

**Winter edition**



# Linkage Care & Independence Newsletter



## In this edition...

### **Linkage turns 50!**

**Looking back, moving forward and everything in between!**

### **Have your say**

**Our new Parent/Carer Forums - an opportunity to feedback**

### **New beginnings...**

**We celebrate new building openings and a new Chair for Linkage**

**Welcome** to the Winter edition of our Linkage Care & Independence Newsletter. We're pleased to update you on the latest happenings at Linkage and extra information you may find useful.



As we begin a new year, Linkage proudly celebrates its **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary!** This milestone year gives us the opportunity to reflect on how far we have come, recognise the people who have shaped our journey, and look ahead with confidence and ambition to the future.

A key development as we enter this anniversary year is the **reopening of Abbey House**, scheduled for February, following significant refurbishment. Abbey House has been remodelled to accommodate individuals with a higher level of acuity, reflecting our commitment to providing high-quality, person-centred support for people with complex needs. Linkage aspires

to use Abbey House as a template for future properties as we continue to evolve our services. We are also pleased to celebrate the **opening of The Green in Mablethorpe**, a welcoming new service designed to offer greater choice, independence and stronger connections within the local community.

Our anniversary celebrations officially began on 14<sup>th</sup> January, Linkage's birthday, marked by the **opening of the Small Animal Care facility at the Richardson Building**. This exciting development reflects our continued commitment to innovation, learning and meaningful opportunities for the people we support.

We also continue to strengthen our engagement with families through our **Parent and Carer Forums**, which provide a valuable space for open dialogue, shared learning and feedback. These forums play an important role in helping us shape and improve our services, and we encourage parents and carers to get involved.

I am also pleased to welcome **Professor Jayne Mitchell**, who joins Linkage as the new Chair of the Board of Trustees. Professor Mitchell brings a wealth of experience and insight, and we look forward to her leadership and guidance as we move through this landmark year. We would like to also introduce you to our team. Our new Registered Manager for Lincoln, Victoria Sutton, gives an overview of the new **Rapid Response programme**.

At Weelsby Hall, work continues as part of the wider renovation project, including the **development of The Stables**, which will provide additional space to support complex care and deliver services within the local area. These developments form part of our longer-term vision to create high-quality environments that support independence, wellbeing and personalised care.

As we celebrate 50 years of Linkage throughout 2026, there will be many opportunities to come together, reflect and celebrate the positive impact we make every day. Thank you to everyone – the people we support, families, colleagues, volunteers and partners – who continue to be part of the Linkage story.

Best wishes,

**Robbie Wright**  
Director of Care and Independence

# Linkage turn 50!



**Linkage proudly celebrates its 50th anniversary, marking half a century of supporting people with learning disabilities and autism to live fulfilling lives with dignity, independence and a strong sense of belonging.**

Over the past five decades, Linkage has grown and evolved, but its core purpose has remained the same: enabling people to achieve their aspirations, build skills, and be active, valued members of their communities.

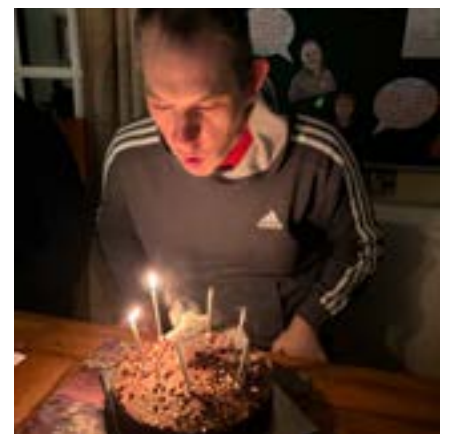
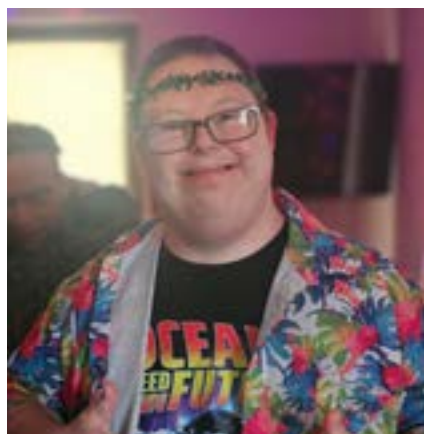
Reflecting on this milestone, the organisation recognises the countless everyday moments that define its impact – from a warm greeting at the start of the day, to reassurance at night; from supporting life-changing transitions to encouraging individuals to go further than they ever believed possible. These moments, both large and small, are what change lives.

