



2023 - 2024

BENCH OUTREACH

Annual Review

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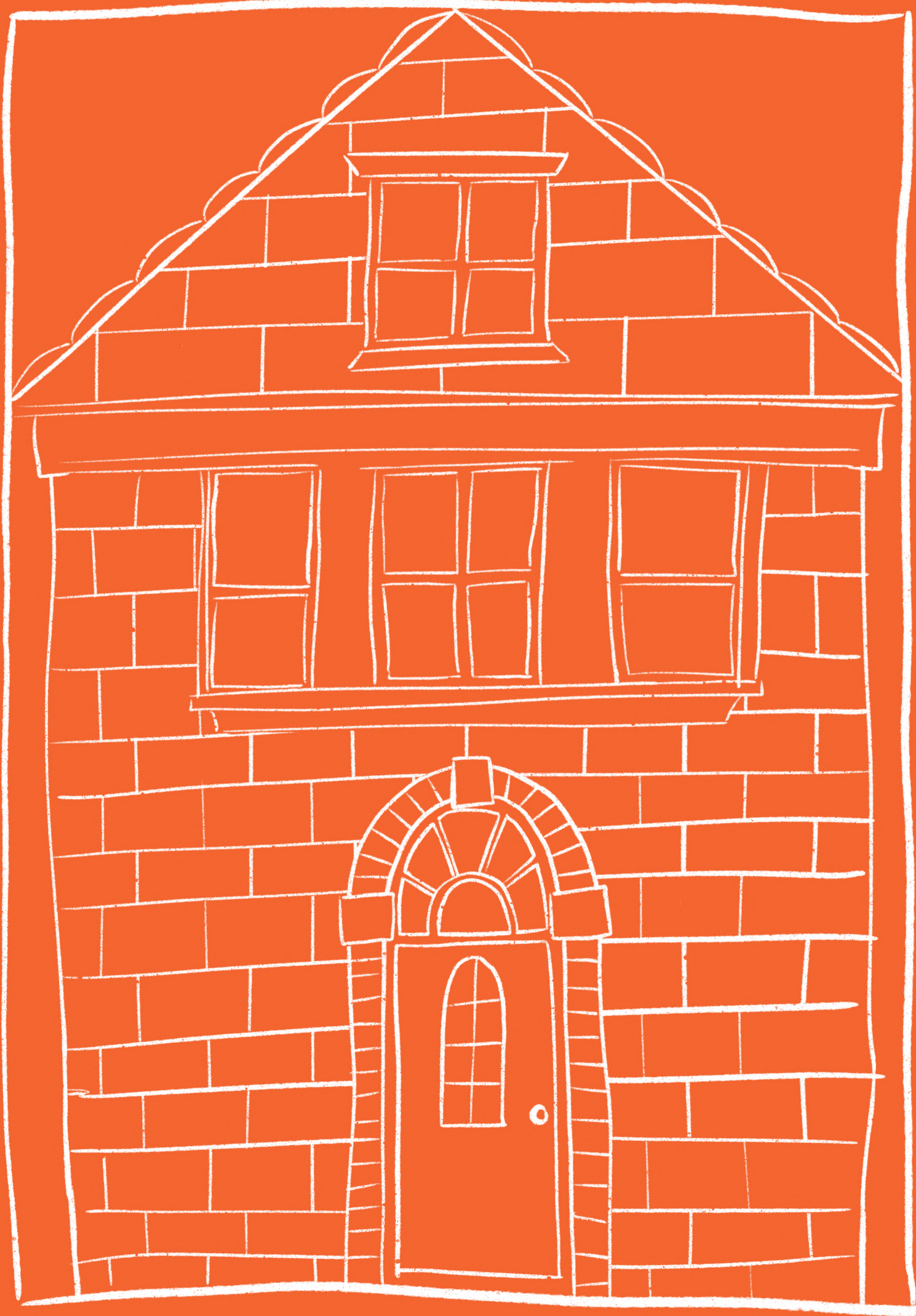


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At the root of all complex housing needs is a strong human need for empathy.

Empathy, just like housing, is a basic human need.

