For details of 2026 training courses and to book your places, scan the QR code or visit headway.org.uk/training.





Leading Personal Injury and Medical Negligence Lawyers



Boyes Turner is proud to be an active supporter of Headway. Kim Milan, head of our Personal Injury team, is a Trustee of Headway Thames Valley.

Our specialist lawyers and brain injury support team have the knowledge, experience and commitment to ensure that you and your loved ones get the result you deserve and the support you need. We are more than happy to visit you in hospital or at home at times that suit you. We provide national coverage.

A special thank you to my lawyer Kim. Her input has changed everything for me. She has given my life a level of security and stability that I never thought I was capable of achieving post-accident.

Jessica Stevens

Contact Kim Milan on
0118 952 7137 or
claimsadvice@boyesturner.com
boyesturnerclaims.com

Personal yet professional legal advice.

Freeths vastly experienced Personal Injury team, led by the highly respected Jane Goulding has an unrivalled reputation for handling brain injury claims, helping our clients receive the life-changing rehabilitation and compensation they deserve.

Please call Jane today for a free introductory chat on **0345 050 3296** or email jane.goulding@freeths.co.uk



freeths.co.uk

FREETHS

Putting your life back on track

It's what we do



Prince Evans LLP is a specialist brain injury practice that focuses upon representing the interests of our clients and their families to the full.

We are understanding and knowledgeable of the multiple complexities that are experienced by all when a loved one is affected by brain injury.

We provide a free nationwide no obligation consultation to discuss respective claims and where our expertise can assist; including with potential interim payments, rehabilitation and case management and support. We offer no win, no fee funding.



For more information on how we can help, contact
Gary Smith, Head of Personal Injuries

Call free on 0800 019 0991

Email: gary.smith@prince-evans.co.uk

Gary Smith is a member of Headway – the brain injury association's Personal Injury Solicitors list



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