What sets Linkage apart is the creativity, diversity and person-centred nature of its work. No two days are the same. Support may involve companionship, learning opportunities, Lego therapy, preparing for performances, advocating for individual voices, or helping someone plan and enjoy a dream holiday. This work requires empathy, flexibility and dedication – qualities demonstrated every day by Linkage's teams.

Alongside frontline colleagues, Linkage also recognises the vital contribution of staff in supporting, planning and coordination roles. Their work ensures that high-quality services can be delivered consistently, safely and with genuine choice at the centre. Teamwork remains fundamental to Linkage's success.

As Linkage celebrates 50 years of impact, the organisation extends its heartfelt thanks to everyone who has been part of the journey – past and present.

Together, Linkage has built something truly special. And together, it looks ahead to the future – committed to continuing this journey with strength, ambition and an unwavering focus on what matters most: **the students and the people we support.**





## Abbey House reopening



**On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March, we will be proudly re-opening Abbey House following its full refurbishment and renovation. Nestled in a picturesque area of Grimsby, Abbey House enjoys a prime location just a short distance from the town centre.**

With convenient access to local bus routes into Cleethorpes, the property is well connected, making travel simple and accessible for residents and visitors alike. For those attending Grimsby Linkage Choices, the Weelsby Campus is approximately a 30-minute walk away, offering further convenience.

Abbey House is a detached property set within its own grounds, featuring a practical drive-in, drive-out driveway, and a garden to the rear. The outdoor space provides a pleasant setting, adding to the welcoming atmosphere of the home.

Inside, the property is thoughtfully arranged to provide both privacy and communal living opportunities. On the ground floor, there are five partially self-contained apartments, each comprising a private bedroom, lounge area and en-suite shower room, with access to shared communal kitchen and dining facilities. In addition, there is a dedicated respite room with its own en-suite facilities, offering flexible accommodation when needed.

The ground floor accommodates people with a higher level of acuity. The space includes a dining room located just off the main kitchen, creating a central space for shared meals. An office, a shower room and a laundry room are also situated downstairs, ensuring practical amenities are easily accessible.

Upstairs, there are seven generously sized en-suite bedrooms, each offering comfort and privacy. People living on this floor will benefit from a spacious open-plan communal kitchen and dining area, surrounded by windows on all sides. This bright and airy space provides an excellent environment for socialising, building friendships and enjoying meals together.

An additional office and a dedicated laundry room for upstairs residents further enhance convenience. Overall, Abbey House combines comfortable private accommodation with welcoming communal areas, all within a well-connected and attractive location in Grimsby.





## We're Open at The Green in Mablethorpe!

**The Green is a newly refurbished site that provides an adult skills day service for people with learning disabilities and autism, as well as an evening and weekend community hub.**

Our day service is designed to offer a safe and supportive environment where clients can develop practical skills that they can take home, helping to support a meaningful and more independent life. Following extensive renovations, The Green now offers a range of dedicated zones, allowing multiple skill-based workshops to take place at the same time.

**Robbie Wright, Director of Care & Independence** states:

*"From the very beginning, our ambition for The Green was to create a welcoming, inclusive and vibrant space that brings people together. We know how powerful meaningful activity, social connection and community participation can be in supporting wellbeing, confidence and independence. Thanks to the dedication of our teams, the support of our partners, and the generosity of those who have contributed along the way, this vision has truly come to life."*

*The Green now offers a modern, high-quality environment that not only enhances day opportunities within Linkage Choices but also serves as a thriving community hub providing evening and weekend activities that people across Mablethorpe can enjoy. It is a space designed for everyone, supporting learning, social engagement and a strong sense of belonging for the people we support and the wider community."*

**To keep up-to-date on The Green, please follow us on social media or visit the **What's On** tab on our website. For any enquiries, please contact [outreach@linkage.org.uk](mailto:outreach@linkage.org.uk)**



# Weelsby Hall Oral Histories



Click on the play button to view the video on YouTube

hear from Don Mackenzie, one of the founding Directors of Linkage Community Trust, who shares fascinating insights into the origins of the Trust and reflects on how Weelsby Hall has provided a strong sense of place for the Linkage community in Grimsby for over 44 years. Stay tuned each week as we share the rest of the interviews!