Empathy should be at the core of housing service provision and delivery.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



Paul Chapman
Chair Of The Board

Dear Friends and Supporters,

It is my pleasure to introduce Bench Outreach's Annual Report.

At Bench Outreach we believe that every person deserves dignity, stability, and hope. Whether through housing support, advocacy, or compassionate care, our work continues to transform lives.

The past year has seen us face a number of challenges the responses to which have been a testament to the resilience of our community, the dedication of our team, and the unwavering support of our partners and friends. Together, we have navigated difficulties, expanded our reach, and strengthened our commitment to those who rely on us most.

You'll be aware that this last year we lost our dear friend and colleague Declan Flynn. He had led Bench over the past 10 years ensuring the organisation was at the cutting edge of provision and support. Yet he always questioned why we have to be here in the first place and loved holding people to account. We miss his insights, commitment and sheer bloody mindedness but, despite the loss, have looked to build and move the organisation forward through the appointment of our new CEO. Belinda has already made a positive mark and we look forward to where the organisation will head under her leadership.

As we reflect on the past and look to the future, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you. Your support fuels our impact, and together, we are building a future where we aim to see that no one is left behind.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

CEO'S MESSAGE

Dear Partners, Friends, and Benefactors,

It is with deep gratitude and reflection that I welcome you to Bench Outreach's Annual General Meeting. As we gather to review the past year, I am reminded of the legacy upon which this organization stands—a legacy of compassion, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to those in need. Every step we take is built upon the dedication of those who came before us and the diligence of those who continue to serve today.



At Bench Outreach, our mission is not just about providing immediate relief but about fostering long-term change. Through our housing support, advocacy, and community services, we have seen lives transformed, hope restored, and barriers overcome. This is only possible because of the tireless efforts of our team, the generosity of our supporters, and the partnerships that strengthen our reach.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to upholding our values and expanding our impact. There is still much work to be done, but together, we are shaping a future where dignity, stability, and opportunity are not privileges but rights for all.

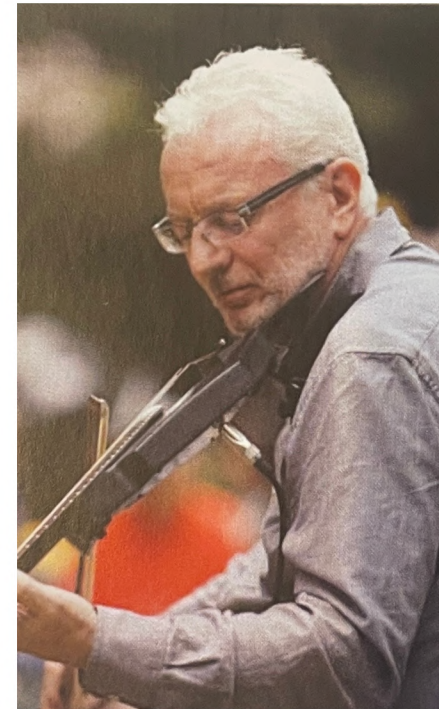
Your belief in our mission ensures that Bench Outreach's legacy endures, and our dedication to those in need remains unwavering. With your continued partnership, we will keep breaking barriers, restoring hope, and changing lives. Thank you for standing with us—we look forward to the journey ahead.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Belinda Wallace
Chief Executive Officer



REMEMBERING DECLAN FLYNN



Declan Flynn
Former CEO

At this year's AGM, we take a moment to honour and remember Declan Flynn, our much-loved and deeply respected former CEO, who sadly passed away in June 2024. Declan's unwavering determination, diligence, and compassion helped shape the strong foundation and reputation of Bench Outreach, making it the trusted and impactful organisation it is today.

His leadership was defined by his relentless commitment to those in need, ensuring that Bench Outreach stood as a beacon of hope and practical support for the most vulnerable. Through his vision, resilience, and dedication, he not only strengthened our services but also championed the rights and dignity of those experiencing homelessness and hardship.

Declan's presence is deeply missed, yet he remains an integral part of everything we do. The legacy he helped to shape continues to inspire our work, reminding us that true progress is only possible when built upon a strong past. As we move forward, we do so with gratitude, carrying his vision with us in every step.

Thank you, Declan, for your invaluable service, your unwavering belief in our mission, and the lasting impact you leave behind.



OUR PROJECTS

Access to Housing & Benefits

Advocacy at the Heart of Bench Outreach

At Bench Outreach, advocacy is at the core of our work. Our Access Team is dedicated to supporting those who are vulnerably housed, facing eviction, or struggling with financial insecurity. Through expert advocacy, we empower individuals and families to navigate complex housing and welfare systems, ensuring they receive the support they are entitled to.

Our Access Team is more than just a service—it is a lifeline for individuals and families navigating crisis situations. By advocating for housing stability, financial security, and community well-being, we continue to stand with those who need us most, ensuring that no one is left without a voice.

"I was days away from being evicted when Bench Outreach took on my case. They fought for me, helped me navigate the legal system, and got my housing situation sorted. I don't know what I would have done without them."

– David, Eviction Advocacy Client



Housing Advocacy – Preventing Evictions & Securing Stability

Many of the people we work with are at imminent risk of eviction or living in insecure and inadequate housing. Our team provides tailored advocacy support, helping clients understand their rights, challenge unfair decisions, and secure safe, stable housing. We work with individuals to address housing disrepair, navigate homelessness applications, and access emergency housing where needed.



Specialist Welfare & Benefits Advocacy – Maximising Income & Securing Entitlements

Our Welfare and Benefits Specialists work tirelessly to ensure that those most in need are receiving the financial support they are entitled to. Through income maximisation strategies, tribunal representation, and appeals, we have successfully secured thousands of pounds in backdated benefits for our clients. By tackling financial hardship, we help people break the cycle of poverty and regain stability.



Expanding Our Reach – Community-Based Satellite Services

Recognising the growing demand for advocacy support, we have expanded our services to key community locations, bringing specialist support closer to those who need it most:

- ▶ Clyde Nursery School – Working with families to address overcrowding, housing disrepair, and access to a decent standard of living.
- ▶ 2000 Community Action Centre – Providing welfare and benefits advocacy at the heart of the community, expanding access to quality services and urgent support.

OUR PROJECTS

Housing First

At Bench Outreach

Since 2014, Bench Outreach has been committed to delivering Housing First, an approach that prioritises securing stable housing as a fundamental right. In 2019, we strengthened this mission by formalising a partnership with Lewisham Council, becoming one of the first Housing First services to utilise social housing as a long-term solution for people experiencing chronic homelessness. This pioneering model has allowed us to take an innovative, trauma-informed approach, ensuring that some of the most vulnerable individuals in our community receive the support they need to rebuild their lives.

Over the years, we have housed over 80 individuals, with over 50 remaining securely housed. Many of the people we work with come from entrenched homelessness, where traditional pathways to housing have failed. Through empathy, persistence, and a deep belief in the dignity of every person, we continue to create meaningful pathways to stability. At Bench Outreach, we do not believe in a 'one size fits all' approach—instead, we recognise that each person's experience of homelessness is unique, and we work to tailor solutions that respect their journey and personal agency.



▲ 80+
Individuals
Housed

▲ 50+
Remain
Securely
Housed

Housing First is More Than Housing—It's About Dignity

Our work goes beyond securing a roof over someone's head. Housing First at Bench Outreach is about ensuring that people receive holistic, person-centred support, including access to healthcare, mental health services, substance misuse recovery, and financial stability. We understand that providing a home is only the beginning—true stability comes from a wraparound support system that fosters long-term well-being.



For some of our clients, their journey includes the reality of end-of-life care. Many people who have experienced long-term homelessness suffer from severe, complex health conditions due to years of hardship, trauma, and inadequate access to healthcare. At Bench Outreach, we are deeply committed to ensuring that no one faces the end of their life alone or in undignified conditions.

Through strong partnerships with palliative care teams, NHS services, and social care providers, we advocate for our clients to receive compassionate, dignified end-of-life support. This means ensuring they have access to comfortable, secure housing, appropriate medical care, emotional support, and—most importantly—human connection in their final days.