This project was generously funded by **The Humber Museums Partnership** as part of the Weelsby Hall restoration project, supported by the **National Lottery Heritage Fund**.

**To celebrate Linkage's 50th anniversary, we are delighted to present Untold Stories – a compelling collection of oral histories created by Friends of Weelsby Hall volunteers and Linkage students, in partnership with Hammond House Production Company.**

The project uncovers the rich and often hidden heritage of Weelsby Hall, bringing its stories to life through the voices of those who have a deep connection to this historic building.

In the first of ten recorded interviews, we

## Renovation of The Stables



**The Stables Residential Care development is part of the larger Weelsby Hall Project. The renovation of the Stables Outbuildings will create residential care accommodation for people with more complex needs (higher levels of acuity).**

The overall Weelsby Hall project is the culmination of several years of development work which has received significant support, including a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant to undertake a Viability Appraisal in 2020-21, a

grant for further development work from the North East Lincolnshire Heritage Starter Fund.

On successful award of the Heritage Fund development grant, work commenced on this phase of the project in May 2023.



# The Grand Opening of The Richardson Building



**On our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on 14<sup>th</sup> January, Linkage Community Trust was proud to celebrate the official opening of The Richardson Building, our brand-new Small Animal Care Facility in Grimsby.**

The facility, named after one of our beloved founders, Rex Richardson, was officially opened jointly by Rex Richardson and the Vice Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire, Andrew Clark.

The facility has been purpose-designed to support accessible, hands-on learning and to create meaningful pathways into employment for young people with learning disabilities and autism. The opening ceremony was a fantastic opportunity to recognise everyone involved in bringing this vision to life, including members of our team and project partners who have supported the journey from start to finish. Our new Outreach mobile sensory space came along to showcase how the facilities can help with sensory requirements.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to our funders North East Lincolnshire Council for the High Needs Capital Grant, funded by the Department for Education through North East Lincolnshire councils' small grants project, and to Jupiter Construction for their hard work, professionalism, and commitment throughout the project. A very proud moment for Linkage, and a powerful reminder of how the right environment can open doors, build confidence, and change futures.



# Parent & Carer Forums



**The Parent and Carer Forum is a dedicated space for parents and carers of people supported by Linkage Community Trust to come together, share experiences and stay informed about developments across the organisation.**

The Forum is designed to support open, two-way communication, ensuring that the views and voices of families are heard and valued.

Through the Forum, parents and carers are able to share feedback and experiences, receive updates on Linkage services and developments, access information relevant to the care and support of their loved ones, and celebrate good news and achievements. It also provides a respectful and constructive environment to raise questions or concerns, helping Linkage to better understand what matters most to families.

The Forum covers all areas of Linkage's care provision, including Residential Care, Community Supported Living and Linkage Choices Day Services. While the Forum is not a decision-making body, it plays an important role in informing and influencing Linkage's understanding of family perspectives and supporting continuous improvement across services.

Meetings offer regular opportunities for dialogue between families and Linkage. Organisational updates, service developments and future plans are shared, alongside positive stories and successes from across services. Common themes or concerns raised by families can be explored together, and relevant information about care and support planning and delivery is shared to help keep families informed and involved.

The Forum is open to all parents and carers of individuals supported by Linkage. Key staff members attend meetings, including representatives from Residential Care, Supported Living and Day Services, and the Forum is chaired by a designated Linkage representative to ensure discussions are inclusive, respectful and productive. The Forum meets on a quarterly basis, with additional meetings arranged where needed. Sessions may take place in person, online or as a hybrid to ensure accessibility for as many families as possible. Agendas are shared in advance, and notes and key actions are recorded and shared following each meeting.

All discussions within the Forum are treated with respect and confidentiality. Personal information is not shared without consent, and any feedback used to inform service improvements will not be attributed to individuals unless agreed. The Forum's Terms of Reference are reviewed annually to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

**If you have any requests for speakers, topics you'd like us to cover, suggestions, or anything else you'd find helpful to know, please get in touch by emailing: [info@linkage.org.uk](mailto:info@linkage.org.uk)**

# CQC ratings & inspections



**Over the last 8 months, Linkage Community Trust has undergone 5 Care Quality Commission inspections – three within Community Supported Living services and two within Registered Care Homes.**

To date, we have had the outcome of four of the inspections, all of which have an overall outcome of good. This is a testament to the hard work of the support teams and managers within those services. We await the outcome from the most recent inspection at Beech Lodge.

Themes have included the positive and knowledgeable way in which our support staff work with people we support, treating them with kindness and respect. Comments from reports include:

*A relative told us, "Staff are very kind and treat (Loved ones) well."* **Spencer's Lodge**

*"People gave positive feedback about their care experience. They told us they were happy with the care they received, describing staff as kind, respectful, and aware of their needs. People said they felt listened to and were supported to plan how they wanted to spend their time, which helped them maintain a sense of independence and personal choice."* **CSL Spilsby**

*"The provider had inclusive leaders at all levels who understood the context in which they delivered care, treatment and support and embodied the culture and values of their workforce and organisation. Leaders had the skills, knowledge, experience and credibility to lead effectively. They did so with integrity, openness and honesty."* **CSL Lincoln**

Currently, we have four services that have not yet been inspected, three Community Supported Living Services and one Residential Care Home – CQC have indicated that these services will be inspected within the near future.

**We'd like to take a moment to thank our wonderful support staff that have made our positive ratings so successful.**

Linkage continues to work closely with all of our services, to ensure they are operating in line with local authority contracts and CQC policies. We look forward to sharing further positive outcomes in the future.

For further information on CQC, please visit: <https://www.cqc.org.uk/>

# Linkage Welcomes Professor Jayne Mitchell as New Chair of the Board of Trustees



**Linkage is delighted to announce the appointment of Jayne Mitchell as the new Chair of its Board of Trustees, effective January 2026.**

Jayne brings a distinguished career in Higher Education and Public Health, having served as an academic, practitioner, senior leader, and policy-maker. She is currently Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost at Leeds Trinity University and has previously held multiple senior governance roles across UK universities.

As a former Director of the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Jayne has extensive expertise in governance, quality assurance, and strategic planning,

contributing to national and international initiatives, including leading the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and advising on European Higher Education policy. She has also contributed to public health initiatives, including work on the COVID-19 response for Public Health England.

Brought up in Lincolnshire, Jayne has personal experience supporting a family member with multiple and complex learning disabilities, giving her unique insight into the challenges faced by individuals and families in accessing appropriate support. She is committed to enabling people to lead creative and purposeful lives in their communities.

Jayne said:

*"I am honoured to take on the role of Chair of Trustees at Linkage. I am passionate about supporting services that transform the lives of individuals and communities socially, economically, and culturally. I look forward to working with the Board and Executive Leadership Team to continue the organisation's excellent work."*

Linkage would also like to extend sincere thanks to Steph Simpson, who has served as Interim Chair over the last 12 months. Steph is a Chartered Engineer with over 20 years of military experience leading diverse teams in complex and challenging environments in the UK and overseas. She joined Linkage as a Trustee in March 2017 and was appointed Vice-Chair of the Board in April 2018. Steph is also the mother of a young child with Williams Syndrome, bringing invaluable lived experience to her work with the organisation.

**Linkage welcomes Jayne in her new role and look forward to benefiting from her wealth of experience, strategic insight, and dedication to empowering individuals and communities.**

# Get to know our Team

## New Regional Operations Manager **Samantha Wheatley**



I joined Linkage on 15th December as Regional Operations manager for care and independence and will be supporting Services in the Toynton and Spilsby area. I was born and have grown up in Lincolnshire and prior to joining Linkage I have worked in various roles over the last 25 years within the sector managing and supporting residential, supported living, community and education-based services. I have dedicated my career to supporting people, with learning disabilities and other complex needs and am passionate about delivering high-quality person-centred services.

In my role within Linkage I hope to be able to share my experience and knowledge and continue to build and shape our services, ensuring that all the people we support are able to reach their full potential. The positive values and ethos of Linkage has been apparent since I joined I am very much looking forward to getting to know everyone and all the amazing work that takes place.

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## New Head of Specialist Support **Tracy Connelly**



I have almost 30 years' experience working in social care, supporting adults with learning disabilities, autism, and complex needs, within various service types. I hold an MSc and level 5 Diploma in Positive Behaviour Support, and a Post graduate certificate in supporting people with learning disabilities who have significant and complex needs. Throughout my career I have worked in a range of senior leadership and practice roles, with a strong focus on Positive Behaviour Support, reducing restrictive practices, and improving quality of life for the people we support.