For us, Housing First is not just about helping people survive—it's about ensuring they live with dignity, choice, and respect until the very end. Whether that means securing a safe place to call home, providing emotional support, or standing alongside them in their final moments, we remain steadfast in our belief that everyone deserves to be treated with care and humanity, no matter their past or their circumstances.

At Bench Outreach, we don't just house people—we walk with them through every stage of their journey, honouring their stories and ensuring they receive the support they deserve.

"I had been on the streets for years, bouncing between shelters, but Bench Outreach didn't just find me a place to live - they made sure I stayed there. They helped me settle in, sort my benefits, and finally feel like I had a home."

– James, Housing First Client

OUR PROJECTS

Housing First Partnership Initiative



Our Housing First Partnership Initiative is a vital part of the borough's strategy to address homelessness, focusing on those with the most complex and entrenched experiences of rough sleeping. This includes individuals within the T-1000 cohort - those who have faced long-term homelessness alongside challenges such as mental health issues, substance misuse, and histories of offending.

These individuals often struggle to engage with traditional housing services due to trauma, instability, and multiple barriers to support.

Housing First breaks this cycle by placing people into stable accommodation first, rather than requiring them to meet certain conditions before being housed. From there, Bench Outreach works in partnership with key agencies to provide tailored, wraparound support, including mental health services, employment and education opportunities, substance and alcohol support, and income maximisation assistance.

Housing is secured through social tenancies arranged by Lewisham Council in collaboration with registered social landlords, ensuring individuals have a safe and permanent home. Since September:

2

Clients have successfully moved into their own homes

3

Clients have been placed in temporary accommodation while awaiting permanent housing



Additionally, new funding allows us to fully furnish clients' homes, providing essential items such as white goods, furniture and flooring, ensuring they have everything they need for a fresh start.

The Housing First Partnership Initiative continues to demonstrate the stable housing, combined with the right support, can transform lives, offering not just a home, but a foundation for long-term stability and change.

Client's House Photos



"Bench Outreach didn't judge me. They understood my struggles and worked with me at my own pace. For the first time in years, I felt like someone actually cared."

– Lisa, Housing First Client



RECENT INNOVATIONS AT BENCH OUTREACH



New Initiatives in Partnership with Lewisham Local

"It's not just about the food - it's about having somewhere to go where you feel human. The monthly meal service gave me a place to meet people, talk, and not feel invisible."

– Sarah, Community Meal Attendee

Warmth and Wealth: Digital & Financial Empowerment

Running from February to April 2025, 'Warmth and Wealth' is a weekly initiative held every Thursday at our satellite hub, the Community Action Centre in Evelyn Ward. This programme provides digital and financial literacy support for individuals experiencing financial hardship and social exclusion. Through tailored guidance, participants will gain essential skills to navigate the digital world, improve financial stability, and access crucial resources, empowering them towards greater independence.

Creating Space: Building Independence & Wellbeing

'Creating Space' is designed to empower individuals—particularly those facing homelessness, financial hardship, and social isolation—by equipping them with essential life skills for greater independence and wellbeing. The programme offers structured activities, including:

- Cookery classes focused on healthy eating on a budget, reducing food waste, and improving food security.
- Financial literacy workshops covering budgeting, debt management, and accessing benefits.
- Peer mentorship to provide guidance and encouragement towards personal growth.
- Wellbeing sessions on stress management, confidence building, and holistic self-care.



Additionally, the initiative provides a warm and comfortable space for individuals affected by fuel poverty, offering hot drinks, support services, and opportunities for social engagement. By fostering social connections, reducing isolation, and equipping participants with the tools for self-sufficiency, 'Creating Space' aims to create lasting, positive change within the community.



"I didn't even know I was entitled to certain benefits until Bench Outreach stepped in. They helped me win my tribunal, and now I can afford my rent and bills without fear. I finally have peace of mind."

– Maria, Welfare & Benefits Client

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE



Establishment of Our Women's Services

We aim to be recognised as champions and advocates for specialist services, focusing on trauma-informed approaches and addressing disparities in health inequalities.