My role at Linkage is Head of Specialist Support, and I will be leading the clinical team, which includes Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) and our Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) partners. Over the next six months, my focus will be on getting to know Linkage and hopefully meeting many of you on my travels. This will help me to understand what's working well and areas that may need further development within in Linkage Community Trust, specifically in relation to meeting the needs of the people we support and our staff teams. The information I gather along the way will provide me with invaluable knowledge to help shape and develop a co-produced Specialist Support Strategy and training offer.

In addition, and where required I will be working alongside supported individuals, staff, and parent/carers to carry out functional behaviour assessments to support the development of high-quality PBS plans with a clear focus on skills teaching, reducing behaviours that some may find challenging and the improving quality of life for the person and those close to them. I am very much looking forward to working with you all and supporting Linkage to continue delivering safe, person-centred, and meaningful support.

## New Registered Manager **Victoria Sutton**



I would like to introduce myself, I am Victoria, I joined Linkage in June 2025 and I am the Registered Manager for CSL Lincoln, Linkage Choices Lincoln, and our new Rapid Response Team.

I have worked in health and social care for over 15 years, specialising in supporting adults with learning disabilities and autism. I hold a BSc (Hons) in Special Needs Education and Inclusion, along with a Postgraduate Certificate in Social Studies.

I am passionate about supporting people to live happy, fulfilled lives, encouraging the people we support to achieve positive outcomes that enrich their lives. My role as a Registered Manager involves leading our team of support workers to provide high quality support, ensuring the compliance of our services and providing an effective and safe service for the people we support.

We recently piloted a new Rapid Response programme. It was first established in June 2025 and we have been delivering targeted short term support to people in the community for packages of 6–8 weeks. We have a new small dedicated team who are able to receive referrals from the local authority and get out to carry out assessments within 24 hours. We have had some fantastic feedback from the support given so far, the aim of this service is to be able to support people with Learning disabilities and autism in the community by delivering support in their homes. To date the service has proved successful targeting more rural areas of Lincolnshire, bridging the gap whilst a longer term provider is found.

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## Registered Manager **Mathew Francis**



My name is Matt Francis, and I'm one of the Registered Managers in Grimsby at Linkage. I began my journey here 11 years ago as a Support Worker, and over the years I've had the privilege of growing within the organisation—first stepping into the role of Deputy Manager and now as Registered Manager.

Working at Linkage has been incredibly rewarding. Every role I've taken on has given me the opportunity to support the People We support more deeply, develop strong teams, and help create environments where people can truly thrive. What I enjoy most about my role is seeing the positive difference we make each day and being part of a team that genuinely cares.

Linkage has been a huge part of my life for more than a decade, and I've enjoyed every minute. I'm looking forward to seeing the organisation continue to grow and evolve, and I'm excited to be part of its future.

# Finding His Voice: Josh's Journey at Oliver House



Josh moved into Oliver House shortly after it opened, following the closure of his previous care home where he had lived for more than five years. The move marked a significant transition in his life. Josh is non-verbal and experiences physical difficulties with mobility, so ensuring the right support was in place from the outset was essential.

Before the move, Anna Billett, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist, and Helen Ashford, Operations Manager, visited Josh at his former care setting to assess whether Oliver House would be a good fit for him. During this visit, staff explained that Josh communicated entirely through gesture. If he wanted something, he would take a person to it; if he didn't

want food, he would push it away. However, he had no reliable way to choose between options that weren't physically in front of him. The staff there believed that he did not understand symbols and reported that he would rarely use photos to make choices.

In preparation for Josh's arrival at Oliver House the SALT Team provided some photos to see if Josh could use them to make choices. The team decided to build on what was already familiar to him. They replicated the original six photo choices and added six more large photographs of activities he was known to enjoy, such as watching Formula 1. Alongside this, Staff received training in using pictorial choices, with ongoing support from the Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) team throughout Josh's transition.

Josh settled into Oliver House quickly. Staff used his pictorial choices consistently, embedding them into daily routines. While Josh still sometimes chose food by physically taking staff to what he wanted, he also began to demonstrate an understanding of symbols - particularly when used on the menu board. This was a key development, as symbols allow for more flexible and meaningful choices. For example, Josh can now choose something general, like "going out," before being offered more specific options such as shopping, visiting a café, or going for a walk.