Expanding Our Access Services

We will work towards influencing policy changes that challenge the ways minority groups are marginalised in housing.



Intersectionality in Homelessness

We are committed to unpacking the different layers that contribute to homelessness, ensuring personalised support models that address the diverse needs of those we serve.



Evaluation and Knowledge Sharing

Through continuous learning and reflection, we strive to shift language, challenge misconceptions, and bring about lasting systemic change.



Outdated housing models and support frameworks re-traumatise clients, perpetuating cycles of repetition. What's needed is disruption, innovation, and empathetic "I see you" approach that truly acknowledges each person's experience.

CASE STUDY

Transforming Lives

Through Bench Outreach's Holistic Support

Mark had been experiencing homelessness for over five years, cycling between rough sleeping and temporary accommodations. His struggles were compounded by mental health challenges and a history of benefit sanctions, which left him without financial stability. Despite multiple attempts to seek help, Mark found himself excluded from traditional services due to the complexities of his situation.



The Impact of Our Support

When Mark was referred to Bench Outreach's Housing First programme, everything changed. Rather than placing conditions on him before offering support, our approach ensured that he was given secure, long-term housing first, allowing him the stability to address other challenges in his life.

With one-to-one caseworker support, Mark was guided through benefit applications and appeals, securing over £6,000 in backdated payments and ensuring he received ongoing entitlements. Our welfare and benefits team, led by Cynthia, worked tirelessly to navigate the complexities of the system, ensuring Mark was no longer excluded from essential financial support.



Community Member

Beyond financial stability, Bench Outreach provided:

'Creating Space' is designed to empower individuals—particularly those facing homelessness, financial hardship, and social isolation—by equipping them with essential life skills for greater independence and wellbeing. The programme offers structured activities, including:



Resettlement Support

To furnish and set up his new home.



Mental Health Advocacy

Helping him engage with the right professionals.



Digital Inclusion Support

To access services online and reconnect with family.



Peer Mentoring

Connecting him with others who had overcome similar challenges.

"I never used to go online - everything seemed too complicated. But Bench Outreach helped me get set up, apply for jobs, and even reconnect with my family. Now, I feel like I have options."

– Mohammed, Digital Support Client

Through our monthly hot meal service, Mark found more than just food—he found a sense of community. The safe and welcoming environment allowed him to build relationships, regain confidence, and take small but significant steps toward rebuilding his life.

Mark's journey is a testament to the power of trauma-informed, holistic support. His story reflects how Bench Outreach's person-centred approach continues to break barriers, restore dignity, and create pathways to stability for some of the most marginalised individuals in our community.



WITH GRATEFUL HEARTS

Thank You to our Supporters



To our Funders

At Bench Outreach, every step we take toward justice, restoration, and hope is made possible by the unwavering generosity of our funders. Your belief in our mission allows us to stand in the gap for those most in need – offering not just services, but dignity, stability, and belonging.

To each of you who has invested in our work: thank you. Your funding isn't just financial - it is faith in change, fuel for impact, and a powerful act of solidarity with those often overlooked.



A Special Thank You to Stephen and Jannet Mathers

With deep affection and reverence, we extend our most heartfelt thanks to Stephen and Jannet Mathers. Your love, support, and trust have gone beyond generosity – you've offered us a home. By entrusting us with Jessica's Heart, you didn't just give us a space – you gave us identity.

Bench Outreach is more than its services – it is its presence. And our presence is only possible because of yours.

- You make it possible for us to be rooted in the heart of our community.
- You make it possible for the most vulnerable to find a place that feels safe.
- You make it possible for hope to have an address.

From all of us at Bench Outreach – thank you for believing in what we do, and who we are.

To Our Incredible Volunteers at Bench Outreach

We want to take a moment to express our deepest gratitude for your unwavering dedication and hard work. Your steadfast commitment to expanding our reach and building stronger networks has been nothing short of extraordinary. You are the driving force behind our mission, bringing compassion, connection, and hope to the communities we serve.

Thank you for your time, your energy, and your belief in what we do. It is because of your tireless efforts that we are able to make a real, lasting impact. You embody the spirit of generosity and teamwork that defines Bench Outreach.

From all of us - thank you for being an integral part of our journey.



Philippa Crammond and Jan Donaldson

Two of our Dedicated Volunteers

Thank You

FINANCES

Driving Financial Sustainability A Year in Review



As we reflect on the past year, I am pleased to share insights into Bench Outreach’s financial performance and strategic initiatives that have strengthened our organisation’s sustainability. It has been a year of transformation, resilience, and growth as we navigated ever-evolving economic conditions while ensuring financial stability.



Optimising Financial Systems for Greater Efficiency

One of our key achievements this year has been the further development and optimisation of the financial systems. We have improved efficiency and transparency by integrating digital solutions and streamlining financial processes thereby elevating both efficiency and transparency. Implementing a paperless financial system has significantly reduced administrative overhead, allowing us to allocate more resources to our core objectives.



Strengthening Financial Oversight and Compliance

Compliance remains at the heart of our financial strategy. We have ensured that all financial activities align with regulatory standards and best practices. By maintaining strong financial internal controls, we have continued to build trust with stakeholders, funders, and regulatory bodies.



Driving Growth through Strategic Financial Planning

Focusing on long-term sustainability, we have prioritised disciplined budgeting, financial forecasting, and detailed variance analysis to support informed decision-making. Proactive cash flow management and timely implementation of corrective actions have positioned us well for future challenges and opportunities for growth.



Investing in People and Innovation

Beyond financial metrics, our focus has also been on building a strong team and fostering a culture of innovation. By empowering teams with actionable insights through advanced reporting tools and data visualisation, we have enhanced financial planning and decision-making processes.

Looking Ahead

Our commitment remains unwavering—to uphold financial integrity, drive sustainable growth, and support the organisation’s overarching mission. We will continue to refine our strategies, strengthen partnerships, and explore new opportunities to enhance our financial resilience.

I sincerely thank our dedicated staff members, the Board of Trustees, Donors, and Stakeholders for your continued trust and support.

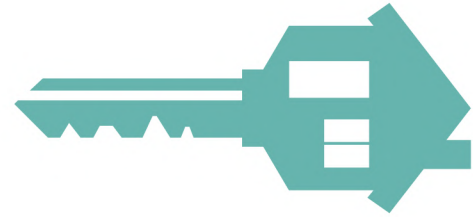
Together, we are building a stronger, more sustainable future.

It has been an absolute pleasure to serve.

Daniel Oziegbe
Finance Manager



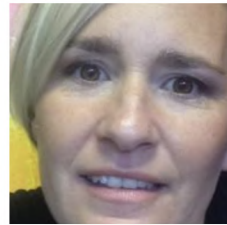
OUR TEAM



Belinda Wallace
Chief Executive
Officer



Daniel Oziegbe
Finance
Manager



Helen Goodchild
Sourcing and Grant
Coordinator



Eleanor Thomson
Service
Manager



Maria Watson
Office
Manager



Dave Watts
Specialist Housing
Advocate



Cynthia Noel
Specialist Welfare and
Benefits Advocate



Emrey Smith
Support
Worker



Keeley Richards
Support
Worker



Craig McPherson
Support
Worker



Parice Olawabi
Support
Worker



Debbie Findlay
Support
Worker



Kate Murray
Outreach
Worker



Pamela Caprice
Outreach
Worker

THANK YOU

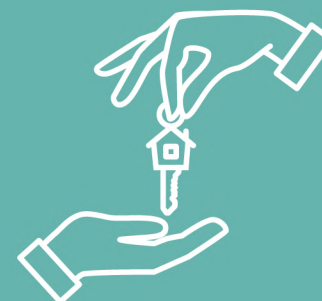
We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone for your valuable contributions and unwavering support. Your commitment not only strengthens our community but also fuels our shared purpose. Together, we are building a future marked by resilience, innovation, and a deep sense of purpose.

With sincere thanks,

The Bench Team



Our Trustees Paul Chapman, Philippe Granger and Errol Chambers





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