Consistency has been key to Josh's progress. The manager and staff at Oliver House have used symbols regularly and have fed back to the SALT team about what Josh uses confidently and what additional support might benefit him. The symbol system has been so effective that it's now being used by everyone in the house, not just Josh.

Most importantly, Josh has moved from having very little choice or control over his life to having his own personalised communication book. This allows him to tell staff what he wants to eat and what activities he'd like to do. And this is just the beginning. Josh has a cheeky sense of humour, and the next step is to support him to comment, express opinions, and let others know how he feels.

Looking ahead, the team would also like to explore the use of a VOCA (Voice Output Communication Aid) with Josh. This could open up even more opportunities for him to make choices, express himself, and take charge of his own decisions - giving him a stronger, louder voice in his own life.

# Grimsby Red – Heritage Heroes Film Premiere



**On 26 November 2025 at Parkway Cinema, Cleethorpes, we were thrilled to celebrate the première of Grimsby Red, a brilliant re-imagining of Little Red Riding Hood created by members of our very own Heritage Heroes, in partnership with the Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre.**

Thanks to support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund through the Dynamic Collections Project, our talented group took centre stage in this creative retelling, accompanied by a special behind-the-scenes documentary showcasing their hard work, teamwork, and imagination.

Heritage Heroes is a weekly educational activity group for adults with additional needs, giving members the opportunity to explore local history, develop new skills, and contribute to real museum projects and exhibitions. The première was a wonderful celebration of their achievements and a proud moment for everyone involved.

**A huge thank you to all who attended and supported such a special occasion.**

**In February, Lincoln Choices staff took the people we support for a brilliant night out watching the Nottingham Panthers vs the Dundee Stars at the Motorpoint Arena, Nottingham.**

They stopped for tea on the way and enjoyed an amazing atmosphere – a great night and even better memories made!



# Students get creative for the Lincolnshire Food & Gift festival!



## **Santa's elves would be proud!**

Over December Linkage Choices and Retail prepared for the Lincolnshire Food & Gift Show, turning their creative ideas into festive magic! From handmade crafts and chocolate bouquets to reindeer food, the students poured their skills, teamwork, and care into every item.

At the show, the people we support were ready to share their skills and experiences with visitors on the Linkage stand as part of The Power of Specialist FE awareness week. It's inspiring to see how specialist FE transforms lives, unlocks potential, and brings creativity to life.

A huge well done to everyone involved - your hard work and dedication not only made the stall a hit but also helped raise money for Linkage.

## **Which leads us to the event itself...**



**We are so proud of the amazing people we support, their brilliant support workers, dedicated families and our fantastic staff who all came together to make this event such a huge success!**

Thank you also to the people who visited our stand and gave so generously, we loved how interested everyone was in our handmade gifts! The people we support absolutely shone – building confidence, singing songs to an audience, working as a team and showing just how much they've grown throughout the Lincolnshire Food & Gift festival. A very special mention must go to Linkage Choir who were simply outstanding. They received so much praise that people were queuing afterwards just to shake their hands – a truly heart-warming moment that shows the impact they made on everyone who watched.

**Well done to everyone involved** – on stage and behind the scenes – we couldn't have done it without you.

## Robbie Wright **races for Linkage**



**Linkage’s Director of Care and Independence, Robbie Wright, is taking on a 10K challenge to support the people at the heart of everything we do.**

*“I’m running this 10K to support Linkage and the incredible work they do to empower people with learning disabilities and autism to live independent, fulfilling lives. Every day, Linkage provides education, care and support that makes a real difference to individuals and their families. I’m proud to be taking on this challenge to help raise funds so they can continue delivering life-changing services and opportunities. Whether you’re able to donate a little or a lot, every contribution will go towards supporting the amazing people Linkage works with. Thank you so much for your support – it really does mean a lot!”*

Robbie’s commitment reflects the passion and dedication we see across Linkage every day. If you’d like to support Robbie and help us continue creating opportunities for people to thrive, please consider donating at the following link: [https://www.justgiving.com/page/robbie-wright-2?utm\\_medium=FR&utm\\_source=CL&utm\\_campaign=020](https://www.justgiving.com/page/robbie-wright-2?utm_medium=FR&utm_source=CL&utm_campaign=020)

**Thank you for reading, we look forward  
to providing you with the next edition  
in Spring 2026!**



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